

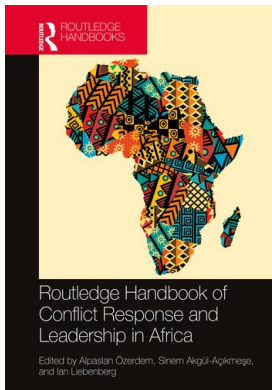
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MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

Voices of South African women peacekeepers, 2000–2018¹

Angela Alchin, Amanda Gouws, and Lindy Heinecken

Introduction

In 1988, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar gave the acceptance speech when the United Nations (UN) Peacekeeping Forces were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts in ending violence in conflict-affected states. Several years later, optimism regarding the success of peacekeeping operations had dwindled, largely due to the shift in the ways in which scholars assessed the success of deployments. The focus was no longer on the absence of war but on human security and development and the effect on civilian populations (Fortna and Howard 2008, p. 287). A change in the traditional scope of peacekeeping involved increased interaction with locals. With it emerged a myriad of unintended consequences, particularly sexual misconduct against civilians by male soldiers (Simić 2012, p. 33). Feminist scholars went a step further and highlighted the gendered dynamics of these consequences. The negative effects of peacekeeping missions prompted the United Nations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and scholars alike to promote the recruitment of women into peacekeeping units. The assumption was that women would make a number of positive and unique contributions to peacekeeping operations, ultimately advancing the operational effectiveness of the unit.

This chapter looks at how these debates have shifted and the growing importance of the gender dimension of human security. Largely as a response to the negative consequences of deploying mainly men to these missions, pressure was placed on troop-contributing countries to increase the number of women deployed. The argument is that this is not something that should be done from an equal rights perspective but as a necessary step to address gender-based concerns and also to improve overall mission success (Simić 2013, p. 2). This was based on the premise that women have something unique to contribute that men cannot provide (Jennings 2011, p. 3). However, claims that women add value or make a difference are largely unsubstantiated, and this has led to a call for more case study analyses to identify the contributions that women make to peacekeeping operations (Jennings 2011, p. 11). Cordell (2011b, p. 37) encourages us to broaden our understanding of women's inclusion in the military and their impact on the operational effectiveness of a unit "specifically through the lenses of troop-contributing countries".

The military has taken gender equality and gender mainstreaming seriously in the South African National Defence Force (SANDF). Women represent approximately 30% of the membership of the SANDF, and the percentage of women in higher-ranking positions continues to increase (Department of Defence 2017). There has been an assertive affirmative action campaign to improve gender representation across all ranks and branches. Accordingly, the SANDF is committed to increasing the recruitment of women to 40% (Heinecken 2015, p. 229). While this goal has not yet been reached, the fact that women represent over one-quarter of the full-time uniformed forces may lead to the assumption that there is a sufficient critical mass of women to disrupt the dominant masculine military culture and make a unique contribution to peacekeeping.

The SANDF has also shown an interest in understanding the challenges and value of women peacekeepers. The authorization of this study, which includes focus group discussions with women in the SANDF, demonstrates an eagerness to understand the utility of its soldiers. The aim is to identify the obstacles women face that prevent them from contributing to peacekeeping missions in the expected way, and to identify what changes need to be made to foster an environment in which the utility of female soldiers can be realized. The point is not to critique gender mainstreaming policies within the SANDF but to examine institutional practices and deployment realities and how they correlate with the theoretical expectations of female peacekeepers and official policies in South Africa.

To place these findings in context, the article is structured as follows. The first part provides a general background to the gender and human security debate and what the discourse suggests are the unique contributions women can make on missions. Details of the research methods are also discussed. The findings in the South African case are then deliberated and the factors impeding women's contributions are identified. Finally, suggestions are made on how the SANDF can overcome these challenges.

Broader debates on gender, human security, and peacekeeping

Gender and human security

The term 'human security' is sometimes traced back to the publication of *An Agenda for Peace* in 1992, written by then UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in which a clear shift of focus from military and arms to development is noted. Most scholars point to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) *Human Development Report* of 1994 when referring to the new understanding of human security, which highlights the "new dimensions" of security as its central focus. The *2005 World Summit Outcome* defines human security as follows:

We stress the right of people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair. We recognize that all individuals, in particular vulnerable people, are entitled to freedom from fear and freedom from want, with an equal opportunity to enjoy all their rights and fully develop their human potential.

(United Nations 2005, p. 31)

This paradigm shift, together with the effect of globalization, prompted a 'culture of intervention' in the 1990s which has been associated with an increase in the number of peacekeeping deployments (Jakobsen 2002). Although a broadening of security theory after the Cold War included economic and environmental concerns, as well as threats from social sectors within states, it still lacked a gender perspective (Blanchard 2003, p. 1292). Although human security

focuses on the individual, feminists argue that human security collapses the feminine and masculine under the term ‘human’ (Hudson 2005, p. 157). The term is understood to be gender neutral; however, most often it is masculine and therefore does not guarantee women’s security (Hudson 2005, p. 157).

Furthermore, the issue of rape in wartime has forced feminist security theorists to question the war/peace dichotomy and what form of peace is provided to women during peacetime (Blanchard 2003, p. 1301). Women often suffer a ‘double-assault’ in states recently affected by war (Mackenzie 2010, p. 213). They are not only victims of rape during war but are stigmatized in their communities during ‘peacetime’. Women are also not seen as active players in the peace process, and, in cases where a gender perspective *is* considered, the link between women, peace, and security is often made by categorizing women as victims and men as belligerents or heroes (Puechguirbal 2010, p. 163).

The understanding that men and women experience war and peace differently prompted feminists to investigate the gendered effects of deploying peacekeepers in a host state. From 1992, allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), an increase in sex houses and prostitution near military bases, and rising levels of child prostitution and fatherless ‘peace babies’ highlighted the gender-based repercussions of deploying peacekeepers (De Coning and Thakur 2007, pp. 6–7). In addition, it has been found that emerging ‘peacekeeping economies’ have a gendered effect on society which often undermines the gender equality goals that peacekeeping missions aim to achieve (Jennings and Nikolić-Ristanović 2009, p. 3).

Feminist scholars also started questioning how gender roles play out *within* peacekeeping units. Scholars focused on the soldiers’ identity, issues of hegemonic masculinity, and more violent cases of hyper-masculinity within units. Hegemonic masculinity refers to a form of masculinity present in a militarized setting which all men strive to attain and which is constructed in relation to subordinate masculinities (Hooper 1998, p. 34; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, p. 848). It is associated with culture and persuasion, which is policed by the threat of feminization; in the end it enforces the domination of men over women (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, p. 832). In cases where hegemonic masculinity is associated with aggression, a form of hyper-masculinity emerges, which relates to violent behaviour, particularly against women. A common argument in peacekeeping literature is that a hyper-masculine culture pervades peacekeeping missions (Whitworth 2004; Lopes 2011, p. 6).² It is believed that hyper-masculine cultures are cultivated in military training to enable soldiers to make the necessary transformation into fighting ‘machines’ ready for combat (Lopes 2011, p. 5). Puechguirbal (2010, p. 162) notes that a hyper-masculine environment also fosters the approach that women are the ones who need protection.

Gendering peacekeeping

By the mid-1990s it had become clear that men and women experience security differently. Increasing cases of peacekeeper misconduct, combined with claims that women’s empowerment and more gender-balanced states lead to long-term stability, had encouraged the UN and its member states’ agencies to mainstream gender in all security processes (Caprioli 2005, p. 171; Cordell 2011b, p. 35). Gender mainstreaming is the understanding that all policies and actions affect the lives of men and women differently. This led to the ratification of a number of policies and principles relating to women, peace, and security, the watershed being the ratifications of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 in 2000, which argues that gender mainstreaming should be implemented in all peacekeeping operations and mandates and should be aimed to “expand the role and contribution of women in United Nations field-based

operations” (United Nations Security Council 2000, p. 2). Resolution 1325 and numerous subsequent resolutions aiming to advance human security all promote the deployment of more women in peacekeeping operations.³ Advocates argue that increasing women’s participation is essential in improving the operational effectiveness of peacekeeping units due to the unique contributions they make (Bridges and Horsfall 2009, p. 120). The UN’s Department of Peacekeeping Operations’ policy on gender equality explains:

Collaboration and dialogue with [troop-contributing countries] shall advocate for the adoption of gender-sensitive policies which support the increased recruitment and deployment of uniformed women to peacekeeping, as part of the overall commitment to ensure maximum operational effectiveness of the peacekeeping operations in line with the commitments made by Member States in recent policy discussions.

(United Nations 2010, p. 6)

Critics have claimed that the UN has reinforced gender stereotypes and that although from a top-down level there is a strong agenda for gender mainstreaming, it often falls short in reality (Basini 2013, pp. 553–554). Policies which promote gender mainstreaming are often the first to be discarded due to budget constraints (Charlesworth 2005, p. 11). Furthermore, global principles may not coalesce with local values, especially regarding religion and the position of women within society, and gender mainstreaming is difficult to translate into local languages (Winslow 2009, p. 549). Studies also demonstrate that even in cases where women are welcomed into the military, politicians still allow mission risk levels to affect the feasibility of deploying female military personnel (Karim and Beardsley 2013, p. 468). Despite these critiques of gender mainstreaming, the task of recruiting more women into the military and deploying them on peacekeeping missions became a priority in many of the top troop-contributing countries in the world. The following section explains why.

The unique contributions women make to peacekeeping operations: a literature review

Civilizing effect on men

One of the main arguments for adding women to peacekeeping missions is that they are believed to have a civilizing effect on their male comrades. Drawing from evidence in a 1995 study for the UN Division of the Advancement of Women, reductions in accusations against peacekeepers allowed DeGroot (2001, p. 35) to conclude that men behave better when around women of their own culture. This leads to the belief that the presence of women helps to reduce the high levels of prostitution which are often found close to military bases, reduce the number of soldiers affected by HIV and AIDS, and reduce the number of abandoned babies (Simić 2010, p. 188).

Feminists question the assumption that men are sexual beings and women are asexual. Even though the vast number of peacekeepers accused of sexual misconduct are men, women in militarized settings have been accused of taking part in sexual misconduct and in some cases acts of gang rape (Wood 2010, p. 305). In addition, women tend to change their behaviour to become part of the “boys’ club” rather than acting as “sex police” (Jennings 2011, p. 6). Furthermore, Higate (2007, p. 107) points out the fact that not all men are “uncivilised” and that many do not partake in forms of SEA. Heinecken (2013, p. 18) also found mixed results, with women saying that they can mitigate the behaviour of men while they are present but not when they go off base.

Contact with the local population

Another argument for the inclusion of more women is that they are more passive than men. It has been found that women are more likely to calm a situation with their presence and negotiating skills compared to men, who supposedly act more aggressively in times of crisis (Karamé 2001). As women are considered to be more compassionate, they are believed to be more inclined to interact with and befriend members of the local community – especially local women. This may enhance the intelligence of the mission, as information regarding the local culture can be collected when meetings are informal and friendly (Karamé 2001; Clarke 2008, p. 59). If locals perceive peacekeepers in a non-threatening way, this in effect also enhances the security of personnel. Additionally, women are vital in cases where body searches need to be conducted, as some local cultures forbid physical contact between men and women.

The ‘positive interaction’ argument does, however, face a number of obstacles. Firstly, the argument assumes that women have a desire to interact with locals, which may not always be the case. Peacekeepers also face the risk of being targeted by rebels because they are women, and therefore may actively avoid contact with locals or may conceal their identity so as not to be recognized as female soldiers (Heinecken 2015, p. 239). Furthermore, local men often resent women for their unconventional roles as soldiers and forbid local women from communicating with the peacekeepers. Other impediments include mandates which forbid contact with the locals or simpler challenges such as language barriers (Bertolazzi 2010, p. 18; Cordell 2011b). In addition, a high turnover – which is usually experienced in peacekeeping missions – makes it difficult for women to establish close relationships with the local population.

Responses to sexual gender-based violence

Another contribution women peacekeepers make to peacekeeping operations is that they are better able to respond to cases of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Women’s ability to respond better to victims of SGBV enhances the ability of the unit to improve the human security of the host state by assisting victims in receiving the appropriate help and psychological support they need. It is argued that women who have suffered from sexual abuse generally feel more comfortable speaking to a female peacekeeper (Mackay 2001, p. 8). The assumption is that female soldiers are more aware of the psychological impact of such events because they are women and therefore are more compassionate towards victims of SGBV (Jennings 2011, p. 3). However, it is often the case that locals wanting to report a security incident react to the soldiers’ uniform rather than their gender (Simić 2010, p. 195). Furthermore, cultural challenges and language barriers may also inhibit female soldiers from contributing in this way (Jennings 2011, p. 9). Finally, women peacekeepers are often not trained in responding to such cases and in many instances do not know where to report these violations (Heinecken 2013, p. 12).

Inspirational to local women

Finally, it is assumed that the notion of seeing women peacekeepers in such unconventional roles will inspire local women to take an active part in political life and security sector reform. The most commonly cited example to support this argument is the increasing number of women enrolling in the police force in Liberia following the deployment of an all-female Indian Police Unit to the state in 2007 (Cordell 2011b, p. 34). Olsson (2000, p. 9) refers to this as having a “positive demonstration effect” on locals. Initially, this can only be proven by actually investigating the perceptions of the local population. However, Cordell points to changes in crime levels

and political participation in Liberia following the deployment of the all-female unit (Cordell 2011a, p. 6). Nevertheless, some scholars note that, rather than viewing female peacekeepers as agents of change, their interactions seem to be superficial (Jennings 2011, p. 6).

The extent to which women peacekeepers can be seen as agents of change is dependent on their ability to interact with the local population and the cultural context. Even where local women may want to embrace equality and challenge patriarchy, this may not be possible and may even be dangerous. Very often, female peacekeepers do not have a solid grasp of the gender dynamics of host nations and how their actions can either protect or undermine local women's insecurity and vulnerability (Heinecken 2015, p. 239).

Research methodology

The research design is based on an exploratory case study wherein qualitative data were collected through primary and secondary sources. Secondary sources were used to produce a literature review and to establish widely advocated themes relating to the call for more women in peacekeeping units. The collection of primary data was achieved through facilitating focus group discussions with women from the SANDF – particularly those who serve in the infantry, as this is the combat corps, which is typically hostile to women and from which most soldiers who serve on peacekeeping operations are drawn.

The interviews took place at the 9th South African Infantry (9 SAI) base near Cape Town on 12 August 2014.⁴ A total of 50 individuals voluntarily took part in seven focus group discussions, yielding an average of seven participants per focus group. The women had the option of choosing whom they wanted in their group, provided that members of the same rank remained in the same group. This was done to address the possible power dynamics associated with rank which could influence the flow of the discussions. The ranks of the women interviewed included privates and non-commissioned officers (NCOs, ranging from corporals to staff sergeants), and the higher-ranking members' focus group included officers and a warrant officer. The ages of the respondents ranged between 22 and 55 years. Some of the soldiers had deployed to South Africa's border region, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and some had deployed more than once. Focus groups were conducted by two researchers, and participants were asked open-ended questions. These questions focused on why the women joined the military and the recruitment process of the SANDF, attitudes of male comrades as perceived by women soldiers, the levels and types of interaction with the locals, and what the women felt their value to peacekeeping was.

The discussions lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Recordings of the conversations were transcribed, and coding was used to identify central themes throughout the discussions which reflect the challenges the women faced in the military and the contributions they believed they had made to peacekeeping units; some unexpected themes also emerged. Naturally, limitations existed during the research process. Time constraints and access to the SANDF were the most obvious obstacles during the data collection process.⁵

Findings on the utility of women in peacekeeping: the opinion of women in the SANDF

Evidence of women's contributions to peacekeeping: women and the behaviour of male soldiers

The data indicate that the value of female peacekeepers in the SANDF in some cases runs parallel to the values advocated by scholars. However, gaps remain between the reality experienced

by women in the SANDF and the discourse on women in peacekeeping. Regarding women's civilizing effect on men, the participants agreed that men change their behaviour around them; however, this change is short term, particularly if new women join the force, as one soldier explained:

I think when the women is new yes [men do change their behaviour], but for us for instance, they treat us like parallel, like it's a workshop filled with a lot of men, so you end up feeling like them, even behaving like them [laughter].

(Focus group 7, 2014)

The focus group discussions revealed that male soldiers having sexual relations with locals was generally accepted, and it was something that women soldiers had no control over. The women spoke with ease about how 'today he has this girlfriend and tomorrow he has that one' (Focus group 3, 2014). One higher-ranking participant also mentioned how men are better at intelligence collection due to finding local girlfriends. It is clear that the power dynamics between peacekeepers and vulnerable groups, as well as the gendered effects of men getting "girlfriends" in the host state, is not always understood (Simić 2012, p. 51).

Maternal compassion versus careerism

Mixed sentiments were expressed regarding women's interaction with the local population. The discourse suggests that women are more compassionate and therefore more inclined to interact with locals. The discussion indicated that a desire to help vulnerable citizens was not the main motivator to deploy on a mission. Only one participant stated this as a reason; the rest cited monetary benefits or the need to gain experience to advance their careers as the reason for deploying. This indicates that women on peacekeeping missions did not deploy for reasons of compassion. However, examples given by the participants who were deployed did demonstrate that they were inclined to be more compassionate than men, especially towards local women and children. In most cases, the women cited motherhood as the primary prompt for their compassion. However, it was found that maternal compassion and peacekeeping could not always be exercised in conjunction, as explained by a private: "In terms of peacekeeping, there are times where you have to be a parent – put your job aside and think like a parent" (Focus group 6, 2014). Participants did mention that men also made an effort to interact with the locals. Furthermore, combat readiness seemed to be considered more vital to peacekeeping than communication with locals:

There are people who are allocated who communicate with the locals, that's not part of our job, we only protect those who go and communicate with the locals, so your job is just to stay there, be ready [for anything].

(Focus group 5, 2014)

The soldiers did agree that local women are more inclined to speak to female peacekeepers due to the perception that women are more understanding than men, as explained by a private: "The [local women] come to women [soldiers] most of the time, because they know how understanding we are; they don't expect you to be harsh, unlike a guy" (Focus group 6, 2014). However, the participants also indicated that the discussions with the local women who approached them involved material needs, such as food and clothes, rather than security concerns. It was also noted that the level of contact with locals is very context-specific; in most cases (particularly

in Sudan), local women were hesitant to approach female peacekeepers because they viewed women soldiers with suspicion and often regarded them as spies. On many occasions, the soldiers also needed translators to communicate with the local population, and without exception the translators were male.

Addressing SGBV

The research suggesting that female peacekeepers are better respondents to incidents of SGBV is inconsistent with the reality experienced by the women in the SANDE. Firstly, the argument assumes that women peacekeepers deal with victims of SGBV; however, no participant mentioned any SGBV incident during their deployment. This is surprising, as sexual violence is rife in the DRC and Sudan. Also noted was the level of importance the participants placed on dealing with these victims. It emerged from the discussions that women seemed to think that preventing SGBV was more important than dealing with victims of such violence. Protecting women was part of their mandate, and dealing with victims of rape was not, as evidenced by remarks such as, “[T]hat’s not part of our job” (Focus group 5, 2014) and “[W]e will refer the person to the medics” (Focus group 5, 2014). In addition, the discussions revealed that the women peacekeepers were perplexed as to how to deal with victims of sexual violence, as they had not been trained on the gender dynamics of the host state before deploying. This lack of knowledge was evident when the participants blamed the local culture or religion for gender inequalities.

Giving hope to local women

The final contribution women are said to make to peacekeeping is that they are inspirational to local women and can encourage them to take part in security sector reform. The female peacekeepers did not think that they could make a lasting impact on the host state, pointing out the lack of appropriate mechanisms to utilize and protect such women: “You will teach them what to do but they can’t practise it. Who is going to protect them when they leave?” (Focus group 1, 2017) The female soldiers did not see this as a particular skill or contribution to peacekeeping and actually indicated a sense of realization that it could be valuable: “I think that’s what should actually happen, like when we deploy we should show the oppressed you don’t have to be this way, the slave, that mattress that everyone lies on” (Focus group 1, 2017). The participants indicated that the local woman reacted with surprise, disbelief, and – on occasion – suspicion at the sight of female soldiers, rather than being inspired.

Factors impeding women’s contributions

Hyper-masculine culture and biological differences

One major theme that emerged when discussing the behaviour of men is the amount of resentment the women felt was expressed towards them by their male comrades: “They [the men] will say harsh things like why did you apply for the army, we didn’t call you up, and they are saying to us you say you can be like a man now prove it” (Focus group 1, 2017). The overall consensus was that men feel that women are weakening the army: “They say we are destroying the army. . . if they could vote us out, they would” (Focus group 1, 2017). The women were made to feel that they did not belong in the infantry and that they needed to act like men to cope in such a militarized setting. The women agreed that a good soldier constitutes ‘manly’ traits, such as

being aggressive or physically fit (to the standard of a man). The few who stated that they wanted to work in the infantry viewed it as a man's job: "We fell in love with the infantry because it's more 'soldierly'" (Focus group 2, 2014). An officer explained: "When you are on deployment, you get there as a soldier, not as a woman, so you do the work of a soldier, and as a soldier, it's a combination of male work" (Focus group 4, 2014). Despite the women's perception that their male comrades wanted them out of the army, they did acknowledge that a sense of acceptance and bonding occurred once they were deployed: "Over deployment everybody, we bond, we actually work better, because who is he going to depend on now, he is going to depend on me" (Focus group 5, 2017).

The presence of a hegemonic masculine culture within the SANDF serves to undermine feminine qualities, as women peacekeepers need to abandon their femininity to conform and even to aspire to become soldiers characterized by hegemonic masculinities. This is also revealed by the lack of value they associate with feminine qualities: "Sometimes being soft, [feminine], is good, sometimes it's not good . . . it's mostly bad" (Focus group 6, 2014). Even higher-ranking members are cited as claiming that "there are no ladies in the army" (Focus group 6, 2014). This is not only seen in units with a minority of women and a majority of men but also in military settings consisting of all women. In the all-female police unit deployed to Liberia, Sergeant-in-Command Monia Gusain (a woman) often referred to the Indian women making up the force as "my men" (Carvajal 2010, p. 2). The fact that women often see a need to abandon their femininity to fit into the demanding peacekeeping environment calls into question their ability to contribute in the unique ways advocated.

The discussions indicated that a hegemonic masculine culture was particularly prevalent in the training sessions, which entail physical strength and endurance and wherein – on most occasions – the men outperform the women. Due to their minority status in the army, women are seen as a token presence and face increased performance pressures as a result (Kanter 1977, p. 972). In addition, the characteristics of being a token are extended to fit the group; the soldiers noted that the failure of one woman is often extended to all women in the unit (Kanter 1977, p. 971). This not only impacts on the self-worth of female peacekeepers but also gives leverage to men to accuse women of not being proper soldiers or justifies their argument that women are "weakening the army". Physical strength seems to be the primary measurement of meeting male standards, and women cited this as their primary weakness. Surprisingly, when asked whether physical strength is necessary and important in peacekeeping operations, the participants answered no. Even though women do not consider the value of strength vital to peacekeeping, they still strive to keep up with their male comrades.

Many scholars cite that a critical mass (approximately 30%) of women is needed to change the hegemonic masculine culture present in military settings (Olsson 2000, p. 9). However, the participants strongly opposed increasing the number of women in the force. The main reason they cited is the lack of cohesion (*camaraderie* or unity) among women in the military. The general consensus among the women was that unit composition should consist of a male majority and that increasing the female contingent could effectively weaken the force:

No I think it's fine [men being in the majority], because if we are like [seven in the group] and two guys, it's going to be weaker – it's going to be chaos. If we go to countries like Sudan, there they still have mentality that women cannot rule or hold weapons, so we will struggle without men – no manpower. It's good to have nine men and three women, the majority must be men.

(Focus group 2, 2014)

Women argue that their male comrades think they are destroying the army; however, in some ways, they agree that more women could effectively weaken the force; the women soldiers in the SANDF seem to live these contradictions. The lack of cohesion among female soldiers and support for more women in the military, as well as the perception among women that the ideal peacekeeper entails mainly masculine traits poses a major challenge to the future feminization of the force.

Reasons for recruiting women: the UN versus the SANDF

True (2010, p. 197) states that “[i]nstitutional analysis is important to understand why gender mainstreaming takes the forms it does in particular institutional settings and why it is often resisted”. For this reason, it is important to understand the contrasting perspectives of the UN and the SANDF with regard to their stance on gender mainstreaming. Considering women in peacekeeping operations, the UN advocates not only gender equality based on liberal equal rights arguments but also the need to include women based on gender difference. This resonates more with the ideology advocated by radical and standpoint feminists. This is captured in the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations policy on gender equality in peacekeeping operations, which states: “Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men” (United Nations 2010, p. 6). The policy further states that “equality does not mean that women and men will become the same” (United Nations 2010, p. 8). Critiques often call this the “add women and stir” approach; advocating certain operational changes merely by increasing the number of women peacekeepers (Jennings 2011, p. 7).

South Africa is a frontrunner regarding levels of women in the military and on deployments and is rated as one of the top 20 troop-contributing countries to the UN. The SANDF takes a liberal feminist approach to recruiting women in the military, focusing mainly on gender equality. The facility recruits women to uphold its legitimacy, as individual rights and equality are fundamental components of the South African constitution (Heinecken 2012, p. 26). Liberal feminism views individual rights as essential and hardly takes gender difference into consideration. South Africa encourages the inclusion of women based on quotas in order to allow for the military to appropriately represent South African society. However, gender equality “should demonstrate a *value* and *appreciation* for both men and women” (United Nations 2001, p. 1).⁶

When participants were asked why they believe the SANDF recruits women to join peacekeeping operations, no one cited the special qualities that women can bring to peacekeeping operations. Those who answered indicated the rights of gender equality within South Africa. Gender equality was associated with gender balancing, in other words – recruiting the correct percentage of men and women. The responses indicate that recruitment is political: “They do it because it must be done” (Focus group 1, 2017) and “because the Constitution says [so]” (Focus group 1, 2017). Women also felt they were not specifically recruited due to their gender: “the recruitment is open, it’s fair, they don’t say because you are a woman you must come” (Focus group 3, 2017). The following discussion between two participants revealed a sense of frustration regarding the quota system:

PARTICIPANT 1: The thing I don’t like is these percentages, everything that you do you must first count how many women and how many [men], it’s always a percentage.

PARTICIPANT 2: But I think it’s also beneficial to us, because us ladies first started with a lot of men and now we get a chance to be in equal numbers with men, so it’s fine.

PARTICIPANT 1: But that's the thing, it's not because they value us so much, it's because the numbers need to be [correct].

(Focus group 1, 2014)

Despite an active recruiting campaign, the female soldiers felt that the SANDF does not specifically target women for the special contributions they make to peacekeeping. When asked about gender mainstreaming, many had never heard the term before, and not one participant could explain its meaning. Gender mainstreaming is also not mentioned in the 300-plus pages of the 2015 *South African Defence Review*. However, goals hinting at gender mainstreaming do feature:

It is important that in the planning of any of the peace building processes, cognizance should be taken of the fact that women, men and children are affected differently by conflict. The integration of gender perspectives in all aspects thus constitutes an important strategy to support inclusive and sustainable peace in post-conflict environments.

(Department of Defence 2015, pp. 2–20)

The lack of understanding of gender mainstreaming directly plays into how female soldiers see themselves and why they do not acknowledge the contributions they make in achieving the peacekeeping mandate.

The self-perception of women peacekeepers

When focusing on how women see themselves and their value to peacekeeping missions, some unexpected contradictions were revealed. Participants were perplexed when asked whether they felt they could offer certain skills to peacekeeping operations that were specifically attributable to their gender. Although some participants did mention they had better communication skills compared to men, these contributions were mentioned in passing and were not considered a vital skill that is valuable to the operational effectiveness of a unit. A skill was considered valuable only when women peacekeepers could do the same tasks that male peacekeepers could do. The participants all revealed a deep sense of wanting to keep up with the men.

The participants explained that the only time women were valued by their male comrades was when performing domestic tasks traditionally assigned to women in society, such as cleaning and cooking. This notion was strongly recognized by the participants, and all of them resented the fact that their perceived value lay in the 'housekeeping' tasks they could perform. Yet surprisingly they tended to cite that this was where their unique value lay – in tasks such as cleaning, cooking, and organizing events. It is clear that women peacekeepers face a paradox with regard to their perceived value in peacekeeping missions. On the one hand, the female soldiers wanted to be treated equally to men and resented having to live up to the societal expectations of women as organisers of the household; on the other, they saw these stereotypical tasks as the only gender-specific value they could add to the operation.

Patriarchy, the military, and society

The gender-specific tasks assigned to women based on domestic responsibilities, along with the self-perception of female soldiers regarding their utility in peacekeeping (or lack thereof), are drawn from the deeply rooted patriarchal beliefs within South African society. Malešević (2010, pp. 291–292) argues that patriarchal social conditions reinforce a strict gender division of labour

in which fighting and warfare are for the most part identified with masculinity, while mothering and caring are synonymous with femininity. The status of women in society plays a major role first in how women are perceived by men from their own contingent, second in how they are perceived by the men and women of the local population in a host state, and third how they perceive themselves.

Patriarchal thinking is demonstrated in the way in which family responsibilities are hailed as a woman's domain. Even some higher-ranking women stated that women do not belong in the infantry because a woman is "the organiser of the household [and] bears children". Furthermore, higher-ranking officers stated that their leadership and authority are often undermined. The women stated that both gender and sexual harassment are things they have to deal with. Moreover, it was found that the female soldiers expected and accepted such behaviour from their male comrades. There was even a sense of annoyance with women who found such acts disconcerting; if a woman interpreted a sexual comment as sexual harassment, then "she must go and stay in a cave". Despite the Department of Defence (DOD) policy on the prevention and elimination of sexual harassment, the overwhelming presence of a hegemonic masculine culture has allowed women in the SANDF to develop internalized guiding principles as to what is considered crossing the line. The consensus among participants was that women in the infantry "must not be too sensitive" (Focus group 3, 2014).

The challenge in overcoming patriarchy is not confined within the walls of the SANDF; it is a struggle facing all levels of South African society. These ideologies pose a major challenge to the SANDF in changing gender perceptions and truly incorporating women into the military on equal terms.

Women peacekeepers and their impact on human security

Empirical research on how the presence of women directly enhances human security within the host state is limited. Persuading men not to commit acts of SEA definitely improves the human security of locals; however, as this study reveals, the women of the SANDF seem unable to serve as the moral conscience of the men. There is no evidence that their presence actually reduces the levels of SEA, as this seems to have become normalized despite the strong stance taken against this by the SANDF. As revealed through the focus group discussions, if women do not understand the gendered effects of men's and women's interaction with locals, incidents of misconduct are normalized. This is attributed to the fact that they receive little to no training or education in gender awareness. Most of the training is purely military training, which means that women cannot make a difference when they are not made aware of the underlying gender dynamics of these missions (Heinecken 2015, pp. 241–242).

Human security is also said to improve with women peacekeepers' increased interaction with the locals. Intelligence collection provides a deeper sense of understanding of locals' needs, and standing in good faith with the community improves the security of the unit (Jennings 2011, p. 4). Although not denying the value of intelligence collection on missions, if the local gender dynamics are not understood, the presence of female peacekeepers may negatively impact on the security of local women. The participants mentioned that if the local women were caught speaking to female peacekeepers in Sudan, they were suspected of sharing intelligence with peacekeepers and therefore specifically targeted by rebels. One can also presume that any local women who are inspired by peacekeepers to challenge conventional gender roles in their community are ostracized and face additional insecurity.

The presence of women soldiers on deployments also increases their own insecurity (more than men) and heightens the insecurity of their unit. Women's sexuality becomes a major factor

impacting their security. The focus groups revealed a number of examples where rebels would stop vehicles if they knew women peacekeepers were present. It was also suggested that the presence of women signals to rebels that the unit is weak and therefore encourages them to attack the unit's base due to considering it an easy target. Heinecken (2015, p. 245) refers to this as the "gendered security risks" which are used to justify their exclusion. Furthermore, women's sexuality also disrupts the authority of leading female officers in the unit. Rebels refuse to negotiate with higher-ranking female soldiers and find it disrespectful to their culture, which results in increasing resentment towards the peacekeeping unit. Men also face additional pressure due to the need to protect 'their' women. The men in the unit do not view female soldiers in the same way as they view their male comrades (Heinecken and Van der Waag 2007, p. 532). Women in the SANDF also explained that they expected this protection from men, stating that they would not conduct patrols without at least one man present and expressing the obligation of men to be extra vigilant when on patrol with a female peacekeeper. The need and obligation for the men to protect the women while on site dilutes the priority of their mandate and places male peacekeepers under additional pressure when already operating in a high-risk environment, ultimately increasing their own insecurity.

Conclusions

Based on this study, one can reach a number of conclusions about women's contributions to peacekeeping and why the ideals espoused in Resolution 1325 and gender mainstreaming remain elusive. Firstly, training within the SANDF mostly revolves around combat readiness, physical strength, endurance, and weaponry. Although this type of training remains a vital part of preparing soldiers to cope in post-conflict societies, it remains steeped in hegemonic masculinities wherein feminine traits are suppressed and undervalued by men and women alike. A shift in gender norms cannot occur under such conditions. This is reflected in the results of this study, which clearly indicate that the women felt a need to 'man up' and viewed their unique contributions to the unit only in terms of gender-stereotypical roles.

Secondly, the fact that they have little understanding of their real value and contribution, coupled with a lack of understanding of why gender matters, is a major shortcoming in soldier training. The women peacekeepers had little knowledge of the local gender dynamics of the countries in which they were deployed. A proper assessment of the host state should be conducted to pinpoint where and how women's gender may be valuable, or harmful, to operational effectiveness and to the security of the local population. Furthermore, taking a gendered approach to training improves not only the chances of fulfilling the mandate (creating lasting peace) but also the professional capacity of the soldier.

Thirdly, although the SANDF prides itself in terms of the number of women it incorporates, it is clearly apparent that it has not been able to shift gender norms or add voice to the current debates. This is due partly to a lack of awareness among soldiers of the content of Resolution 1325 and partly to a lack of awareness of the term 'gender mainstreaming', demonstrating the need for a reassessment of mission readiness training within the SANDF. The concept of gender mainstreaming must be understood by all members involved, men and women alike, not only by those in leadership roles. It is necessary not only to allow men and women to understand the impact they have on the local community and its security needs but also to serve to reduce the men's resentment towards their female comrades and to increase the confidence of the women peacekeepers regarding their professional capacity.

The fourth point is that the SANDF's process for recruiting women seems to focus purely on getting the numbers right, without the associated understanding of why these numbers are

necessary to make a difference. The lack of focus on the value of women during recruitment affects the way in which women see their position in the military – namely merely as gender equality tokens. This has also meant that when women come into the military, they are automatically expected to assimilate masculine values and traits to fit in with the men rather than being able to take their rightful place and challenge or shift gender norms. In so doing, masculinity and patriarchy are reinforced. By specifically targeting women and focusing on their unique qualities during recruitment processes, women can identify the value they add – or are expected to add – to their units.

The fifth issue relates to an inability to bring about a more androgynous or hybrid military culture and peacekeeping identity. Strength and the warrior ethos – in other words masculine qualities – are acknowledged as being vital to peacekeeping operations; however, a peacekeeper identity should also incorporate so-called feminine qualities, such as compassion, sensitivity, and passivity. ‘Re-gendering’ the peacekeeper or soldier identity will allow the SANDF to deploy soldiers that are better trained for conflict resolution in a range of scenarios and environments (Carreiras 2010, p. 482). The creation of a new soldier identity should be captured in all future policies and defence reviews. Most importantly, a mental liberation of SANDF members as to what constitutes an ideal soldier must be encouraged; this paradigm shift will likely prove to be the most challenging change to implement in the force.

In closing, by identifying and addressing these gaps, the SANDF will be in a better position to mould their policies to allow gender mainstreaming to work. Recruitment processes, patriarchal beliefs, and the overwhelming belief in a soldier identity entirely based on masculine traits are all obstacles to the successful future feminization of the SANDF. Nevertheless, it is a task that is vital for one of the world’s top troop-contributing countries. Promoting the role of women in peacekeeping during the recruitment processes, alongside improved pre-departure gender training, will serve to enhance the value of women in the SANDF. This does not mean enslaving men and women soldiers to specific gender roles; instead, the SANDF must actively engage in advocating the value that feminine qualities can add to the professional capacity of a soldier, in relation to both men and women. In the end, this will discourage women from diluting their femininity during peacekeeping operations, encourage male soldiers to value their female comrades, and ultimately help in reaching the peacekeeping mandates, which today are focused on the protection of the population and human security concerns.

Focus Groups

- 1 *Focus Group 1*: Discussion with women in the SANDF (mainly NCOs). 9th South African Infantry Base, Cape Town. 12 August 2014.
- 2 *Focus Group 2*: Discussion with women in the SANDF (mainly NCOs). 9th South African Infantry Base, Cape Town. 12 August 2014.
- 3 *Focus Group 3*: Discussion with women in the SANDF (mainly NCOs). 9th South African Infantry Base, Cape Town. 12 August 2014.
- 4 *Focus Group 4*: Discussion with women in the SANDF (higher-ranking officers). 9th South African Infantry Base, Cape Town. 12 August 2014.
- 5 *Focus Group 5*: Discussion with women in the SANDF (mainly NCOs). 9th South African Infantry Base, Cape Town. 12 August 2014.
- 6 *Focus Group 6*: Discussion with women in the SANDF (mainly privates). 9th South African Infantry Base, Cape Town. 12 August 2014.
- 7 *Focus Group 7*: Discussion with women in the SANDF (mainly junior NCOs). 9th South African Infantry Base, Cape Town. 12 August 2014.

Notes

- 1 This chapter was previously published in *African Security Review*, 27(1) (2017), pp 1–19.
- 2 The situation is complicated as the military has frequently been seen by sociologists as a “total institution”, the inhabitants of the institution being socialised in a hierarchical order with little space for critical questioning (Lopes 2011, p. 6).
- 3 See “Secretary-General’s Bulletin, Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, 2003” and “UN Secretary-General Report: A Comprehensive Strategy to Eliminate Future Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, 2005”; both encouraged the promotion of women in peacekeeping operations to overcome the issue of SEA. Resolution 1820 (2008) and Resolution 1888 (2009) specifically acknowledged sexual violence as a tool of war and addressed SEA by peacekeepers. These resolutions, along with Resolution 1960 (2010), call for more women in peacekeeping; see United Nations Security Council, Resolution (1820); United Nations Security Council, Resolution (1888); United Nations Security Council, Resolution (1960).
- 4 The data were collected as part of Alchin, “Are Women Making a Difference in Peacekeeping Operations?”
- 5 This study is part of the ongoing research by Lindy Heinecken, a professor of sociology at Stellenbosch University in South Africa, on the call for more women in peacekeeping operations and how their presence contributes to achieving the mandate of the unit.
- 6 Emphasis added.

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