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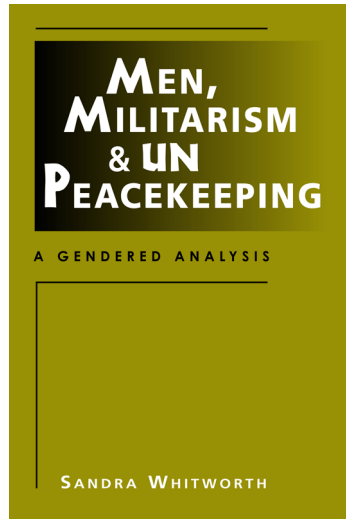
Men, Militarism, and UN Peacekeeping: A Gendered Analysis

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PREFACE

There is probably nothing more annoying than a contradiction. This, at least, is how I felt when in January 1998 I watched (with tears in my eyes) as members of Canada's armed forces helped clear ice from my roof, chop wood, and otherwise contribute to my family's and community's safety through an ice storm that had cut our power, water, heat, and phone for two very cold wintry weeks. These men weren't wearing blue berets when they were deployed throughout eastern Ontario and western Québec on what was dubbed "operation ice rink," but they were some of the people who served on UN peacekeeping missions when deployed abroad. They were the people I had been studying already for a number of years, the people about whom I was writing a book, at that point entitled "Bullies in Blue Berets." They were jovial, decent, and dedicated, and all I wanted to do was hug them.

This wasn't the first, and wouldn't be the last, contradiction I would encounter in doing this project. In fact, the notion of a "contradiction" has come to form an important element of the argument I develop here. This particular one helped to illustrate, for me at least, one of the themes I would try to thread throughout this book. Much of what is written here concerns the struggle over meanings—of peace, security, national identity, masculinities, peacekeeping, and militaries. What I have uncovered during this research suggests that these contestations over meanings matter, and they matter not only to those who wage and sustain them, but they matter also to most of the rest of us who are left to live with the consequences.

One of the contradictions at the root of this discussion is that those consequences can be—but are not always—deeply negative ones. When I spoke with women in Cambodia about the peacekeeping mission that had been deployed there in the early 1990s, I heard firsthand a series of concerns that never made it into the UN's official "Blue Book" on that peacekeeping mission—charges of harassment and assault, cultural insensitivity,

reported rapes, and the rise of prostitution and HIV/AIDS. Almost every Cambodian woman I spoke with said she wished the UN had done it better, had been smarter and more thoughtful before they arrived, or had taken more seriously her concerns once they did arrive. At the same time, not a single woman with whom I spoke said she wished the UN had not come to Cambodia at all, and even the most critical among them prefaced their remarks with the observation that many aspects of their lives had improved since the mission.

Examining contestation and struggle does not mean that some of the things that are said or done in the name of peacekeeping are true while others are false. When I describe the ways in which soldiers deployed as peacekeepers are depicted as benign and altruistic (see Photographs 1 and 2), I am not suggesting that people who express feelings of security, friendship, and even joy upon the arrival of peacekeepers to their villages, cities, or towns are mistaken. Rather, I am suggesting that just as relevant is the experience of those people whose photographs do not end up forming part of the official account of what peacekeeping is: for example, women who ended up serving as prostitutes or who were assaulted by peacekeepers. Equally important is the experience of young men who were shot at, beaten, or as in the case of sixteen-year-old Somali Shidane Abukar Arone, murdered by foreign soldiers. It does not mean that all soldiers and peacekeepers are involved in such acts, or that this is a final and more accurate



Photograph 1 Canadian operations officer greets a local Serbian woman with her sheep, March 14, 1994 (*CP Photo/Tom Hanson*)

account of what peacekeeping is; rather, it means that we will not understand the nature of the contradictions, indeed the very extent to which peacekeeping *is* a contradiction, unless these images remain as central in our minds as those that show peacekeeping's more positive record.

One of the main reasons peacekeeping *is* a contradiction is because of its almost exclusive reliance on soldiers. Soldiers are not born, they are made; and part of what goes into the making of a soldier is a celebration and reinforcement of some of the most aggressive, and most insecure, elements of masculinity: those that promote violence, misogyny, homophobia, and racism. This does not mean that all male military peacekeepers are beasts, that every individual soldier is violently homophobic, racist, or sexist. It does mean, however, that all soldiers have been subjected to the message that they have been given license to express these things, to act upon them, especially if that is what it takes to perform their duties as soldiers. Lying at the very core of peacekeeping is a contradiction: on the one hand, it depends on the individuals (mostly men) who have been constructed as soldiers, and on the other hand, it demands that they deny many of the traits they have come to understand being a soldier entails.

If militarized peacekeeping is contradictory, it is little wonder that the reactions to the arguments contained here have met with such fierce, but



Photograph 2 A UN peacekeeper is accompanied by local children while on security patrol in the Becora district of Dili, East Timor (*United Nations/ Department of Public Information photograph, Eskinder Debebe, February–March 2000*)

often very illuminating, responses. One of the first times I presented some of the questions that I raise in this book was in 1993 when I was asked to provide a commentary at the end of a three-day peacekeeping workshop organized in part through Canada's Department of National Defence (DND). Participation in the workshop was by invitation only, and the guests included academics, policymakers, representatives from the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and military officers from a variety of countries. Those of us doing the summary comments were told that we would be kept strictly to our allotted three minutes, and I organized my remarks around the way in which much of our discussion over those three days had focused on a series of technical and policy-relevant questions; for example, about financing, command and control, storage, and communications. When questions are framed exclusively in technical terms, I argued, a number of things happen. First, political questions are left off the agenda—questions such as: Who benefits from peacekeeping operations? Who is excluded? What is the effect of peacekeeping missions on the people in those countries where the missions are deployed? This means that we did not explore whether the United Nations or certain member states benefited from the increasing interest in peacekeeping. Nor did we ever ask whether there were costs to local populations of particular peacekeeping missions.

When questions are posed in strictly technical terms, not only are a whole series of political questions silenced, but whole groups of interested people are excluded from the discussion, treated as if they were beside the point. Technical questions are answered by technical experts, and I pointed out to the conference participants that while some people around our table had experience in *delivering* different elements of peacekeeping missions, none of us had been *subjected* to one. In order to give voice to some of the people who were not invited to the workshop, I ended my comments by reading from a letter delivered to the UN Secretary-General's special representative in Cambodia just a few months before, which accused some peacekeeping personnel of the various things I would hear directly when I later traveled there myself: sexual assault, sexual violence, and the rise of prostitution and HIV/AIDS.

My fellow participants' reactions were threefold. First, in that cavernous room at the very bottom of Ottawa's Château Laurier Hotel, except for a few quiet chuckles, one almost certainly could have heard a pin drop. I don't think that silence was out of any sense of awe at the profundity of my remarks. Most people—and in particular the only other woman present at the table—shifted their bodies so that they were facing as far away from the head of the table as they could position themselves. The second reaction came from the Canadian brigadier-general who spoke after me. He devoted almost half of his precious three minutes to rebut my comments, and explained

carefully that countries involved in peacekeeping—such as Canada—do not derive any benefit from doing so, that they do so at their own expense and for a common global good. The behavior of peacekeepers detailed in the letter I had read, he noted, amounted to an unusual and isolated event.

The final and most interesting reaction, though, came that evening at the dinner that closed the event. As soon as I arrived, a retired major-general walked over and asked, rather gruffly, “Just what were you saying this afternoon? Why did you read that letter?” I said something rather gruff back, but then he said, “No, no, I’m just a dumb soldier. I’m not sure I understood what you were saying.” I summarized briefly what I had tried to convey at the workshop, and he reacted by slamming his hand on the table and exclaiming, “That’s what I thought you said. And you’re absolutely right! Why, I’ve been thinking about what you were talking about and it just opened up a Pandora’s box for me. I’ve seen all sorts of things like what you were talking about.” This self-described “dumb soldier” went on to regale me with stories that came out of his own peacekeeping experiences, some that illustrated what I was trying to argue, others that only complicated my arguments further. It was the first time I ever heard a person in the military describe himself as a “dumb soldier,” and I have learned since that it often seems to be the most interesting and insightful soldiers who normally preface their remarks in this way.

Since that early talk, in addition to traveling to Cambodia to discuss with some women their views of the impact of the mission on their lives, I also attended Canadian hearings in what came to be called the Somalia Inquiry. At the same time that I was reading the letter from Phnom Penh to the Ottawa workshop, the Canadian media was beginning to report rumors that Canadian soldiers on duty in Somalia possibly had murdered a teenager. As information from both official and unofficial investigations trickled out, what Canadians learned was that Shidane Arone had been tortured and murdered by soldiers from Canada’s elite Airborne regiment. Those soldiers had photographed the young man’s ordeal, and other soldiers within the compound who had heard his cries throughout the night did nothing to stop what was happening. Videos from Somalia showed Canadian soldiers describing the mission as “Operation Snatch Niggers,” and other videos captured some of the Airborne’s initiation rituals: soldiers defecating, eating vomit, and forcing the only black member of that unit of the Airborne to walk around on all fours with “I love KKK” written on his back.

The Airborne regiment was eventually disbanded, a series of military investigations and court-martials were called, and some two years after Arone’s murder, the Canadian government launched a commission of inquiry into the Airborne’s mission to Somalia, an inquiry I attended as an observer. The Somalia Inquiry lasted almost two years, from 1995 to 1997, and though it was cut short and never actually heard evidence concerning

Shidane Arone's torture and murder, by its end it saw 116 witnesses and collected more than 150,000 documents. Although it likely never had the audience draw of, say, the O. J. Simpson trial in the United States, the portion of the inquiry devoted to testimony was open to the public and televised across Canada.

On the days I was able to attend the inquiry, I sometimes found the dynamic of the proceedings as revealing as the testimony itself. Much of the testimony was mundane, describing the minutiae of proper procedures, communications, and command and control. But there was never a day I attended that I did not find something fascinating in either what was said or how it was being said. In addition to the three commissioners, the room was filled with lawyers representing the commission, the government, the military, and a number of individuals and groups who had obtained official standing at the proceedings. There were also translators (Canada operates in two official languages), stenographers, and various assistants. As one might guess from even a passing acquaintance with feminist thought, the room was notable for its distinctive division of labor on the basis of sex—none of the commissioners, few of the lawyers, but almost all of the support staff, were women.

As serious as the proceedings were, I was struck one morning by the banter—recorded once the hearing had been opened and so noted for the record—between the various lawyers and the commissioners themselves. One of the commission's lawyers would be leaving at the end of the day, and lawyers from "the back of the room" (those representing either military personnel or interested groups that had been granted standing) suggested a number of possible replacements for the departing counsel: Pee Wee Herman, Danny DeVito, or possibly Tom Cruise. One of the commissioners suggested that Ms. Lovett, one of only two female lawyers present that day, would "probably go for Tom Cruise." When she suggested that she would likely ask for a female replacement, she was asked by the chair if she was trying to promote equality of rights.

The banter continued in this way—Ms. Lovett replied to the chair that she was operating on the assumption that the commission already had equality of rights—but eventually the assorted gentlemen and the very few ladies returned to the more serious matters at hand. The inquiry's banter was not unlike the kind of apparently innocent joking that takes place in any number of workplaces every day. It was "all in good fun," and it caused no direct physical or emotional harm, yet it delivered a clear message to everyone about who—and what—"counted" in that room. Coupled with the near absence of women in positions of authority, it was clear that the job of investigating the military was a predominantly masculinized affair. This was often confirmed by the defiant glare between witnesses and examiners—members of the military had long insisted their internal reviews and

various court-martials had served as a more than sufficient investigation into the events in Somalia, and some came to the witness stand only because they were compelled to do so. It was also confirmed on occasion in the overheard discussions of strategy between lawyers. As one male lawyer eloquently said to his colleague just before cross-examining a very popular retired major-general: "I'm gonna take him on. I'm gonna bury him."

As interested as I became in the dynamics among the official participants at the inquiry, so too did I find myself taking mental notes about the other public observers to the commission's proceedings day after day. Sometimes I was seated alone, sometimes near family or friends of witnesses, and sometimes—much to my surprise—I found myself sitting beside Canadian tourists who were "taking in" the inquiry much as they might a trip to Canada's federal government on Parliament Hill or a boat trip down the Ottawa River or Rideau Canal. Whether among the tourists or the few "regulars" who rarely seemed to miss a day of the proceedings, I slowly realized that the chief audience to these proceedings seemed to be former members of Canada's armed forces, former soldiers who quietly served as "witnesses" to the investigations. What I had not anticipated, however, was that many were there not because they felt the legacy of which they had been a part had been tarnished by the Airborne's actions but rather that, as veterans, many of the inquiry's visitors held deeply critical views of the military themselves and waited to hear if some of those concerns would be given public voice through these proceedings.

There were numerous revealing moments at the inquiry, but one of the most difficult, and one that returned me to my musings about the core contradictions of peacekeeping, was when the young black soldier who had been made to walk on all fours with "I love KKK" written on his back gave his testimony. He was asked repeatedly whether in his view this and other acts depicted in the video were racist acts, and he consistently acknowledged that they were. When asked whether he had experienced racism in the Canadian forces or the Airborne regiment in particular, he was equally insistent that he had not. None of these things were said or done "from the bottom of their hearts," and moreover he remained proud of the regiment of which he had been a part and "would do everything he could to protect it."

Perhaps the most difficult task I have had in the writing of this book has been trying to "hear" the place from which contradictory positions such as this one—and the others I have encountered like it—were spoken with authenticity. The challenge has been, as it is for so many feminist analysts, to develop a way of thinking through these contradictions without simply suggesting that the young black corporal was suffering from "false consciousness," that he had been a victim of racism for so long that he just could not recognize it. Of course he could. But he also had other experiences and other commitments to which he was trying to give expression in that

moment as well. A principal aim of this book is to name the many contradictions that are constitutive of peacekeeping and to think through their implications, both for the people who encounter peacekeepers and for peacekeepers themselves.

Whether or not I have been successful in this task, I have certainly benefited from the support and assistance of numerous people in trying to get there, some of whom include Juan Pablo Ordoñez, who could not have been a more caring or generous host, or a more insightful political analyst, during my visits to Phnom Penh; the many people who gave generously of their time in Cambodia, including in particular Kek Galabru, Kien Serey Phal, Eva Galabru, Oung Chanthol, Brigitte Sonnois, Genevieve H. Mercœur, Koy Veth, Cathy Zimmerman, Pen Dareth, William Collins, Annuska Derks, and Andrew McNaughton; at Lynne Rienner Publishers, Richard Purslow, Sally Glover, Lisa Tulchin, and Lynne Rienner, all patient and thoughtful editors; Neil Blaney and Sheena Pennie at the Commission of Inquiry into the Deployment of Canadian Forces to Somalia, who were enormously helpful with documentation; and the many students and research assistants who have provided research support over the years, including Elaine Brown, Suzanne Baustad, Maya Eichler, Yumiko Iida, Samantha Majic, Nicole LaViolette, and Emily Saso.

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