United Nations Policy on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: Problematizations and Performances.

Abstract

The United Nations'(UN) response to reports of UN personnel perpetrating sexual violence proclaims "zero-tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA)." Drawing on Carol Bacchi's "what's the problem represented to be (WPR)?" framework, this article unpacks how UN policy solutions represent the problem of SEA. It explores the discursive effects of the UN's problematization of SEA drawing on Sara Ahmed's analysis of audit systems and non-performativity within performance cultures. It scrutinizes the Secretary-General's reports on SEA data and policy documents, including training and risk assessment materials. The analysis shows that UN policy problematizes SEA as transactional sex, inevitable in conditions of poverty and gender inequality. Solutions individualize perpetrators as rule-breakers subject to discipline and generalize victims as among the many impacted by SEA globally. Such solutions situate the UN as the solution to, rather than cause of, SEA and restore a narrative of the UN as defender of the vulnerable.

Introduction

In the twenty-first century UN missions have repeatedly made headlines over allegations of sexual violence and exploitation by peacekeepers and humanitarian workers (Vandenberg 2018). Some cases, particularly those involving sexual exploitation of children, have attracted more media and official attention than others. Indeed, UN research and policy on the question has developed in "surges" of reaction to "media storms" (Westendorf and Searle, 2017: 381–81). The Code Blue (n.d.) campaign against impunity for sexual violence and exploitation (SEA) by UN personnel offers an online archive documenting the extent of the problem.

Attempts at cover-up and retaliation against whistle-blowers have punctuated UN responses. A particularly egregious instance involved the UN's Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). The story became public in mid-2015 when Prince Zeid Raad al-Hussein, the U.N. high commissioner for human rights, fired senior UN human rights official, Anders Kompass, for giving the French government copies of interviews with boys aged eight to thirteen describing sexual violence by French peacekeepers

in the Central African Republic (CAR) (Laville, 2015; Lynch, 2015). In the face of media attention to the situation, the UN Secretary-General commissioned an independent review that reported in December 2015. The review exonerated Kompass, telling a damning story of the boys' testimony passing from "inbox to inbox, across multiple UN offices, with no one willing to take responsibility" (Deschamps et al., 2015: i). Although he was reinstated, Kompass resigned in June 2016 in protest at peacekeeper impunity (Smith, 2017).

The review noted that when French authorities attempted to investigate the allegations of abuse by French peacekeepers in CAR, they were met with bureaucratic obstruction on the part of UN agencies that seemed more concerned with pursuing Kompass for supposedly "leaking the information" (Deschamps et al., 2015: appendix A). This story of cover-up and retaliation against a whistle-blower recalls the case of the UN's mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina where, in 2001, a US military contractor fired International Police Task Force (IPTF) gender monitor Kathy Bolkovac after she pursued cases against some of her colleagues for their involvement in forcing women to work in brothels that catered to peacekeepers (Human Rights Watch, 2002: 54–55). While these whistle-blower cases attracted a lot of attention — Bolkovac's story became the movie *Whistle-blower* — their distance in time suggests little has changed in the UN's institutional responses after two decades of policy development.

The official UN response is built around the slogan "zero-tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA)." This article draws on Carol Bacchi's "what's the problem represented to be (WPR)?" analytical framework to interrogate the UN's SEA policies and programmes. This analysis unpacks the discursive effects and silences evident in how UN policy solutions represent the problem of SEA. It shows how the Secretary-General's reports and associated policy documents represent the problem as largely one of transactional sex, individualize perpetrators as a few bad apples, and generalize victims as among the many impacted by the global problem of sexual violence.

The article concludes that the discursive effects of SEA policy solutions largely address the reputational damage created by reports of UN personnel sexually violating beneficiaries of UN assistance. Thus, SEA policies avoid problematizing UN mission cultures and senior leadership. They represent the problem of SEA as endemic to poverty and global patterns of sexual violence. The discursive effect of this problematization restores the UN's narrative of itself as the solution to SEA with its efforts to empower impoverished women.

This analysis also shows how the Secretary-General's requirement to report on SEA data shapes solutions. The reports reflect managerial audit systems that produce a performance culture in which the goal becomes performing well for the audit. The analysis shows how much anti-SEA activity manifest what Sarah Ahmed (2012) calls non-performativity nested within a performance culture. Ahmed's concept of non-performativity provides an important supplement to the WPR approach because it points to the significance of audit systems and performance cultures in keeping an ineffective policy response going, particularly in cases like that of the UN where there is institutional resistance to change.

The article begins by outlining how the gendered, classed, and racialised dynamics of UN interventions produce conditions for sexual violence and its cover-up. It then details the analytical approach and selection of primary sources. The Secretary-General's annual reports on SEA provide an important source for analysis. These reports present misleading data and should be understood as artifacts of performance culture. The article then interrogates how the UN's main policy slogan/solution, "zero tolerance for SEA," represents the problem and the performative and masking effects of this representation. Following this, it considers the effects of problem representations evident in key solutions to SEA discussed in the Secretary-General's reports.

Sites of UN intervention

UN interventions, particularly peacekeeping, have increasingly supervised fundamental political, economic, and security sector reforms. Enlarged UN missions produce "peacekeeping economies" characterised by cross-cutting inequalities between and among locals and foreigners (Jennings, 2014). Wealthy states usually send a small number of highly paid (mostly) white men as "experts" while peacekeeping troops are more likely to be Black or brown men from poor states that can make money from troop contributions (Ward and Dorussen, 2016). Mission personnel are well-paid by local standards, some very well paid.

Civilian personnel may rent local accommodation and shop and socialise after hours within certain zones, driving up local prices. They may hire local people – men as personal security guards, and women as domestic workers and sex workers. Local service sector businesses develop to cater to UN personnel, including sexual entertainment establishments (Jennings, 2014). Research about peacekeepers shows a masculinised culture prevails on missions in which men view local women as sexually available, whether as a chance for sexual adventure

or a temptation to be resisted; such views depend upon racialised/orientalised constructions of Black and brown women (Higate and Henry, 2004; Jennings, 2014).

Arguments for UN intervention recall Gayatri Spivak's (1993: 93) description of colonial projects: "white men are saving brown women from brown men." Black and brown women often appear as the face of poverty and sexual victimization in UN literature. Justifications for interventions have pointed to escalating sexual violence as a serious security problem (Hudson, 2009). Inter-governmental organizations and powerful states represent UN intervention as best for women and children, agreeing that free market economies empower women by drawing them into paid work and enabling them to challenge male violence and patriarchal cultures led by unruly hyper-masculine men. (Roberts and Soederberg, 2012).

Such narratives exclude the UN's part in creating poverty, sexual violence, and political instability. Critical analyses of global free-market policies pushed by the World Bank and IMF (part of the wider UN system) highlight how they structure intersecting inequalities and foster armed conflicts in the global south (Meger, 2016). In the case of women's poverty and vulnerability to sexual violence, the World Bank's economic reform demands have encouraged women's engagement in low-paid export production, sex work, domestic service, and small-scale micro-financed enterprises involving formal and informal paid work (Pyle and Ward, 2003: 462). Such work is often precarious, requires long hours, and exposes women to sexual harassment and violence (McMillan and Worth, 2017; Pyle and Ward, 2003: 467).

The political volatility of accusations of sexual violence against UN personnel lies in how such violence can potentially lay bare relations of political domination. As Patricia Hill Collins argues: "violence constitutes a saturated site of intersectionality where intersecting power relations are especially visible" (Collins, 2017: 1464–65). Specific matrices of domination achieve hegemony to the extent they make violence against some types of people invisible by naturalizing or normalizing it (Collins, 2017: 1467). Sexual violence by men against women often becomes naturalised as normal sex. However, UN justifications for intervention depend on discourses of protecting victimised Black and brown women and children. Therefore, masking UN personnel's sexual violence requires ongoing effort as it repeatedly gets exposed then obscured. After outlining the analytical framework below, this article unpacks how UN SEA policy works to mask peacekeeper sexual violence against impoverished black, brown, and/or orientalised women and children.

Analytical framework: Policy problematizations and performances

Feminist scholars Bacchi and Ahmed both analyse policies designed to combat discrimination. Bacchi (2010) has researched gender mainstreaming policies while Ahmed (2012) has researched university "diversity" policies. Both are sensitive to the discursive effects of policy. Bacchi's analysis of gender mainstreaming policies reveals how they frequently treat women's conduct as the problem requiring intervention. Ahmed's analysis of university diversity policies unpacks how institutional audit systems allow for ineffective diversity policies to count as exemplary. Both show how policies that ostensibly address inequality and abuses of power can mask systematic power relations that foster sexual violence and harassment.

Bacchi's WPR approach provides a critical tool for analysing policy failures such as UN efforts to reduce sexual violence perpetrated by its personnel. Bacchi's approach draws from constructivist, governmentality, and feminist post-structuralist theories. It "starts from the premise that, since all policies make proposals for change, by their very nature they contain implicit representations of 'problems'" (Bacchi and Eveline, 2010: 116). WPR analysis unpacks proposed policy solutions to uncover the "unexamined assumptions and deep-seated conceptual logics within implicit problem representations" (Bacchi and Eveline, 2010: 116). For example, if an organization offers women leadership training to tackle male-domination of its senior leadership it implicitly represents this problem as women's lack of training (Bacchi, 2012: 21). Thus, "the banal and vague notion of 'the problem' and its partner 'the solution' are heavily laden with meaning" (Bacchi, 2012: 23).

This article draws upon Bacchi's approach by excavating the unexamined assumptions, values, and concepts evident in the UN's proposed solutions to SEA. Bacchi's WPR analysis is not concerned with establishing policy makers' manipulation of information, or competing interpretations of an issue (Bacchi, 2012: 22). Rather, it interrogates the intellectual scaffolding that allows a policy solution to seem logical. Bacchi (2012: 23) provides a six-question framework as an "open-ended mode of critical engagement" with policy solutions rather than a formula; Bacchi does not insist every analysis address each question. These questions overlap and interact yet pursuing a particular question can uncover a rich vein of research. This analysis will focus on questions two and five which ask about the conceptual logics and discursive effects of the problem representation, implicitly addressing question one ("what's the problem?"). It also addresses question four, on what is left unproblematic in the problem representation and how it might be conceptualized differently. This article cannot provide a detailed analysis of question three, on the genealogy of the problem representation, or six, on its dissemination and disruption.

Ahmed's (2012) research on audit systems and university "diversity" policies provides a helpful supplement to the WPR approach. Her research suggests that the logic and effects of problem representations are shaped by institutional performance cultures and audit systems. Performance cultures emerge in situations where authorities use audit systems that apply accountancy techniques to the broader management of institutions and people; scholars have noted the profound cultural and institutional effects of the global spread of such audit techniques (Shore and Wright, 2015). Audit systems demand quantifiable progress in solving policy problems and systematically evaluate institutional performance according to measurable targets and indicators (Slagter and Forbes, 2009). Audits of not-readily quantifiable performances must contrive ways to quantify them, often with far-reaching consequences. The detail of audit performance measures and indicators therefore provides important clues about problem representations and their effects.

Audit systems, in Foucauldian terms, are "disciplinary technologies" that produce "performance cultures" in which people prioritise activity that counts toward positive evaluation (Ahmed, 2012: 84). In performance cultures, meeting performance targets and documenting progress can become an end in itself. Ahmed (2012: 98) describes how the UK Equality Challenge Unit's quality ranking of universities' racial diversity policies allowed her university's leadership to claim excellence in combatting racism based on the "exemplary" ranking of their policy documents that reported on the university's lack of racial diversity. According to the relevant metric doing so contributed toward an overall assessment of excellence on diversity. As Ahmed (2012: 84) puts it: "A document that documents the inequality of the university becomes usable as a measure of good performance." More broadly, the bureaucratic activity produced by audit systems serve as a performance of commitment to tackling the problem.

Ahmed (2012: 84–85) unpacks how university performance cultures produce diversity policy performances that are ultimately "non-performative." She points to how institutions resistant to change may nevertheless make statements of commitment to change which do not commit them to doing anything or develop policies they do not follow. Ahmed furnishes examples of universities establishing diversity committees but ignoring their recommendations and producing diversity policies but not following them. She suggests that such non-performances should be understood as "not a failure of intent or even circumstance, but … actually what the speech act is doing" (Ahmed, 2012: 117). She argues that in such cases commitments,

committees, and policy development "can be used as masks to create the appearance of being transformed" (Ahmed, 2017: 90).

In a context of institutional resistance to change, such as we see in the UN, Ahmed's concepts of performance culture, non-performativity, and masking contribute to an explanation of policy failure. The mere existence of policy documents and activity can be represented as a solution, effectively masking troubling conditions. Mindful of this, when asking "what's the problem represented to be?" of UN policy on SEA the analysis considers the performance culture these policies operate in and their possible non-performativity and masking effects. This is not to suggest intentional manipulation of information to cover-over problems by bad faith actors, although that may be part of the process. Rather this analysis seeks to uncover how institutional processes and cultures allow for nothing to change even when a great deal of energy and activity centres around change.

The Secretary-General's regular reports on SEA and "efforts underway to prevent such acts" provided a starting point for identifying SEA policy solutions and relevant documents (Secretary-General, 2004: 1). Based on these reports, six substantive solutions were selected for analysis: training, risk assessment, experts (and silences), victim support, and a gender perspective. These solutions involve action, compared to others that offer only declarations, resolutions, or statements of commitment. Further information about these six solutions was collected from UN websites and Code Blue's (Code Blue, n.d.) archive. Below, problems with the Secretary-General's reporting on SEA data and how these reports can be understood in terms of performance culture are highlighted. The article then unpacks the UN's slogan of "zero tolerance for SEA" before turning to a critical discussion of these six solutions.

The Secretary-General's Reports on SEA Data

The Secretary-General's Reports provide a good source of information about what counts as SEA from the UN's point of view. The reports contain data on the number of SEA allegations documented by UN missions. Categories of allegations vary somewhat from report to report, they include rape, sexual abuse, sexual assault, sex with a minor, trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation, human trafficking, exchange of money, employment, goods, or services for sex, solicitation of prostitutes, transactional sex, viewing pornography, sexually exploitative pornography, exploitative relationship. Thus, the term encompasses a wide range of sexual conduct, from rape to paying a sex worker or participating in an exploitative relationship. The Secretary General (2003: 1) issued a 2003 Bulletin on SEA that defined

sexual exploitation as "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;" it defined sexual abuse as "the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions." However, aside from the occasional footnote, categories of SEA in the reports mostly go undefined.

The Secretary-General's annual reports and quarterly updates typically interpret SEA data as demonstrating the success of the measures taken. Thus, where numbers increase the reports claim this demonstrates the success of campaigns to encourage reporting; where numbers decrease, they claim this demonstrates the success of training and discipline on the issue (Grady, 2016: 941–43). However, inconsistencies in how different UN entities collect and report data means that these statistics tell us little about rates of SEA as defined by the UN (Donovan and Lewis, 2015).

Importantly, for the most part, the reports document and compare the number of *allegations* the UN has received about SEA rather than the number of perpetrators, victims, or incidents of SEA (Grady, 2016: 936). Yet a single allegation may allege multiple perpetrators, victims, and incidents, and the nature of the incidents may vary. For example, a whistle-blower may allege several members of their unit regularly visit brothels, that one staff member has abused multiple children, or that a staff member is in a sexual relationship with a vulnerable local. Furthermore, some allegations may involve the same perpetrators, victims, or incidents leading to double counting (Grady, 2016: 937).

Since 2016 the Secretary-General's reports have contained more detail about numbers of victims, perpetrators, and the nature of allegations. The UN database on SEA allegations had recorded this information since 2010 (United Nations, n.d.). However, the reports still offer misleading graphs and commentary, comparing the number of allegations across years. For example, an annex to the 2018 Secretary-General's report says, "The number of allegations recorded in 2017 significantly decreased from 104 allegations in 2016, returning to lower numbers observed in 2012, 2013 and 2015" (Secretary-General, 2018a).

Thus, the data contained in the Secretary-General's reports has limited comparative value. Apparent fluctuations in the data may reflect uneven compliance with reporting requirements. Some years' reports indicate that not all entities required to provide data had done so. Furthermore, some missions have better community outreach and reporting processes and thus

may report more allegations (Awori et al., 2013). Another problem for comparative analysis lies in how the reports categorize different types of SEA. Categories of SEA vary from report to report with terms such as "employment for sex," "transactional sex," or "exploitative sexual relationship" appearing and disappearing over the years with little explanation as to how they should be understood (Grady, 2016: 937–938).

These regular reports on SEA exemplify the sorts of documents produced by performance cultures. The reports contain bar and line graphs with claims they represent trends over time. The production and presentation of this data in ways that imply positive trend lines rhetorically creates an impression that the UN has a constant overview of the problem. Such presentation of the data satisfies a demand for measurable improvement to illustrate the effectiveness of SEA policies.

"Zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse"

The Secretary-General's reports describe programmes and practices that various UN agencies and partners have adopted to combat SEA. These all reiterate the UN's central policy slogan of "zero tolerance for SEA" first proclaimed in the Secretary General's (2003) Bulletin. This proclamation of "zero tolerance" represents the problem as a matter of individual indiscipline on the part of UN personnel and assumes the threat of punishment will act as a deterrent. However, this threat of punishment fits Ahmed's definition of a "non-performative" proclamation. While "zero tolerance" gives an assurance of swift and harsh punishment, UN disciplinary systems have limited capacity for enforcement. The legal difficulties with holding UN personnel accountable for crimes committed during a mission are beyond the scope of this article; Controversially, the UN usually applies immunity to accused perpetrators meaning local law enforcement cannot touch them. Troop and police contributing countries regularly ignore their memorandum of understanding with the UN that they should act on allegations against their personnel (Awori et al., 2013: 14). In some instances, the UN's Office of Internal Oversight Services conducts investigations that move at such a glacial pace the people involved have moved on and evidence degraded before they conclude (Awori et al., 2013: 12–13).

The "zero tolerance" slogan discursively situates UN authorities as opposed to SEA and ready to punish individual offenders or member states that turn a blind eye. Reiteration of the slogan masks the UN's part in producing sexually violent peacekeeping economies and failure to hold individuals accountable for sexual violence. Senior leaders in peacekeeping hierarchies have repeatedly tolerated SEA by covering it up and punishing those that call attention to it.

Furthermore, an expert report on SEA risks in four peacekeeping operations complained that SEA investigations of UN staff were ineffective and described a general "climate of impunity" and "culture of silence" on the issue (Awori et al., 2013: 12–14).

Ending the UN's "institutional culture of impunity" (Code Blue, n.d.) would require the creation of an independent body to respond to accusations against UN personnel. Senior management rarely drops claims to immunity for personnel accused of crime, claiming that local justice systems would not treat UN personnel fairly. However, dealing with complaints internally creates conflicts of interest for senior managers charged with defending UN interests, caring for employees, respecting whistle-blowers, and delivering justice and compensation to complainants. Code Blue's (n.d.) solutions of a Temporary Independent Oversight Panel and, in the long run, an independent Special Court Mechanism address problems of impunity and conflicts of interest.

Training

Calls for training as part of the solution to SEA date back to the UN's earliest efforts to respond to the issue. SEA training materials provide rich texts for analysis of "what's the problem?" of SEA since they purport to explain the problem to UN personnel. The training video "To Serve with Pride: Zero Tolerance for Sexual Exploitation and Abuse" dwells upon the global significance of the UN mission and emphasizes how SEA damages that mission. In one clip a human rights worker says: "the UN is the ray of hope it is frequently what people are so looking forward to is to have the blue-helmets come in to save them" (Jaqueline UNDP, 2013). The video's narrative represents buying sex from desperate people as the antithesis of everything the UN stands for and as causing the organisation reputational damage. It also emphasizes that UN personnel's patronage of sex businesses constitutes a security threat because of the links such businesses may have to organized crime. This message presupposes that the problem of SEA lies in UN personnel not understanding how it can undermine the UN and as mostly concerning transactional sex.

Training materials' representations of SEA emphasize transactional sex and sex with minors as a problem of poverty. "To Serve with Pride" has three take-away points, reiterated in the accompanying PowerPoint and "frequently asked questions" sheet: no sex with people under 18; no paying for sex (with money, goods or promises of employment); and an obligation to report suspicions of sexual abuse and exploitation. According to the video, poverty at UN mission sites drives sex markets. The video includes many images of poor and suffering women

and children. The commentator says: "Where there is desperation buying sex is cheap and easy." The commentator stresses that in such circumstances desperate people look to the UN for protection, again situating the UN as a solution to rather than a participant in SEA. Examples of SEA committed by UN personnel are discussed as instances of individual indiscipline rather than as a systemic problem.

Thus, training materials mask the UN's responsibility for SEA by presenting a narrative of the UN as rescuers of impoverished women and children living in circumstances in which SEA is endemic and only occasionally perpetrated by rogue UN personnel. These training materials discursively situate UN personnel as heroic protectors of the vulnerable. They represent the problem of SEA as the reputational damage it does to the good work of the UN. The training materials describe the harm experienced by SEA victims but generalizes their plight as linked to their poverty and desperation, ignoring the part played by the UN and its partners in producing those conditions.

UN training on SEA serves performance culture in the sense that posting of training materials on the UN website and public assurances that UN staff receive training showcases preventative efforts. The Secretary-General's reports on SEA cite their development and availability as evidence of progress (Secretary-General, 2004: 4). However, these assurances mask an underlying non-performance since the educative goals of the materials appear restricted to communicating basic rules of conduct. and historically many never received training. The 2013 expert report found that large numbers of personnel had not received training (Awori et al., 2013: 8–9). In some cases, nobody seemed clear about who held responsibility for training or record keeping about it. Furthermore, no efforts had been made to assess the effectiveness of training in bringing about attitudinal change. The report also noted that awareness-raising efforts, for example posters on the issue, seemed limited (Awori et al., 2013: 8).

Since the 2015 CAR scandal and leak of the 2013 expert report, the UN has attempted to address criticism of its failure to implement training. Alongside introduction of a mandatory online training programme and certification from troop and police contributing countries that personnel completed this training, efforts have been made to monitor its effectiveness. Since 2018, the Secretary-General's reports mention a system-wide survey of personnel to discern whether they had received SEA training and understood the rules and their responsibilities to report. The 2020 report says that more work should be done on "consistency of training, implementation and enforcement of risk mitigation measures …

reporting mechanisms and addressing a fear of retaliation when reports were made" (Secretary-General, 2020: 6). Thus, implementation continues to be patchy.

Risk Assessment

In 2018 the UN's Conduct and Discipline Unit produced a risk assessment toolkit and posted it to their website (Conduct and Discipline Unit, 2018). Like the training materials, it represents SEA as a problem of transactional sex, as endemic to post-conflict/impoverished environments, and as a product of personnel's unawareness of SEA's harmfulness. The toolkit instructs mission management to consider risks such as the presence of a commercial sex industry, cultural tolerance of transactional sex, or sex workers actively soliciting UN personnel. It suggests solutions such as restricting contact between UN personnel and sex workers/women and SEA training. Such solutions presuppose the problem lies in local sex markets.

This focus on sex markets in both training and risk materials minimizes SEA as a problem of transactional sex. Indeed, low compliance with SEA policies may arise in part from a tendency within the UN system to focus SEA prevention on prohibiting visits with sex workers and sexual relationships with beneficiaries of UN assistance. The effect of such messaging is evident in comments from Colleen Keaney-Mischel's (2006: 7–8) interviews with nine of the ten full-time gender advisors then working in peacekeeping. They resented expectations they police colleagues' sexual relationships with local people and emphasized "grey areas" in such relationships. They suggested SEA was more a public relations problem for the UN than one they commonly encountered on missions. One complained that resources could be better used elsewhere, another saw it as a non-fraternization policy that largely targeted harmless sexual encounters (Keaney-Mischel, 2006: 6). These responses underline the minimizing work the term SEA achieves.

The toolkit represents SEA as manageable through careful planning. It says UN missions should develop a "risk register" in which they enter all SEA related risks' likelihood and potential impact then prioritise them and develop a risk treatment plan (Conduct and Discipline Unit, 2018: 6). Such risk assessments provide documentation for performance cultures and mask non-performances. Bureaucratic risk assessments allow authorities to claim credit for anticipating both risks that do appear and those that do not: The appearance of an anticipated risk shows foresight while its non-appearance can be attributed to risk-assessment based planning. Unanticipated risks can also allow authorities to call for more resources to improve their risk assessment capacities (McGoey, 2012: 8).

Experts and silences

The Secretary-General's annual reports include details of various advisory and expert appointments. However, they probably do not provide full information on the expert advice he receives. In the case of the 2013 expert report, previously cited, Code Blue obtained and released it two years after it was delivered to the Secretary-General (Donovan and Lewis, 2015). This leak allows for comparison of the Secretary-General's descriptions of the experts' findings with their 2013 report to discern silences in the UN's representation of the problem.

The report provides a scathing assessment of UN senior leadership responses to SEA. The experts investigated four peacekeeping operations known for high rates of SEA. They concluded that the UN's handling of the problem reflected a "culture of impunity" and a "culture of silence" (Awori et al., 2013: 12–14). The report paints a picture of a masculinized "command climate" dismissive of SEA policies (Awori et al., 2013: 10). It describes shambolic risk assessment processes where risks such as breaches in the perimeter fencing (allowing locals to be brought in for sex) are recorded but not acted on (Awori et al., 2013: 11).

The Secretary-General's (2014: 7) first mention of this report appears in a paragraph about false allegations and misrepresents the report's content:

> some recently conducted investigations concluded that false allegations of sexual exploitation or sexual abuse were being made in order to extort money from United Nations personnel, in particular military personnel. A report of a team of experts that visited MONUSCO [*Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo*] also refers to this issue.

Yet the twenty-nine-page report only mentions false allegations twice. The first mention noted that UN personnel in Haiti mostly assumed that SEA allegations were false (Awori et al., 2013: 17). The second recommended that SEA statistics distinguish between unsubstantiated and false allegations to avoid the impression that unsubstantiated allegations were false (Awori et al., 2013: 22). The report discusses MONUSCO culture as dismissive of SEA rules and its senior leadership as supporting a more flexible policy toward sex work. It is hard to see how the report could be cited as evidence that false allegations are common or that MONUSCO leadership were reliable commentators on the issue.

Criticisms of UN leadership are notable by their absence in the Secretary-General's reporting on the experts' findings. The experts concluded that "impunity is the norm not the exception"

and said that they spoke to leaders in all sectors (civilian, police and military) who at best pay lip service to anti-SEA policy; indeed, some openly questioned the policy (Awori et al., 2013: 4, 10). The experts reported that those in leadership positions who were committed to enforcing SEA policy said they felt powerless to enforce the rules because of mission cultures of impunity and silence (Awori et al., 2013: 3). The Secretary General did not pass on these findings nor other pointed criticisms made by the experts about the unreliability of the UN's SEA statistics and inadequacy of its response to victims.

The Secretary-General's reporting on the experts' investigation exemplifies Ahmed's analysis of performance culture: he points to an expert report documenting a problem as evidence his institution is doing well at solving the problem. Indeed, the Secretary General (2015: 2) highlighted the experts' report as a "key aspect" of a three-year work programme to enhance the UN's SEA response. According to the Secretary-General (2015: 2), the experts' findings were considered "in the context of experience gained by the Organization over time." However, by not releasing the report he silenced their representation of the problem as caused by UN mission cultures and poor leadership. When the Secretary-General announced the completion of the three-year work-plan that included the experts' investigation, a UN insider leaked their report fearing its findings would be suppressed (Code Blue, 2015).

Victim support.

Like other SEA policy solutions, UN victim support practices treat SEA as a product of the vulnerability of people the UN seeks to help and situates the UN as the solution. The Secretary-General's (2017: 6) report announced an intention to put SEA victims "rights and dignity at the forefront" of UN responses. The report promised both legal and financial support for victims. A Victims' Rights Advocate (VRA) was appointed at UN headquarters in 2017 to coordinate victim support activities. A victims' trust fund, established in 2016, finances such efforts. While the General Assembly (2007) had adopted a "Comprehensive Strategy on Assistance and Support to Victims of Sexual Exploitation" little had been done before the establishment of the trust fund almost a decade later.

While SEA perpetrators are individualized victims are generalized. Thus, funding has tended to flow to civil society organizations that work with vulnerable communities rather than to identified victims. Such a form of victim support constructs victimhood as a feature of community vulnerability and neglects individual claims for justice and compensation. The fund has supported impoverished women with "obtaining new skills" and "business starter kits"

(United Nations, n.d.). It has provided scholarships for vulnerable children and adult literacy programmes (Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, 2020: 10, 17). As a "solution" such patterns of funding treat SEA as a product of underdevelopment and replicate other UN "women's empowerment" programmes that structure impoverished women of the global south into precarious work.

The UN Victims' Rights Advocate has proclaimed her willingness to assist individual victims legally and financially. However, there is limited evidence from the most recent trust fund reports (Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, 2020) of efforts in this direction. Victim advocates external to the UN have testified to difficulties accessing UN support and cooperation. In one example, the Victims' Rights Advocate failed to provide timely assistance to Haiti's Bureau Des Avocats Internationaux in their efforts to establish legal paternity for ten children fathered by peacekeepers (Bureau Des Avocats Internationaux, n.d.). In another, despite official assurances, some of the victims identified in the CAR scandal of 2015 have received little or no support (Code Blue, 2017).

UN victims' rights policy constructs the problem of SEA as endemic to mission environments. By offering "advocacy" and support to vulnerable communities, UN victims' rights programmes and projects erase the conflict between victims and the UN. Programmes funded by the victims' trust fund rarely help individual victims of sexual offences committed by UN personnel. Offering such programmes as a solution for SEA obscures the role of UN perpetrators and UN institutional practices. Victims would best be served by an independent entity able to investigate allegations and provide justice and compensation.

A gender perspective

Recent Secretary-General's reports discuss SEA as requiring gender analysis. The 2018 report announced a study by an inter-agency SEA working group "to analyse the causes and consequences of sexual exploitation and abuse from a gender perspective" (Secretary-General, 2018b: 6). Perhaps reflecting this work, the 2019 report says SEA is "acknowledged to be rooted in unequal power relations, abuse of power and gender bias" (Secretary-General, 2019: 2). The 2020 report declares:

> we, as an international community, must address the root causes of sexual exploitation and abuse, including gender inequality and the deep power imbalance between our personnel and those whom we are mandated to protect and aid, if we are to combat these shameful and harmful behaviours effectively (Secretary-General, 2020: 2)

Addressing global gender inequality is already part of the UN mission, as previously discussed. The UN and its partners seek to empower women through free markets, paid work, and microfinance loans for small businesses. Thus, as the above example of victim support shows, almost any programme targeting women can be represented as an SEA response. The Secretary-General reports that "programmatic investments, although not exclusively devoted to addressing sexual exploitation and abuse, mainstream prevention and response to sexual exploitation and abuse in line with existing guidelines (Secretary-General, 2020: 3). In other words, various UN programmatic investments can be cited as a response to SEA even if they not specifically designed to address SEA.

Representing SEA as a problem of global gender inequality generalises the problem to an extent that masks the specifics of UN culpability. We can observe this effect in the following exchange between the UN's SEA special coordinator and UN News (2016):

> UN News Centre: How wide ranging is sexual exploitation abuse [sic] within the UN system?

> Jane Holl Lute: I think the better question is how widespread is the problem of sexual exploitation and abuse. It frankly is a global scourge. There is not a family, a school, an organization, a military, a government, or any activity free from this problem (…).

> UN News Centre: It's a particular problem in peacekeeping though, isn't it?

> Jane Holl Lute: It's not; it is a particular problem wherever women, children, and [the] vulnerable are present.

Representing women and children's vulnerability as the problem means that the UN can avoid confronting issues of institutional culture and senior leadership raised in the expert report (Awori et al., 2013).

Conclusion

Adopting Bacchi's WPR approach has shed important light on the UN's failure to prevent its mission personnel committing sexual violence. The UN's policy solutions mostly represent the problem as one of transactional sex. The label SEA achieves this by covering both transactional sexual encounters and various forms of sexual violence, while SEA training and risk assessments mostly focus upon transactional sex. Training materials problematize UN personnel's engagement with transactional sex as a source of reputational harm to the UN

mission. Problematizing transactional sex as SEA and a reputational issue can effectively minimize the problem in the eyes of UN personnel, producing low levels of compliance or interest in the rules.

Additionally, UN representations of SEA individualize the problem to a few bad actors who can be dealt with through disciplinary measures. The Secretary-General's reports and UN training and risk assessment materials paint a picture of UN personnel as saviour-like figures who carry out the UN's heroic mission of bringing aid to the world's most vulnerable. The UN's assurance of "zero tolerance" for SEA suggests that perpetrators can be rooted out of the organization and punished. The slogan precludes discussion of systematic or institutional aspects of the issue.

However, the UN generalizes victims' experience as part of a global problem. UN statements on the gendered nature of SEA treat it as a product of poverty and the ubiquity of sexual violence. Such generalization discursively situates the UN as tirelessly working against the problem with its many programmes that seek to empower women. The UN can represent these programmes as combatting SEA with minimal further investment while spending victims' trust fund money on programmes serving vulnerable communities. Meanwhile, individual victims – including those left supporting children fathered by UN personal - struggle to gain compensation or justice.

Ahmed's analysis of how audit processes produce performances characterised by non-performativity informed the analysis. The Secretary General has regularly reported on meaningless data and ineffective or barely implemented practices. Non-performativity characterizes many SEA measures: proclamations of zero tolerance mask a pattern of cover up and lack of legal mechanisms to hold perpetrators accountable, training materials are posted on UN websites while many personnel do not receive training, expert advisors are commissioned to write a report, but their advice is suppressed, victims are declared as at the centre of the UN's response but ignored when they pursue paternity claims. Nevertheless, official reports on such activity count as signs of commitment to solving the problem.

Code Blue (n.d.) proposes an alternative solution to the problem of SEA: establishing independent systems of oversight that could respond to whistle-blowers and complainants. This solution reflects their alternative representation of the problem as the UN's internal management of SEA complaints, the conflicts of interest that arise from this system, and the consequent institutional culture of impunity. Such a system would confront masculinized UN

mission cultures, providing leverage to whistle-blowers and others within the UN system who seek to support victims and reduce victimization.

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