Discourse at Fault: the Role of UN's Discourse on Gender in Continued Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by UN Peacekeepers

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Abstract

Despite the main function of the United Nations (UN) peacekeepers being to protect civilians in war-torn territories, allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) committed by said peacekeepers continue to arise during every peacekeeping mission. Much of the previous scholarship has focused on the structural and institutional causes of the problem, primarily focusing on factors such as immunities, data gathering mechanisms and training programs. The feminist scholarship has also been increasingly vocal on the matter, stressing the importance of gender framing in UN documents and policies. Nevertheless, the feminist theory has continuously resorted to normative studies, lacking any empirical backing to their arguments. This thesis investigates whether a condescending and victimizing way in which women are framed in a series of UN documents can serve as a possible explanation for the continued SEA perpetrated by the UN peacekeepers. A critical discourse analysis of the UN's zero-tolerance policy, SEA pre-training manual and mission mandates demonstrated that UN's discourse on gender can be one of the reasons why SEA is continuously committed by the peacekeepers.

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1. Introduction:

The abuse of human rights committed by the United Nations (UN) peacekeepers is neither a nuisance to the general public, nor to the academics. Allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) committed by the UN peacekeepers have been widespread since the early 1990s, with the highest number of allegations reaching 127 in 2007 (Mudgway, 2017, p. 1454; United Nations, 2022). This is despite the main role of the UN peacekeepers, which is to protect civilians (via miliarized and non-militarized means), prevent conflict and ensure security and stability within the region (United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.). However, regardless of the amount of investigations, discussions and research that has taken place on the topic, there are diverging opinions about why such a dissonance takes place.

One of the founding UN documents that served as a catalyst for the UN's battle against SEA committed by peacekeepers is the zero-tolerance policy, introduced by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in 2003. In simple terms, the policy prohibits UN employees from engaging in any relationships and activities that can qualify as either sexual exploitation and/or sexual abuse, including sexual interactions with minors (under 18 years of age) and transactional sex.

Although the numbers of SEA allegations on peacekeeping missions have been decreasing, the fact that sexual violence continues to take place highlights the failure of the UN policies pertaining to SEA in achieving their aims. There has been a plethora of research conducted on the topic from a structuralist perspective, arguing that the root of the problem primarily lies within the institutional composition of the UN, such as accountability mechanisms (Allred, 2006; Grady, 2016; Karim & Beardsley, 2016; Freedman, 2018). Another prominent pool of research came from the feminist school of thought, which instead focused on the less apparent sources of continued SEA, particularly discussing the role of how elements such as gender, agency and economic opportunities are framed in legal and political documents (Tripp, 2013; Holviki, 2021; Meger, 2021; Ogg & Craker, 2021). Despite the importance of these contributions, little to no empirical studies have been done on how these factors are framed in the UN documents specifically. Therefore, the research question that this thesis seeks to answer is: How does the UN discourse pertaining to gender enable the sexual exploitation and abuse committed by the UN peacekeepers?

The thesis will first discuss previous literature which has been conducted on the topic, followed by an overview of the feminist security studies - the main theory that will be consulted. Then a discussion of the methodology, specifically a critical discourse analysis of various UN documents will be included. Finally, analysis and conclusions of the study will be discussed, including recommendations for future and limitations of this research.

2. Background:

As stated previously, significant research has been conducted on the structuralist and institutionalist factors that may serve as the reason for the continued SEA committed by the UN peacekeepers. Although this research seeks to focus on a different approach, instead relying upon the feminist security studies, it is worth mentioning what previous scholarship has argued to be at fault of the SEA on peacekeeping missions. This section will outline general peacekeeping regulations and immunities, data gathering mechanisms and training structures - the factors that structuralist/institutionalist scholarship has unanimously agreed upon in terms of their role in continued SEA. The reason these points are not discussed in the literature review is because these arguments have not had any significant divergences and criticisms among the structuralist/institutionalist scholarship. Additionally, these points primarily focus on the structure of the organization and its practices, making these arguments descriptive in nature.

2.1. Accountability mechanisms and immunities:

Previous literature has produced a number of potential reasons for the failure of the UN's anti-SEA strategy. One of the factors that is extensively mentioned includes the accountability structures within the peacekeeping missions.

Peacekeeping operations consist of three types of personnel: civilian staff, experts and the military, most of which are provided by the troop-contributing countries (TCCs). There are two important agreements which outline the accountability structures between the TCCs, UN and the host countries: Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) and Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). MOA is an agreement between the UN and the TCC, reserving the right to discipline the peacekeepers to said TCC. SOFA is an agreement between the UN and the host country, which

waives its jurisdiction over the peacekeepers. The combination of these agreements leaves the TCC with the ultimate jurisdiction over its own troops, including the investigation and trial process in case allegations arise (Allred, 2006, pp. 8-9). Other official UN documents, such as the UN Charter and the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the UN, grant further immunities and protections to the UN staff. Although the Secretary-General of the UN can waive some of the immunities, this has never been done in practice (pp. 9-10). The UN itself neither has the jurisdiction nor the capacity to undertake criminal prosecutions, delegating yet another important function to the TCCs (p. 10).

A factor that is extensively discussed within existing literature includes the reluctance of the TCCs to carry out investigations and conduct trials. One of the reasons for this reluctance is the risk that their further troop contribution may be limited, affecting their financial gains from these contributions (Freedman, 2018, p. 973). However, when the investigations are conducted, either by the UN or the TCC, there are a few factors that can make its results and evidence inadmissible to the TCC court. One of the reasons for such is the type of method that was used to collect evidence for the court proceedings. In case the evidence collected is not in accordance with the TCCs national jurisdiction, it can be rendered inadmissible. However, apart from the lack of desire that the TCCs may demonstrate, another point that plays a role is their lack of resources. This is often the reason why these countries do not send their own national investigation teams along with the peacekeepers. It is oftentimes not possible to do so even after the accusations, which is why the trial and investigation processes either take longer or fail to occur in the first place (pp. 972-73). As a result of these structural and resource-based mishaps, most SEA perpetrators do not face repercussions for their actions. Due to the lack of any efficient deterrence mechanisms, the issue of SEA prevails, since the perpetrators are usually able to get away with their crimes.

Another crucial problem is related to UN-led investigations into SEA allegations. According to Freedman (2018), while the main investigative body that deals with SEA allegations is the UN's Office of Internal Oversight Service (OIOS), in practice there are at least three other institutions and offices that take part in the investigations (p. 971). Although in theory this could have served as a benefit - more people working on the case, therefore, the allegation can be confirmed and acted upon quicker and more efficiently - in practice, each of the institutions ends up shifting tasks between one another, with no one body holding practical

responsibility over ensuring the investigation is handled in an adequate manner (p. 970). This also poses a problem for the local populations and victims of SEA, as, in cases of misinformation or lack of awareness, they may be unsure of which body to report to and fail to hold these investigatory channels accountable for mishandling their cases (p. 972). A final point to make is that these investigatory bodies record a different number of allegations, which has an effect on the number of allegations that are counted and discussed in the annual UN reports.

2.2 Insufficient data gathering:

According to the annual UN reports on SEA during peacekeeping missions, the number of allegations related to such crimes perpetrated by the peacekeepers has been decreasing since 2007 (Grady, 2016, p. 935). Ban Ki-moon, the UN Secretary-General at the time, has attributed this decrease to a multitude of institutional developments and reforms, specifically highlighting the role of the zero-tolerance policy. While a possible explanation, a study conducted on the UN data gathering and reporting mechanisms has revealed a plethora of inconsistencies, which may account for the fluctuations in the number of allegations reported.

One of the first critiques revolves around the inconsistencies in the allegation count. According to recent reports, there have been fluctuations regarding whether one allegation represents one victim of one perpetrator, one victim of many perpetrators or many victims of one perpetrator (p. 936). Since there is an inconsistent counting framework that the UN employs, the number of allegations covered in their reports does not reflect the number of neither victims nor perpetrators, instead only counting the communications that have taken place between the UN reporting bodies and the SEA victims. This marks the issue of under-reporting.

Another prevalent problem is related to the definitional consistency. The categories and labels attributed to different SEA-related activities and terms tend to change every year, with some labels ('employment for sex', 'sexually exploitative pornography') not receiving significant conceptual attention at all (p. 940). The inconsistent conceptualization may further contribute to under-reporting, because the victims' knowledge and/or understanding of the definition may affect their confidence in whether their experience falls within the scope of said definition (p. 953).

This overconfidence in the effectiveness of the zero-tolerance policy and the subsequent "decrease" in sexual abuse allegations works as a blanket from the necessary legal reforms within the UN and among the TCCs. Therefore, there have been calls for the UN to, if not amend their accountability and investigation structures, then to organize a consistent conceptualization and categorization to be employed in the future reports. This way both the organization and the TCCs will be able to see a more accurate overview of the situation, serving as a catalyst for both entities to address the issue of peacekeeper perpetuated SEA further.

2.3 Peacekeeper training programs:

SEA prevention training has been mandatory for all peacekeepers since 2005. These primarily consist of awareness programs and traditional educational practices, such as lectures and training manuals (Allais, 2011, p. 10). The existing framework is deemed problematic for a number of reasons, ranging from structural implementation mishaps to psychological inefficiency.

When looking at the implementation of SEA-related training programs, a few different factors are worth mentioning. For one, peacekeepers themselves have reported that, in certain missions, training is organized shortly after their arrival in the host-country (Kirby & D'Estrée, 2008, p. 235). Not only does this timeline not give the peacekeepers enough time to go into depth on the different nuances related to SEA, but is also inefficient because the peacekeepers are often unmotivated and tired following their travels to the host-country. There are a few reasons for such a delay in training provision. One, which has been mentioned, includes the lack of resources a TCC experiences - an issue that constrains the TCC in being able to coordinate in-depth and well-organized training programs. Another issue includes the unwillingness or the lack of consensus between the TCC and the UN on the importance of a SEA-related program (Allais, 2011, p. 9). This has been, most often, attributed to the cultural differences that are reflected within the TCC and the West-oriented narrative of the UN. Because neither party has actively sought to implement characteristics of both value systems, proactivity on behalf of the TCC has been limited.

Besides the problems with implementation, certain sociological and psychological debates regarding the structure of training problems have also taken place within academia. As

of now, most training programs follow a so-called knowledge-attitude-practices theory (KAP), which seeks to change an individual's behaviour by educating them about the consequences of that behaviour. According to some scholars, this format alone is not enough to stimulate radical change or effectively alter the peacekeepers behavioural standards. To account for these mishaps, another sociological theory - social identity theory-self-categorization theory (SIT-SCT) - has been proposed (pp. 10-11). Unlike the previous model, SIT-SCT focuses on the entire process of one's identity formation, closely focusing on the group of which the individual is a part. The main argument is that it is the groups we are part of which form our identities, as well as our understanding of right and wrong. Therefore, one structural suggestion includes enacting more peer groups and proactive types of exercises, where individual peacekeepers can engage in discussions, debates and critical thinking regarding SEA. However, this suggestion has not yet been implemented, or even considered at the UN level, maintaining the inefficient SEA training program structure.

3. Literature Review:

As mentioned previously, the scholarship on the continued SEA perpetrated by UN peacekeepers has been largely divided between structuralist/institutionalist and feminist discussions. The former focuses primarily on the institutional and structural developments, which, according to the subsequent scholars, are the main reasons UN peacekeepers continuously engage in SEA against local civilians. Some of the most common reasons have been mentioned previously. The feminist discussions, on the other hand, engage in a more normative and gender-based analysis of the UN as an organization, its documental gender-framing, masculinities that exist with the UN and peacekeeping missions, among others. Due to the different focuses these theories hold, there is not a significant overlap between the two. Nevertheless, some factors have been discussed by both scholarships.

3.1 Structuralist/Institutionalist Arguments:

Although there is little variation in what encourages SEA perpetrated by peacekeepers, there are divergences on how to address the issue. Most of these variations have mainly been

related to the accountability mechanisms, where a number of scholars have argued for reforming the peacekeeping system. Allred (2006) in particular has conducted an extensive comparative study among various international organizations and national units - such as NATO and the US military groups abroad - to compare the different approaches these institutes have taken when facing the issue of SEA perpetrated by their military personnel and, subsequently, create a set of recommendations for the UN. According to his research, there should be a number of structural changes with regards to the investigation mechanisms, as a means of improving their efficiency. These include deployment of legal advisors from the necessary TCCs, organizing courts-martial within the host state, and ensuring that culturally trained and oriented psychologists and social workers are accessible to the victims of SEA (pp. 10-11).

Freedman (2018) finds that a UN-based reform with regards to the accountability measures is needed. These include rigorous 'naming and shaming' of individual peacekeepers and TCCs as a means of provoking a response from their governments, and the establishment of a universal definition of sexual abuse and how it is ought to be employed within each TCC (p. 974). However, a major change that Freedman extensively focused on is establishing a victim-centered approach within the UN. The scholar has argued that most of the time, the UN and the media has extensively focused on holding the perpetrator accountable, rather than focusing on the needs of the victim - a trend that can easily be identified within existing literature as well (Allred, 2006; Grady, 2016). Freedman argued that, although it is important to hold SEA perpetrators accountable, the victim and their needs should not be disregarded. The UN should ensure that victims' complaints are adequately processed within the criminal justice system, that they have access to the legal process and are a meaningful part of it, as well as establishing truth and reconciliation committees and all the necessary aid that the victims may need (pp. 977-79).

The final approach the scholarship has taken is looking at the role of international law and subsequent courts in achieving accountability for the SEA perpetrators. In particular, scholars have considered the role of the International Criminal Court (ICC) as a legal institution that can and should address crimes of the UN peacekeepers, especially in cases where the TCC in question is unable or unwilling to conduct an investigation. According to O'Brien (2011), SEA perpetrated by the UN peacekeepers can constitute crimes against humanity, war crimes and/or, in certain cases, genocide, falling under the Rome Statute and, therefore, the jurisdiction of the Court (p. 808). However, what has also been discussed are the inconsistencies between

certain UN documents and the international law, especially with regards to the definitions included in the UN zero-tolerance policy (Quénivet, 2007, p. 670). According to some scholars, these inconsistencies, which still have not been addressed, preclude the zero-tolerance policy from being used as a protocol/statute during criminal proceedings and prosecutions (p. 668). Although related scholarship has been more optimistic about the prospects of engaging with the international legal institutions, there has still not been any consensus on the matter academically.

3.2 Feminist Arguments:

The main shortcomings of the structuralist/institutionalist literature has been primarily addressed by the feminist scholarship. Instead of focusing on gender rhetorics and behavioural structures when identifying the underlying causes of SEA perpetuated by peacekeepers, UN and relevant scholarship has addressed "'train and punish' approach, where punishment is not guaranteed and training fails to make connections with larger gender and structural inequalities" (Holvikivi, 2021, p. 227). According to the feminist scholars, while structural and institutional developments are worth discussing and addressing, the underlying normative practices and tenets on which the organization is built and acts upon are even more important (p. 227). As a result, this gap serves as one of the main reasons why there has not been a [near-]total elimination of SEA perpetuated by the UN peacekeepers.

Additionally, the feminist school of thought has also disucssed UN documents and how their framing of gender, peacekeeping and other related factors may have had an effect on continued SEA. For one, these scholars have been vocal about how different legal and political documents have disregarded the agency of women, which often prescribe the role of "passive victims" to females in the war-torn state (Tripp, 2013, p. 10; Grewal, 2021, p. 71). This is often characterized by the fact that women are placed in the same "vulnerability category" as children. This often diminishes and minimizes their role as peacemakers and fighters, depriving them (at least on paper) of any agency they may have had during and after the conflict (p. 12). Related to this, they have also pointed out that this infantilization of women disregards the experiences of male civilian victims, effectively gendering the experience of war between the strong and fighting men and the vulnerable and feminized "other" (Tripp, 2013, p. 12; Holvikivi, 2021, p. 225). Another agency-related critique is the disregard of women's agency and willingness to

engage in sexual practices due to the lack of economic opportunities. Because the peacekeepers are deployed to war-torn countries, which often do not have economic opportunities available to the local populations (especially women), some of them resort to transactional sex, i.e. exchanging sexual services for food, money and protection (Mudgaway, 2017, p. 1456). Although the power dynamics and the lack of economic substitutes that are available to women do make these relationships exploitative in one way or another, the mission mandates and other related documents fail to provide any alternatives to the local populations, effectively depriving women of the only/one of the few sources of income available to them (Simic, 2009, p. 289).

Another most common critique is related to the long-term efficiency of peacekeeping operations and mandates, which often disregard the continuum of violence women experience. According to Yadav and Horn (2021), this continuum of violence is not characterized by the level of security and political stability within a given state (although these factors are ought to be considered). Instead, it is the inequalities and oppression that perpetuate violence against women in private and public spheres, and in times of war and peace (p. 106). Coming back to the peacekeeping missions specifically, they most often seek to re-create the pre-war environment of a war-torn country in question. This often means that women continue to experience violence, such as domestic abuse, honour killings, political and social exclusion, and others (Ní Aoláin, 2013, p. 42; Tripp, 2013, p. 20). Although one could argue that third parties should not interfere in the domestic structures of a sovereign state, international actors, such as the UN, can consider expanding their mission mandates to encompass structural and institutional factors to decrease and/or eliminate violence against women in post-conflict societies.

Finally, the feminist scholarship has often been critical of the masculanization and patriarchal nature of various institutions, including in peacekeeping missions. Considering that peacekeeping operations are mostly composed of military and policing personnel (both of which have combat skills and experience), masculine traits, such as aggression, courage and strength, are prioritized over any "feminine" behaviour (Karim & Beardsley, 2016, p. 102). This has also led to a desensitization to violence, including the one perpetrated by wrongdoing peacekeepers. According to Peterson (2013), militarized environments, which are formed and dominated by the masculinized behaviours of the peacekeepers, tend to conform to the male needs and desires, including those of sexual nature (p. 63). This factor serves as one of the explanations for an increase in trafficked persons and prostitution near military bases, further encouraging the use

and/or abuse of sex services available to the peacekeeping personnel (Kirby & D'Estrée, 2008, p. 238; O'Brien, 2011, p. 805). A more institutionalist solution proposed by academics and the UN itself was increasing the number of female peacekeepers deployed. It is argued that their presence will mitigate the overwhelming masculinities and militarized qualities, which are thought to increase the level of SEA perpetrated by the peacekeepers. What is also argued is that female peacekeepers are more likely to report SEA abuses (Karim & Beardsley, 2015, p. 104). However, what the feminist scholarship rightfully argues is that without changes in the institutional structure of the UN, which perpetuates masculinities and, at times, militarization, female peacekeepers end up having to conform to these toxic behaviours, feeling intimidated to report SEA perpetrated by their male counterparts (Karim & Beardsley, 2015, p. 104; Holvikivi, 2021, p. 225). Additionally, although it is true that male peacekeepers are predominant offenders, the proposition of female peacekeepers may overlook the possibility of women becoming perpetrators of sexual violence (Karim & Beardsley, 2015, p. 104). While this may seem less likely, the possibility should not be disregarded in either case.

4. Theoretical Framework:

Feminist international relations (IR) theory, developed between the 1970s and 80s, primarily criticizes the androcentric view point that previous IR theories have implemented in their assumptions, tenets and explanations (Kinsella, 2017, p. 194). It studies various IR concepts through the lens of gender. In this case, gender is not one's attribution to a particular biological sex, but instead "a system of symbolic meaning that creates social hierarchies based on perceived associations with masculine and feminine characteristics" (Sjoberg, 2009, p. 187). Feminist scholars have argued that the exclusion of women, their experiences and their beliefs, as well as the apolitical and privatized roles that were attributed to women makes the previous IR theories limited and biased.

The sub-feminist theory that this research will focus on is feminist security studies, which gained traction in late 1980s (Wibben, 2010, p. 21). The main focus of the feminist security scholarship is studying the gendered nature of various security concepts (Tripp, 2013, pp. 9-10). Attention is particularly given to the masculine-feminine dichotomy with regards to security elements such as war, peace and militarization, and how these affect different groups of people,

men and women of different religious, ethnic, racial and sexuality backgrounds. Among the masculine security traits, feminists often mention concepts such as war, violence and militarization, whereas feminine security is related to peace-building and humanitarianism (Baylis, 2017, pp. 244-45). Additionally, these feminist scholars have sought to increase awareness about security topics, which have previously been disregarded, sometimes due to their inherently feminine nature. These include practices such as [war] rape, poverty and peacekeeping. Finally, related to one of the scholarship's main focuses is the awareness that the field of security is inherently masculinized, both in terms of its conceptual focus (i.e. excessive studies conducted on topics of war, military, violence) and practically. The latter refers to the lack of attention given to women as combatants, security policymakers, and scholars, limiting their role within the field to passive victims who ought to be rescued by the strong masculine figures (Grewal, 2021, p. 71).

The feminist security narrative is of importance for this research, as it gives a clear basis for the UN's discourse pertaining to gender in security-related practices and settings. For one, the theory heavily criticizes the existing security structures and narratives to be overly masculinized, continuously reproducing and deepening the patriarchal nature of security related institutions and reiterating their subsequent toxic masculinities (Wibben, 2010, p. 23). This is particularly important, because, as has been mentioned, not only is women's agency as a security actor disregarded by various international and national organizations and their policies, but any violence perpetrated against female civilians, combatants and activists is almost expected, due to the inherently violent nature of the circumstances the peacekeepers find themselves in. This security narrative will often be referred to throughout the analysis of the UN's documents pertaining to SEA.

Despite the extensive research that the feminist security scholarship has produced, it has largely remained normative. Therefore, the main literature gap relates to the fact that there were no empirical studies proving the findings of the scholarship thus far. This thesis will aim to close this gap by conducting a critical discourse analysis of UN documents.

To conduct a more accurate analysis and, thereby, critique of the UN's discourse, the terms "sexual exploitation" and "sexual abuse" will be defined in the same way as they are conceptualized in most primary UN documents, including the zero-tolerance policy:

1) sexual exploitation is "*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*" (Annan, 2003, p. 1);

2) sexual abuse is "*the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions*" (p. 1).

With regards to UN discourse concerning sexual abuse, not only the crime itself is considered, but also how the victims, perpetrators and circumstances around such crime are discussed and framed in the documents. This includes factors such as how women and their agency is framed, whether lack of economic opportunities are considered, appraisal of masculine and militarized traits, and others.

5. Research Design:

5.1 Methodological Approach:

This thesis will employ a critical discourse analysis (CDA) as this type of analysis seeks to identify connections between language and power dynamics, and how this interplay creates and reiterates existing social structures. In this case, the continued perpetration of SEA by the UN peacekeepers is of utmost interest.

With regards to the sources that will be analyzed, there are a few criteria to follow. Firstly, the sources will be either directly created and published or contributed to by the UN. All of these can be found either in the UN archives or on their designated website. Since this research analyzes the failure of UN policies and subsequent strategies, specifically focusing on the ways certain documents are framed, a thorough study of related documents is necessary for a comprehensive analysis. Secondly, the documents will have to discuss SEA perpetrated by the UN peacekeepers. Lastly, the documents will have to be published after 2003, when the initial zero-tolerance policy was enacted. Because this thesis seeks to analyze the UN's active discourse related to SEA committed by peacekeepers, documents published prior to 2003 are irrelevant for

this study. This is because the first important document pertaining to SEA committed by the UN personnel has been the UN zero-tolerance policy published in 2003.

Based on the factors that this thesis seeks to focus on, three types of documents can already be mentioned: 1) the zero-tolerance policy; 2) pre-deployment training program on SEA; and 3) individual mission mandates.

5.2 Coding Framework:

Because there are three main sets of documents this thesis seeks to investigate in greater detail, the coding framework will have three sets of categories, each attributed to the corresponding variable.

With regards to the gendered framing of zero-tolerance policy, the main aspect to investigate is the extent to which women's agency is decreased or eliminated ("lack of women's agency"). The first sub-category will focus on whether women are infantilized, by either referring to them as [one of] the most vulnerable social group[s] or grouping them together with children and disabled persons. As has been stated before, the feminist scholarship has criticized this common approach among legal documents, because placing women in the same category as minors and people who physically and legally lack agency depicts them in a similar manner, thereby disregarding and disempowering their role in conflict and peacebuilding. Another subcategory includes prohibition of consensual sex between locals and the peacekeepers. Because the zero-tolerance policy prohibits all types of sexual relations between peacekeepers and local populations, it disregards the possibility that individual women may actively seek relationships with the UN peacekeepers, not only for transactional purposes - a dynamic which may hold unequal powers between the two parties - but also because of free will and desire.

The second category, related to training manuals, focuses on the type of advice and activities that the training programs provide, divided between structural and behavioural. The reason this is an important factor to consider is because, as research suggests, existing training programs fail to address behavioural exercises, arguably making these inefficient in combating peacekeeper perpetrated SEA. Identifying which types of activities are referred to more often may provide some clarity into the effectiveness of training.

Finally, the third category, concerning peacekeeping missions, will focus on the level of militarization within individual mission mandates, distinguishing between militarized, demilitarized and non-military activities through which the mission seeks to establish peace and security. This factor is important because higher levels of militarization are often correlated with lesser focus on women's rights, dignity and security, conforming to male needs and desires (Peterson, 2013, p. 63).

5.2.1: Overlapping categories:

There are a number of other categories, which overlap between these three types of documents. One of these includes a lack of economic opportunities. This category is divided into two sub-categories. First is the mere acknowledgement within the documents that women have very few sources of income, forcing them into prostitution. The second is the acknowledgement and action that the document proposes as a means of providing women with greater economic opportunities. This is an important factor to consider for this thesis' analysis, as previous criticism of various UN documents, including the zero-tolerance policy, have discussed the lack of concrete propositions on behalf of the organization on how women's situation can be improved. Whether UN documents simply acknowledge the lack of economic opportunities or seek to provide concrete action plans on how to improve their environment may explain the potential failures of the UN's zero-tolerance policy and other subsequent measures.

Culture is another overlapping category, which is important to consider. A number of UN documents related to SEA perpetrated by the UN peacekeepers discusses the need to establish reporting mechanisms and to encourage victims of SEA to resort to them. However, the policy, as other documents, fail to acknowledge cultural factors, such as religion and opinions on sex, that may preclude said victims from reporting their abuses, due to stigma, shame and fear. Therefore, whether a document acknowledges and takes into account the need for actions that would be in accordance with the local customs and traditions or whether they focus on predominantly Western practices, may have an impact on how effective practices such as reporting may be.

Masculinization - or favourable mention of "masculine" traits - is another category to look for in the documents. This is because, as with militarization, a higher number of masculine

traits reiterates masculine needs and desires, which come at the expense of women's rights and security (Peterson, 2013, p. 63).

A final concrete category is the increased women's agency, both in general and in a post-war environment. This category looks at concrete actions that various documents call for to increase women's engagement in political, economic, social and judicial spheres within the host state. One of the main reasons this factor is worth considering relates to feminist criticism of peacekeeping documents. More often than not, the documents seek to restore peace and security that was present in the pre-war times, disregarding the fact that this type of environment may still be hostile to women (Grewal, 2021, p. 72). As a result, certain developments, such as SEA, are being normalized by the local communities, serving as one of potential factors why zero-tolerance policy is seen as ineffective.

Another category, referred to as "other", is also created for factors that are not directly related to any of the mentioned developments, but are still of importance to the feminist critique of peacekeeping. This includes sub-categories such as female peacekeepers (their numbers, effectiveness and effect on SEA trends), terminological inconsistencies in UN documents related to SEA terminology, as well as rules and procedures that apply to its prevention, and explicit referral to the zero-tolerance policy and investigation mechanisms in other UN documents (such as training manuals and mission mandates).

6. Analysis and Discussion:

6.1 Zero-tolerance policy:

As mentioned in the previous section, the UN's zero-tolerance policy has mostly been guilty of disregarding women's agency in relation to their sexual relations with the UN peacekeepers. This trend has been characterized by a number of factors.

Firstly, the policy groups women in the same vulnerability category as children, specifically reminding the peacekeepers that they have a "*particular duty of care towards women and children* [...]" (Annan, 2003, p. 1). Not only does the merging of women and minors in the same category undermine women's individual agency, their roles in the community and their potential as fighters, peacekeepers and decision makers, but so does the use of the word "care" -

a term most often used with regards to most vulnerable groups, such as children and disabled persons (Tripp, 2013, p. 12). Additionally, the policy goes as far as referring to women as one of the most vulnerable populations, in need of the UN's protection ("*to further protect the most vulnerable populations, especially women and children* [...]") (p. 2). Again, such framing further downplays the [potentially little] agency local women have, not taking into account their role as combatants and/or activists. This point conforms to the feminist critique of most political and legal discourses with regards to women, who are seen as victims in need of protection by the strong masculine soldiers/men (Simic, 2009; Grewal, 2021; Ogg & Craker, 2021).

Secondly, the policy's framing of sexual relationships between the peacekeepers and local women implies that all of such interactions are inherently exploitative in nature ("*Exchange of money* [...]*, including sexual favours or **other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitative behaviour, is prohibited***") (Annan, 2003, p. 2). Not only does this phrasing once again strip local women of their individual and independent decision-making, but also, albeit indirectly, further stigamatizes their sexual choices and actions as something that should be looked down upon - an issue that victims of SEA are often faced with, especially in smaller communities (Meger, 2021, p. 117). The first half of this clause - namely, "*Exchange of money, employment, goods or services for sex* [...] *is prohibited*" (p. 2) - can be subjected to two points of feminist critique, both of which have been extensively discussed in this thesis. For one, it disregards the agency of the local women, who, despite the circumstantial hardships, may consentually and willingly choose to engage in sexual activities with the UN peacekeepers, be it for money, resources and protection or simply for pleasure. This framing also relates to the critique of "sex panic" - the intervention of international institutions (UN) in the regulation of sexual behaviour, in this case, of the peacekeepers and the local women (Simic, 2009, p. 288). As has been mentioned, these regulations tend to prohibit women from engaging in the only source of income that may be accessible to them, however, they fail to provide any economically feasible alternative, leaving women in a helpless economic situation as a result (p. 288).

Although on its own, these examples of diminished women's agency may not serve as a substantial reasoning for the continued SEA perpetrated by the peacekeepers, the feminist security scholarship would argue otherwise. The trend of military personnel engaging in sexual activities with the local populations has been practiced for millenia, with prostitution and human trafficking increasing upon the arrival of the [UN] peacekeepers and brothels being organized

near military bases (Allred, 2006; Kirby & D'Estrée, 2008; Simic, 2009). Not only is such discourse present within the field of security, but it has also spilled over into domains of entertainment, further solidifying and normalizing violence against women, especially in cases of conflict and instability (Tripp, 2013, p. 13). The downbringing of women to victims in need of masculine protection is one of the many ways in which toxic masculinities and militarized behaviour is indirectly fostered and, some may say, even encouraged (Holviki, 2021, p. 224). Therefore, the policy's outright negligence of women's role as informed decision-makers makes them an easy target for those who foster and are entrenched in said toxic masculinities, namely the UN peacekeepers. Additionally, the fact that the policy's only structural leverage against SEA perpetrated by their personnel are "*disciplinary measures, including summary dismissal*" (Annan, 2003, p. 2), as well as the lack of any legal responsibility the perpetrator will face, does not serve as a particularly deterring mechanism for the peacekeepers.

6.2 Pre-deployment training manual:

The only training material available to the general public is the pre-deployment training manual, last edited in 2017. Therefore, instead of analyzing the training programs conducted on site, each of which have slightly different focuses and variations, the research will instead concentrate on the universal training manual that all the peacekeepers go through upon their departure to the host state.

The manual, just as the zero-tolerance policy, has included a number of patriarchal and inactive statements with regards to women's agency and their economic circumstances. Related to the literature pertaining to the structure of the training programs, the manual has demonstrated that most of the discussions, lessons and activities are structural in nature, without any significant focus on behavioural change nor group based activities.

Throughout the manual, there are multiple instances when the authors have acknowledged the lack of economic opportunities available to local women. They often state that due to a lack of alternative modes of earning income available to them, these women are pushed to engage in sexual activities with the more affluent peacekeepers, making these relationship inherently unequal and, therefore, exploitative:

"An inherently unequal dynamic exists between peacekeeping personnel and beneficiaries. Peacekeeping personnel have money, food and shelter. Local people have less or no access to these essentials. The result is differential power." (UN DPO, 2017, p. 9)

"The UN strongly discourages sexual relationships between UN staff and beneficiaries of assistance. Such relationships are likely to be based on inherently unequal power dynamics." (p. 9)

To add on this, even consensual sexual relationships between the peacekeepers and local prostitutes (referring to states where prostitiution is legal) are prohibited due to their exploitative nature. Although these statements are fair and have been acknowledged by the feminist scholarship as well, the document (just like the zero-tolerance policy) fails to suggest any economic alternatives the peacekeepers could provide and/or organize, leaving women in a helpless victim position yet again. The manual also disregards the locally accepted practices, such as prostitution, imposing Western-oriented ideals on the peacekeepers and, to an extent, local women.

The division between the local women and the peacekeepers is further reiterated by the increased referral to and encouragement of masculine qualities a peacekeeper has to demonstrate. An example of some qualities that are most often referred to includes strength (both physical and psychological), persistence, authority and acknowledgement of these peacekeepers being in dangerous environments. According to Hearn et al. (2021), there is an inherent relationship between perpetuated promotion of masculinity and violence that male soldiers engage in. Violence, including sexual violence, is almost expected of soldiers, as it may be considered a source of pride and demonstration of the strong authoritative figure both to the local population and to other soldiers (p. 315). This dynamic is further reiterated by the practices, such as military prostitution, which may serve as an incentive to use and abuse local commercial sex workers and population as a whole (Kirby & D'Estrée, 2008, p. 238).

The dichotomy between the strong authority of the UN peacekeeper and the victimized and disadvantaged women without agency may, subsequently, encourage SEA perpetrated by the authoritative UN personnel. This is because the subordinate and helpless framing of local women creates a sense of permissiveness for the peacekeepers, since said local women have no other

source of protection, nor an alternative source of income. The lack of any legal responsibility for the peacekeeper mentioned in the manual, albeit being a structural factor, further reiterates a sense of impunity.

6.3 Peacekeeping mission mandates:

For this research, seven peacekeeping mission mandates were analyzed, all of which took place after the 2003 publishing of the zero-tolerance policy. With regards to the mission mandates, there have been more positive changes concerning framing of women's agency, economic opportunities and, above all, post-war circumstances that women will find themselves in. Although such positive developments are not available in all mandates, the most recent ones have tried to acknowledge all of the above-listed factors.

For one, most of the resolutions have extensively acknowledged the fact that local women do not have a wide range of economic opportunities, pushing them to engage in sexual relationships with the peacekeepers, who have more financial resources. Unlike other documents, however, the mission mandates call upon the national and international governments, and other international organizations, to organize initiatives that would improve, among others, the economic situation for local women:

" [...] *affirming that progress in the reconstruction of Haiti, as well as in Haiti's social and economic development, including women and youth, through effective, coordinated, commendable international development assistance* [...] *is crucial to achieving lasting and sustainable stability, and reiterating the need for security to be accompanied by sustainable development in its social, economic and environmental dimensions*" (UNSC Res. 2350, 2017, p. 2)

"[...] *advise and assist the Government of Iraq in* [...] *the promotion of women's economic empowerment*" (UNSC Res. 2576, 2021, p. 4)

Additionally, most mandates have also called for increasing the number of women within civil services, the three branches of government and the peacemaking process:

"Reaffirms the importance for MINUJUSTH [...] to assist the Government of Haiti in ensuring the participation, involvement and representation of women at all levels" (UNSC Res. 2350, 2017, p. 4)

"Calls upon all parties in Mali to ensure full, effective and meaningful participation of women in the mechanisms established by the Agreement to support and monitor its implementation, using the appropriate framework, including through greater representation of women in the CSA, meeting the 30 per cent quota for women in all political functions and offices as defined in Mali's legislation [...]," (UNSC Res. 2531, 2020, p. 4)

"Requests MONUSCO [...] to assist the Government of the DRC and other relevant stakeholders in creating a legal, political and socio-economic environment conducive to ensuring the full, effective and meaningful participation and full involvement and representation of women at all levels, and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, [...], participation of women civil society leaders and organization members with regards to conflict prevention and resolution, public institutions and decision-making, requests MONUSCO support the government in advancing women's political participation, in particular achieving the 30% constitutional quota [...];" (UNSC Res. 2556, 2020, pp. 12-13)

"[...] assist the Government of Iraq in ensuring the full, equal and meaningful participation, involvement and representation of women at all levels of decision making, [...]" (UNSC Res. 2576, 2021, p. 3)

This is of great importance for the feminist security studies, as one of the main critiques scholars from the field have regarding the UN documentation is their short-term and limited consideration of the post-conflict environment that women will find themselves in. According to Ní Aoláin (2013), end of violence in the state does not necessarily imply the end of violence women continue to face (p. 37). Therefore, the fact that women's agency, security-related importance, and societal role is taken into account (sometimes, multiple times throughout the

mandate) elevates local women from the position of a vulnerable victim in need of protection, slightly altering the dichotomy between the weak local women and the strong peacekeepers.

Nevertheless, there are some critiques that can be attributed to most mission mandates from a feminist perspective: the militarized and masculinized components reiterated within the documents. In some of the mandates, certain clauses have outright stated the exact number of soldiers/peacekeepers based in the host state, and how many more are ought to be dispatched. Additionally, there are sometimes individual clauses celebrating and commending the role of the TCCs and their subsequent troops in supporting the mandates, protecting the host state and ensuring their security. Finally, the mandates often refer to masculinized attributes of strength, protection and robustness that the peacekeepers ought to demonstrate throughout the mission. Although this inclusion may seem insignificant, the high number of militarized clauses compared to non-militarized ones can overshadow the social, political and economic activities that are proposed, further encouraging the UN personnel to perpetuate masculine attributes, potentially encouraging the perpetration of SEA against local women. This is because predominantly masculinized and militarized environments are more favorable of male desires and needs, which SEA may be a part of due to the encouragement and expectations of violence as a source of pride and strength (Peterson, 2013; Hearn et al., 2021).

7. Conclusion:

This thesis analyzed the UN's zero-tolerance policy, peacekeeping training manuals and mission mandates discourse pertaining to gender to determine whether existing framing can serve as a potential explanation for the continued SEA perpetrated by the UN peacekeepers. Based on the literature review, the theoretical framework and the subsequent analysis of UN documents, it is safe to say that the disregardment of women's agency, encouraged masculinities and reiterated militarization present in most of the UN documents do partially lay fertile ground for SEA continuously perpetrated by the UN peacekeepers.

Most of the documents have limited or completely neglected women's agency and independent decision-making, which, coupled with the encouraged masculine traits ascribed to the UN peacekeepers, can be said to serve as a subconscious stimulus to engage in activities that

would conform to the existing dichotomy between weak and vulnerable local women and strong and authoritative peacekeepers.

Although previous research has taken upon itself to propose recommendations for the UN as a means of decreasing/eliminating SEA committed by the peacekeepers, most of those have been of a strictly institutionalist/structuralist nature. In order to eliminate SEA perpetrated by the UN peacekeepers, there must be, along with structuralist and institutionalist reforms, a demasculinization and increased acknowledgement of female agency within the UN documents and policies. As the research has demonstrated, it is vital for the UN to recognize mishaps in their framing of gender, as the current discourse employed by the organization continues to create an environment that allows for SEA-related malpractices. Some of the practical considerations the UN can take into account include demilitarizing their mission mandates, creating economic and social initiatives for local women, and to seek a behaviour altering training program related to SEA.

As for the researchers within the field of feminist security studies, there are also some recommendations that may be considered. Firstly, most of the research within the discipline has remained largely normative, failing to back up their claims with empirical evidence. Although this thesis sought to fill that gap by implementing a qualitative analysis, the trend has to be executed on a larger scale. A great quantity of research supporting the theory that the UN's gender discourse plays a role in the continued SEA committed by peacekeepers may serve as a further push from the academia to the organization in perpetuating change on levels beyond structural ones. This is especially important, considering how little has been done on an institutional level to tackle the issue. Therefore, it is possible that narrative and discourse based remedies may be more favourable to the UN, since they are easier to implement.

However, there is another concern that is related to the previous recommendation. Research should not only seek to empirically prove and/or demonstrate the importance of discourse in the perpetration of SEA, but also whether simply changing the narrative can be enough to catalyze a decrease in the levels of SEA committed by the peacekeepers. An example from previous research reiterating the importance of this recommendation is related to increasing the number of female peacekeepers as a solution to SEA. Although quantitative research has shown that increasing the number of female peacekeepers on missions can decrease the number of SEA allegations against peacekeepers (Karim & Beardsley, 2015, p. 104), the proposals

overlooks the insecurities female peacekeepers may experience due to the highly masculinized environment, as well as the fact that women themselves may be the perpetrators (p. 104). Therefore, an in-depth study related to UN's discourse on gender should be conducted, not only to gather more proof on how it plays a role in continued SEA, but also on whether solely changing the gender discourse in UN documents is truly effective.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research. Firstly, this thesis has only looked at a small subset of UN documents, and an in-depth study on a greater number of the organization's work should be done. Secondly, this research has also disregarded the ways in which the UN itself can improve the situation, only having provided specific recommendations for further research. Nevertheless, both of these mishaps can be addressed by future studies conducted on the matter, when a greater empirical base will be collected and specific advice can be formulated by the feminist scholarship.

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Appendix A - Coding Framework:

Category	Sub-category	Code	Description	Indicators
Lack of female agency	Infantilization	Inf.	Grouping of female and child victims into one vulnerability category	"Female/women and children" Claiming that women are one most vulnerable Referring to women as part of most vulnerable populations
	Consensual sex is prohibited	CSP	Prohibits any type of sexual relations, including consensual sex	Prohibits relations with prostitutes (even when legal) Prohibits relations that are consensual with the locals
Lack of economic opportunities	Acknowledgement	LEO: A	Acknowledging lack of economic opportunities for women, involuntarily forcing them to resort to prostitution	Identifies the collapsed economies in the host state (either overtly or indirectly, by mentioning that locals do not have access to various resources)
	Acknowledgement and Action	LEO: AA	Acknowledges the lack of economic opportunities for women and provides ideas (broad or concrete) and how these ought to be created	Calls for international development and assistance in different economic and social sectors Creation of funds and economic initiatives for

				women
Increase female agency		IFA	Actions and initiatives that seek to increase and make obligatory female participation in various institutions (political, economic, social, security, etc.)	Increase/ensure full and meaningful participation of women in institutions
	"Women-friendly" environment	WFE	Recommendations that seek to establish an environment that would be safe for women, instead of simply returning to a pre-war stability and order	Engaging with women's organizations and networks in peacebuilding and maintenance. Quota on female members/participants
Culture	Western Culture	WC	Any depiction or mention of pro-Western ideals and norms, disregarding local traditions and customs to develop security, reconciliation and justice frameworks	Age of consent/majority (18+ only). Only Western organizations and institutions are engaged with
	Local Culture	LC	Local cultural practices, norms, traditions, laws and mindsets are taken into account to develop security, reconciliation and justice frameworks	UN engagement with local women's organizations. National governments developing their own reconciliation systems
Masculinization		Masc.	Depiction or favourable mention of "masculine traits"	Strength. Persistence/resilience

				Danger (acknowledgment of dangerous environment and subsequent behaviour)
Training	Structural advice	SA	Training manuals providing information about structural processes and tactics as a means of preventing SEA	Definition based discussions MCQ exercises
	Behavioural advice	BA	Training manuals providing information and exercises about behavioural changes and ethical codes as a means of preventing SEA	Discussion-based exercises Mixed-group exercises (i.e. police officers, commanders, managers) Use of examples and case studies
Mission Mandate	Militarized	M	Refers to any military activity as a means of achieving peace and security	Mention number of police and military personnel Providing further military assistance (in either troops or military provisions)
	Demilitarization	DM	Refers to any demilitarization activity as a means of achieving peace and security	Withdrawing military personnel Replacing military personnel from TCCs with local police forces
	Non-militarized	NM	Refers to any non-military activity as a means of	Political, economic, social and legal

			achieving peace and security	initiatives and developments Dialogues with the government Monitoring and ensuring free and fair elections
Other	Inconsistencies	Inc.	Can refer to different terminology used when referring to the same dynamics, developments, etc.	Using "prohibit" and "discourage" with regards to SEA
	Female peacekeepers	FP	Can refer to UN calls to increase number of female peacekeepers and/or special measures that are included for female peacekeepers	
	Zero-tolerance policy	ZTP	Direct acknowledgement of and refer to the zero-tolerance policy and other related measures that peacekeepers, TCCs and the UN is ought to take to prevent SEA	Explicitly mentions zero-tolerance policy Explicitly mentions SEA-related training Explicitly mentions SEA-related investigations