

Privatizing Peace?

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Is the world ready to privatize peace? Or more precisely, is the United Nations (UN) ready to contract-out peacekeeping/support/making operations to private military firms (PMF)? Kofi Annan did not think so in 1998 (Fidler and Catan 2003). Nor do other UN officials; “There is little support for the privatization of U.N. peacekeeping” (Deen 2004). However, with the recent proposal from Blackwater Security, an American PMF, to intervene on behalf of the UN in Darfur (Witter 2006) the issue of contracting a PMF to conduct a UN sanctioned peace operation remains relevant.¹ Indeed, a vibrant political-economy of knowledge production (academic, policy, media, and industry) sustains discussion of the prospects of and for privatized peace operations. The purpose of this paper is to engage with those literatures that constitute the proposal to privatize UN peace operations as an issue of relevance for and to (academic, policy, popular) discussions of contemporary security issues. This first requires discussion of what a PMF is, historical and proposed PMF activities, potential roles for PMFs in peace operations and, most importantly, the pros and cons of PMF em/deployment. While I do, at least implicitly, register some hesitation regarding the privatization of UN peace operations, the purpose of this discussion is not to provide a clean or clear position regarding the feasibility or legitimacy of PMF em/deployment. Rather, I use this overview as the basis for my contention that the privatizing peace literatures, while raising a series of pertinent concerns regarding the em/deployment of PMFs, miss a significant opportunity to begin to question and contest the legitimacy of UN peacekeeping as an international practice.² By this I mean to say, that the proposal to em/deploy PMFs on and for UN peace operations represents a significant challenge to notions of state or public-sector delivered and guaranteed security and thus the emergence of this proposal can be seen as a pertinent opportunity to pursue an interrogation of UN peace operations more generally. Moreover, as the proposal to contract PMFs to conduct UN peace operations signals the increasing, though not unexpected, incursion of the private (for profit) sector into the deliverance of ‘public security’, it is imperative that the privatizing peace literatures better understand and address the problematic intersections of problem-solving methodologies, (neo)colonialism, militarization, and neo-liberal ideology.

What is a PMF?

This story begins with a distancing, if not an outright segregation, of ‘the mercenary’ from ‘the PMF’. According to many commentators the justification for such segregation is that the concept of mercenary does not effectively capture what a PMF is and does: “critics see all privatized services as involving rabid mercenary ‘dogs of war’” (Mandel 2001: 129). As will be discussed further on, I applaud the privatizing peace literatures for moving the debate about PMF em/deployment away from an overly moralistic condemnation of mercenary activity. Nonetheless, I am not at all convinced that the segregation of ‘the

¹ It should be noted that a non-profit and non-state peacekeeping brigade is/has been proposed by the Global Peace and Security Partnership (see Spearin 2005). Although a very interesting proposal, due to a dearth of research on this topic I decided to focus exclusively on PMF em/deployment.

² Of course this purported elision comes as little surprise and it is perhaps unfair of me to expect that the privatizing peace literatures pursue a more general questioning of UN peace operations.

PMF' from 'the mercenary' is solely founded on an ethic of definitional precision. Regardless of how notoriously elusive the definition is of what or who constitutes a mercenary,³ it is paramount to recognize that, under Article 47 of the Geneva Convention and UN Resolution 49/150, mercenary activity, however so defined, is prohibited. Therefore definitional precision appears as a somewhat disingenuous move as the (supposed) differences between 'the PMF' and 'the mercenary' are not so much about understanding what a PMF actually is and does, but a clever turn of phrase that ensures proposals to contract PMFs are not dismissed outright as violations of international law.

While I am thoroughly aware of the irony of now proceeding with defining what a PMF is and does, it remains important to note that the privatizing peace literatures offer a relatively standard articulation of what a PMF is and does (see Singer 2003a; Krahmman 2005; Kinsey 2005). Across the literatures, PMFs are understood to exist as corporate/legal entities with physical business offices, business models, shareholders, and public relations departments and campaigns. Put flippantly, PMFs are just like any other business (Mandel 2001: 129; see also Taulbee 2000). Focusing on corporate character is, however, only one-side of the PMF story as a more comprehensive and less sanitized understanding of what a PMF is emerges in and through elucidation of the services offered and provided by PMFs. Specifically such services include: logistics support, transportation, materiel procurement, personnel training, consultation, intelligence gathering, personal and site security, and tactical/combat activities.⁴ PMFs rarely offer the whole spectrum of services with most firms choosing to offer only a specialized military/security service.

Perhaps the most (in)famous PMF, the now defunct, Executive Outcomes (EO), provided combat forces including air and fire support to the national governments of Angola and Sierra Leone during the mid-1990s. Although deploying limited personnel and materiel, EO regularly directed tactical combat operations against RUF and UNITA forces (see Singer 2003a). EO's exploits, while contributing to an increased awareness of PMF activities, are by no means representative of the majority of PMF projects.⁵ For instance, in Iraq, which is a current hot-bed of PMF activity with an estimated 20,000 private contractors in operations,⁶ Blackwater,⁷ DynCorp, Vinnell, and Kellogg, Brown, and Root variously offer security, training, and logistics services to both coalition and Iraqi officials and forces (see Singer 2003b; Avant 2004b; Bures 2005). Aegis Defence,

³ The ineffectual or outright absence of national and transnational regulation of mercenary activities most readily evidences the difficulties with defining what and who constitutes a mercenary (see Percy 2003; Krahmman 2005).

⁴ It should be noted that the privatizing peace literatures often make a distinction between PMFs and PSFs or private security firms wherein, PSFs tend to offer services of a more defensive character (see Brooks 2000). In other words, PSFs do not offer the combat, tactical, or strategic oriented services offered by PMFs.

⁵ To sanitize the discussion even more!

⁶ The ratio of coalition personnel to PMF personnel in Iraq is 10 to 1, which is a remarkable increase considering that ratio was 50 to 1 during the first Gulf War in 1991 (see Singer 2003b; Avant 2004b).

⁷ Blackwater's operating status in Iraq is currently in question as Blackwater contractors have been accused of killing and wounding up to 25 civilians in Baghdad on 16 September 2007.

a company headed by former Sandline president Tim Spiecer, was awarded a US \$293 million contract to coordinate PMFs operating in Iraq (Krahmann 2005: 107). DynCorp and Military Professional Resources Inc. (MPRI) have also been contracted by the US Defence Department (DoD) to train anti-drug forces in Columbia, civilian police forces in Bosnia and Kosovo, and African Union peacekeepers (see Pape and Meyer 2003). The US DoD also contracts-out the maintenance of the “B-2 stealth bomber and Global Hawk unmanned [*sic.*] aerial vehicle” and it is estimated that between 1994 and 2002 the DoD entered into US \$300 billion worth of contracts with PMFs (Singer 2003b). Still other PMFs have been and continue to be contracted by transnational corporations and INGOs including the World Wildlife Fund who contracted a South African and Angolan PMF to train and protect guards in the Congo protecting the northern white rhino (Avant 2004b: 153).

The Proposal

Violence breaks out in a small African state. The local government collapses and reports emerge that civilians are being massacred by the tens of thousands. Refugees stream out in pitiable columns (Singer 2003b).

The international community, the UN in particular, is thus faced with the choice between another (unpopular?) intervention and the unnecessary deaths of thousands.

It is at this point that a [PMF] steps forward with a novel offer. Using its own hired troops, the firm will establish safe havens where civilians can take refuge and receive assistance from international aid agencies (Ibid.).

Privatizing peace literatures regularly offer this (clichéd, but far from innocuous) story as a preface to discussions regarding PMF em/deployment in and on UN peace operations (see Gantz 2003). Framed as such, the impetus for proposing PMF em/deployment relies on the continued need and demand for UN peace operations to suppress conflict, alleviate suffering, and prevent death: “If governments of the most well equipped militaries in the world are unwilling to provide the troops for peacekeeping, but insist that it must be carried out, then a logical conclusion would be to turn to [PMFs]” (Malone quoted in Gee 2000). To uphold this mandate, the proposal to privatize UN peace operations typically entails four potential roles for PMFs: 1) Logistics and Support; 2) Personal and Site Security; 3) Rapid Reaction Force; and 4) Full Force Operations (see Singer 2003b).

It is at this point that the story gets somewhat complicated insofar as “every multilateral peace operation conducted by the UN [in the 1990s] was accomplished with the presence of [PMFs]” (Avant 2004b: 153-4; see also Spearin 2005; Bures 2005). For instance, demining operations and water purification are regularly contracted-out by the UN (Bures 2005: 538; see also Singer 2003a). With certain aspects (most often logistics and security) of UN peace operations already regularly contracted-out, it is perhaps inappropriate to proceed as though UN peace operations remain a wholly public endeavour. Nonetheless, the privatizing peace literatures do not seem overly concerned with this ‘private’ intrusion into UN affairs and tend to focus on the latter two options, wherein PMFs take on the more robust roles of ceasefire monitoring, setting-up and

protecting safe havens, and restoring stability, order, and public authority – all these roles plausibly involving the application of tactical force/combat.

Although the em/deployment of PMFs as a rapid reaction force or for full force operations remains hypothetical, a variety of specific mission proposals have been floated by PMFs themselves. In a 1994 internal assessment report, EO concluded that it had “the capacity to intervene in Rwanda at the time of the genocide” (Bures 2005). EO claimed that it “could have had its first armed troops on the ground in 14 days and have fully deployed 1,500 personnel, supported by its own air and fire support, within six weeks” (Ibid.). EO estimated that it could have conducted a six-month operation to “create ‘security islands’ and refugee havens” at a cost of US \$600,000 per day (Ibid.). In 2003, Northbridge, an Anglo-American PMF, offered to deploy 500 to 2,000 personnel within three weeks to Liberia so as to halt fighting and apprehend Charles Taylor (Fidler and Catan 2003). Similarly, and as mentioned above, Blackwater proposed to intervene on behalf of the UN in Darfur. Blackwater claimed it could deploy in three weeks (Witter 2006). While none of these specific proposals has been taken up by the UN, Kofi Annan is said to have considered contracting a PMF in 1998 “to keep fighters and refugees apart in the Rwanda crisis” (Fidler and Catan 2003). He did not move forward with this consideration however, as he thought the world was not ready to privatize peace (Ibid.).

The Pros and Cons

As the privatizing peace literatures do so often, let me return to EO’s intervention in Sierra Leone. For proponents of privatizing UN peace operations, EO’s activities in Sierra Leone represent a ‘factual’ and ‘practical’ instance of a ‘successful’ PMF intervention. Albeit a brief mission spanning just 21 months, and unlikely bound by similar rules of engagement as UN operations (see Rosen 2005), EO was able to subdue the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), secure valuable resource extraction sites, and provide enough stability for general elections to occur (see Gee 2000; Mandel 2001; Singer 2003a; Bures 2005). All this was accomplished with 160 personnel and at a cost of US \$35 million (see Schulhofer-Wohl 2000; Rosen 2005). Such ‘results’ and costs compare favourably to the UN-led mission (UNAMSIL) which cost an estimated US \$260 million over six months and, for all intents and purposes, was ineffectual as the mission failed to prevent various government and RUF atrocities (see Schulhofer-Wohl 2000; Avant 2005).

As evidenced by EO’s ‘success’, the most often cited/purported benefits of PMFs are: efficiency and effectiveness. Put another way, PMFs are purported to be a cost-effective, highly mobile, highly trained, and well equipped option. As Howe (1998) notes,

Private forces can start up and deploy faster than multinational (and perhaps national forces,) and may carry less political baggage, especially concerning casualties, than government militaries. Additionally, they have a clear chain of command, more readily compatible military equipment and training, and greater experience of working together than ad hoc multinational forces.

They may be financially less expensive than other foreign forces. Finally they can handpick from a pool of proven combat veterans (308). For instance, EO estimated it could undertake an operation in Rwanda at US \$600,000/day while the eventual UN intervention cost approximately US \$3 million/day (see Singer 2003a; Bures 2005). With regard to deployment times, both Blackwater and Northbridge claim the ability to deploy within three weeks, whereas UN missions can take upwards of six months to deploy (see Witter 2006). Lastly, PMFs tend to draw personnel from data-bases of ex/retired ‘Western’ trained military personnel (see Rosen 2005).⁸ Moreover, PMFs can easily access the global arms market⁹ thereby ensuring the deployment of a highly trained and well equipped force, while UN forces are regularly understaffed, ill-equipped, and ill-prepared: “Most peace operations in Africa for instance, rely on troops from developing nations.¹⁰ These troops are frequently ill-trained, poorly equipped, and often prove to be incapable of stopping routine violence” (Gantz 2003).

Interestingly, detractors of privatization tend not to directly contest the purported efficiency and effectiveness¹¹ of PMF delivered services. Rather the most prominent concern is with a lack of national and transnational regulation whereby PMFs are essentially accountable only to ‘the market’ (see Kinsey 2005; Krahnmann 2005). Although it is highly unlikely that the UN would contract PMFs for rapid reaction or full force operations without attendant regulation,¹² an incident in the late 1990s involving DynCorp employees serves as a vivid demonstration of unaccountability. In this case, DynCorp employees in Bosnia were found to be operating a child sex-ring (Gantz 2003). A ‘site supervisor’ even videotaped himself raping two women (Bures 2005: 542). Nonetheless, no one was ever prosecuted as DynCorp transferred the offending individuals out of Bosnia and threatened, demoted, and then fired the whistle-blowers (Ibid.). A typical retort by proponents of privatizing UN peace operations to claims of ‘unaccountability’ is to cite the occurrence of similarly ‘bad’ behaviour by state-military and UN peacekeeping personnel in Somalia, Cambodia, and Iraq, for instance (see Whitworth 2004). Indeed, a recently released report cites “that between January 2004 and the end of November 2006, the UN probed allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse involving 319 peacekeeping personnel ‘in all missions’ – from East Timor, the Middle East and Africa to Kosovo and Haiti” (News Staff, CTV.ca, 6 January 2007). However, the report goes on to state that “Resulting from the

⁸ However, there are serious concerns that PMFs can, will, and do employ some rather nefarious people including those involved in a variety of human-rights violations. As Singer (2003b) notes “Military provider firms are not always looking for the most congenial workforce, but instead, understandably enough, recruit those known for their effectiveness. For example, many former members of the most notorious and ruthless units of the Soviet and apartheid regimes have found employment in the industry. These individuals acted without concern for human rights in the past and certainly could do so again.”

⁹ For a discussion of the ways the PMFs can contribute to the proliferation of small arms (see Makki et al. 2001).

¹⁰ According to Deen (2004) “As of July, the 10 largest troop contributors to UN operations were from developing nations” including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Ghana, Jordan, and Kenya.

¹¹ For discussions that challenge the efficiency and effectiveness of PMFs (see Taulbee 2000 and Avant 2004a).

¹² As Mallaby (2001) notes, “If the United Nations hired a private firm of mercenaries for peacekeeping, it could write accountability into the contract and enforce that contract much more readily than it can discipline a wayward government.”

investigation, 18 civilians, 17 international police and 144 military personnel were dismissed” (Ibid.).

Underwriting concerns of unaccountability is a questioning of motives: “If you are doing it for money, you’re not accountable... What if someone comes along and offers you better money for switching sides?” (Sokolsky quoted in Gee 2000). Here many detractors see PMFs as motivated more by profit than peace or more attuned to the concerns of shareholders than stakeholders: “All opponents point out that [PMFs] are first and foremost motivated by profit rather than being genuinely interested in the security or stability of those conflict ridden states in which they intervene” (Bures 2005: 540). Such concern with profit motives is difficult to dispel inasmuch as PMFs are war-profiteers. It should be noted however, that UN reimbursement per peacekeeper per month, which includes “\$1,028 for pay and allowances; \$303 supplementary pay for specialists; \$68 for personal clothing, gear and equipment; and \$5 for personal weaponry,” represents a significant (if not lucrative) financial opportunity for troop contributing states, especially post-colonial states (see Department of Peacekeeping Operations 2007). Accordingly, the (moralistic) separation of peace and profit reads more as a distraction from more pertinent considerations of the finical consequences of increasing PMF em/deployment over state militaries.

Beyond profit and peace motivations, some commentators note (almost reluctantly) that it is conceivable that (‘unscrupulous’) PMFs would act to prolong conflict so as to prolong contracts (see Mandel 2001). In other words, PMF em/deployment possesses the potential to exacerbate conflict. For instance, Bjork and Jones (2005) maintain that the em/deployment of PMF personnel to provide security for humanitarian assistance can exacerbate conflict as combatants come to no longer respect the distinction between civilian and military activities (777-81). Similarly, “Arms procurement and brokering of small arms and light weapons (SALW) are integral aspects of the activities of mercenaries, private military companies and private security companies” and thus the intervention of PMFs can result in the further channeling or trafficking of arms into conflict zones (Makki *et al.* 2001: 7). Indeed, Sandline, a British based PMF, was accused of contravening an arms embargo in Sierra Leone during operations in 1999-2000 (see Avant 2005).

Such concerns tend to move from the more general concern regarding the increasing incursion of private (for profit) actors into the traditionally public or state realm of security and peace. In some instances, this concern over the weakening of public deliverance of security and peace manifests as a concern regarding state sovereignty, wherein the deployment of private forces signals an erosion of state control (see Avant 2004b). However, UN peace operations have, do, and with the emergence of the “Responsibility to Protect” doctrine, will continue to violate state sovereignty. Perhaps more appropriate is Leander’s (2005) contention that, “Supply in the market for force is self-perpetuating. It creates its own demand. As [PMFs] become security experts, lobbyists and consultants, they shape the security understanding of clients who consequently require increasing levels of services” (618).

While far from comprehensive, “the above analysis of ... [PMF] peacekeeping services indicates that there is no clear-cut answer ... [and] the debate remains unresolved” (Bures 2005: 543). This statement is perhaps all that proponents and detractors of the privatization of UN peace operations agree upon. Consequently, it seems somewhat superfluous to wade into this debate in the hope of coming out with a clean and concise perspective on the viability and legitimacy of PMF-led peace operations. Likewise, exclusive focus on the pros and cons raised by and in the privatizing peace literatures comes at the expense of an analysis of the problematic elisions and obfuscations that the privatizing peace literatures can be seen to make. As will be demonstrated, limiting discussion to definitions, proposals, and cost-benefit analysis is representative of the ‘problem-solving’ or ‘techno-managerial’ approach evident in much of the privatizing peace literatures – and peacekeeping literatures more generally (see Pugh 2004).

Neo-Liberal Hegemony

As revealed above, PMF-led interventions are typically prefaced on a choice between doing something or nothing. Suppression of conflict, alleviation of strife, and prevention of death are indeed laudable motives and goals. However, the overwhelming focus of the privatizing peace literatures on such motives can and does obfuscate the ways that PMF-led UN peace operations can and do reproduce and rearticulate the material-semiotic conditions for the flourishing of neo-liberal ideologies. In other words, consideration of the ways that PMF-led interventions contribute to the sustaining of a neo-liberal global order as much as suppressing, alleviating, and preventing conflict, strife, and death are all together absent in the privatizing peace literatures. Discussing traditional, meaning state-military staffed, UN peace operations Bellamy and Williams (2004) contend that the “principal aim of peace operations [is] not so much about creating spaces for negotiated conflict resolution between states but about actively contributing to the construction of liberal polities, economies and societies” (4-5). Put more provocatively, UN peace operations, public or privatized, can be considered “as forms of riot control directed against the unruly parts of the world to uphold liberal peace” (Pugh 2004: 41).

Of course it is not at all surprising, or necessarily all that contentious, to suggest that PMF-led peace operations and the privatizing peace literatures that support such proposals emerge from and thereby maintain neo-liberal ideology. As Sheppard (1998) notes the emergence of and proposals for PMF delivered services is the “logical extension of a borderless global business environment” (128). However, what is contentious, or at least contradictory, is that, as mentioned, the privatizing peace literatures regularly base the ‘need’ for PMF-led UN peace operations on the failure of the state/public sector to alleviate, suppress, and prevent conflict, strife, and death. The contentious contradiction is that the privatizing peace literatures offer little discussion of how the neo-liberal global order exacerbates conflict, strife, and death through sector specific (health, education, welfare, etc.) weakening of the state, environmental degradation, abject poverty and income disparity, and population dislocation. Again this is not all that surprising! Nonetheless, it is imperative that if PMF em/deployment is to be anything more than a suture or riot control project (which I’m

not overly convinced it can), privatizing peace literatures “need to consider fundamental questions about the extent to which the ... neo-liberal value system fosters the kinds of political and social instability that require policing, protection or exclusion” (Pugh 2004: 54).

Problem-solving

Discussion of the pros and cons of PMF involvement in and with UN peace operations is an undoubtedly necessary endeavour for the (re)producers of the privatizing peace literatures. However, limiting discussion to problematics of cost, accountability, and effectiveness “represent[s] a managerialist or ‘problem solving’ approach to improving peace operations” (Bellamy and Williams 2004: 2; see also Leander 2005: 618). Engaging PMF intervention with and through a problem-solving/techno-managerial approach is problematic insofar as a “concentration on ‘working with what we’ve got’ may yield important practical lessons, but the prevailing wisdom... does not interrogate the [socio-political] order itself, and by accepting it as ‘reality,’ reinforces its underlying values and structures” (Pugh 2004: 41). Framed as such, the problem-solving/techno-managerial approach epitomized in the privatizing peace literatures by an exclusive focus on costs, accountability, and effectiveness further obfuscates the ways that PMF-led UN peace operations promote “moral values and responses that demonstrate and reinforce the superiority of [neo-]liberal ideology, whilst avoiding having to deal with the structural injustices that foster instabilities in the system” (Ibid.: 49).

For instance, it is interesting to note how privatizing peace literatures reverse the traditional conception of the public/private binary. By setting up PMF-led intervention as robust, efficient, and effective and state/public military-led intervention as weak, ineffective, and costly, the privatizing peace literatures effect a break with the traditionally gendered notions of the public as a masculinized space and the private as a feminized space (see Peterson 1992; Tickner 1992). Such privileging or foregrounding of the ‘masculine’ traits of the ‘private’ sphere undoubtedly draws upon and thereby reinforces (a) neo-liberal discourse inasmuch as the rallying cry of proponents of a neo-liberal global order tend to maintain that the ‘public’ sector/realm is cumbersome, is plagued by inefficiencies, and is anachronistic. Indeed Mandel’s (2001) suggestion that “PMFs often possess great flexibility, with an ability to create unique solutions for each case, knowledge about the problem area and operational expertise, business integrity, secure confidentiality and a generally apolitical nature (132)” most obviously foregrounds the pillars of neo-liberal ideology – flexible, mobile, expert-driven, and apolitical.

In some (very limited) senses this reversal of gendered allocations can be construed as challenging a traditional masculinist conception of gendered places and spaces wherein the private sphere is no longer disparaged as place/space of domesticity, weakness, and dependence. However, masculinist conceptions of gendered and sexed roles and traits remain uncontested – i.e., what it is to be a masculine man is still based on power, courage, economics, and independence. The privatizing peace literatures affect a masculinization of the ‘private’ and a feminization of the ‘public’ and thus reconstitute a hyper-masculinist conception of

gendered and sexed roles and traits and in this way gendered structures (material and discursive) go unchallenged. This reification of gendered and sexed traits and roles is made all the more problematic when considering that privatizing peace literatures offer little in the way of discussion of militarization and militarizing processes.

Militarization

As just stated, the privatizing peace literatures offer limited engagement with militarization¹³ processes, especially the “contradiction of using individuals (mostly men) trained to fight wars in order to conduct peace missions” (Whitworth 2004: 184). Singer (2003b) does note how “‘Peacekeepers’ roles and responsibilities differ markedly from regular military operations. They require an entirely new cultural outlook focused on humanitarian concerns, which at times can duel with or shackle military instincts...[PMFs] untrained or uninterested in the culture of peacekeeping, might be ill-equipped to handle them.” ‘Duel’ and ‘shackle’ seem rather tame in comparison to Whitworth’s (2004) assertion that “The tension being trained as a warrior and then being told to keep a lid on warrior traits can contribute to some of the explosions of hypermasculinity” witnessed in UN missions in Cambodia and Somalia (184). Indeed, discussion of the ways militarization processes deploy gendered, sexed, and sexualized notions is almost completely absent in the privatizing peace literatures. Accompanying such absence is the subsequent evacuation of ‘woman,’ feminized and queered bodies, sexualized violence or the militarization of sex, and the intersections of gender, race, and class from the ‘story’ (pr)ffered by the privatizing peace literatures.

Such evacuation is indeed highly problematic when considering the deployment of systemic rape during the conflicts in the Balkans and the Rwandan genocide in the mid-1990s. More recently, various abhorrent occurrences in Iraq signal the prominence that feminized and queered bodies and sexualized violence have in and with conflict situations. These occurrences include the Abu Ghraib prison scandal¹⁴ wherein gendered, sexed, and sexualized violence was used as an interrogation ‘tool’ by various PMF and American military personnel and the less publicized targeting for death of lesbian, trans, bi, and gay identified Iraqis

¹³ According to Enloe (2000), “Militarization is a step-by-step process by which a person or thing gradually comes to be controlled by the military or comes to depend for its well-being on militaristic ideas. The more militarization transforms an individual or a society, the more that individual or society comes to imagine military needs and militaristic presumptions to be not only be valuable but also normal” (3).

¹⁴ As Singer (2005) notes, “The failure to properly control the behavior of PMFs took on great consequence in the Abu Ghraib prisoner-abuse case. According to reports, all of the translators and up to half of the interrogators involved were private contractors working for two firms, Titan and caci. The U.S. Army found that contractors were involved in 36 percent of the proven incidents and identified 6 employees as individually culpable. More than a year after the incidents, however, not one of these individuals has been indicted, prosecuted, or punished, even though the U.S. Army has found the time to try the enlisted soldiers involved. Nor has there been any attempt to assess corporate responsibility for the misdeeds. Indeed, the only formal inquiry into PMF wrongdoing on the corporate level was conducted by caci itself. Caci investigated caci and, unsurprisingly, found that caci had done no wrong.” Notice the techno-managerial frame employed by Singer!

by the Badr Corps which is the military wing of the Iranian-backed Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq. This obfuscation of gender, sex, and sexuality in the privatizing peace literatures not only represents a problematic conceptual oversight, but an elision that evacuates the very ‘real’ consequences of sexualized violence and the militarization of sex – regularly experienced by feminized and queered bodies.

Again, privatizing peace literatures miss a significant opportunity to question the ways that UN peace operations, more generally, allow “certain identities to pleasure and profit at the expense of others” (Agathangelou and Ling 2003: 134). Consequently, privatizing peace literatures ensure that (militarized) patriarchal, hyper-masculine, homophobic, and/or heteronormative practices, structures, and identities continue to operate in and through UN peace operations – and in the literatures that purport the necessity of continued UN intervention. As Agathangelou and Ling (2003) assert “That UN Peacekeepers would traffic in persons for sex is but a superficial and obvious response to [a] nexus of technology, power and capital utilized by one configuration of race, gender and class against others” (134).

(Neo)Colonialism

Having just suggested that privatizing peace literatures elide the complicity of global processes in the purported necessity and frustration of PMF-led UN peace operations, I have to take a momentary step back so as to acknowledge that the privatizing peace literatures do engage with a claim that PMF em/deployment represents a form of (neo)colonialism. As Bures (2005) notes, “Given the close links between some [PMFs] and top-ranking officials in Western governments...many in the developing world fear that [PMFs] are agents of neo-colonization” (542). Add to this the above suggestion that UN peace operations are nothing more than ‘riot control’ exercises (see Pugh 2004) and Agathangelou and Ling’s (2003) contention that “peacekeeping as an enterprise intensifies a particular strain of neo-liberal global governance that remains unquestionably white, male and bourgeois” (133) and it is not too hard to imagine where such concern comes from. Interestingly, Taulbee (2000) attempts to counter a neo-colonial perspective by suggesting that “in the current international business environment, even weak governments have leverage. Blaming companies for contracts which enrich the few in power without the benefit for the many misplaces responsibility” (446). I say interestingly because Taulbee (re)situates the neo-colonial concern in(to) a neo-liberal frame thereby (re)affirming my claim that the privatizing peace literatures offer a limited critical engagement with neo-liberal globalizing structures and processes.

Perhaps more disconcerting, is that privatizing peace literatures frame discussions of (neo)colonialism in limited economic terms as opposed to recognizing and engaging with the material-semiotic legacies of colonialism that PMFs are regularly situated in and involved with. For instance, Rosen (2005) notes that “Pay averaged in the \$1,500 to \$2,000 a day range, for experienced white soldiers [in Iraq]. In a *bizarre* form of racism, nonwhite [mercenaries]...were paid half as much” (32, *emphasis added*). While raising the ‘race’ issue Rosen summarily ‘ends’ such discussion by attributing pay differentials between ‘white and non-white’

contractors to differential levels of experience and training. Similarly, the privatizing peace literatures often link the ineffectiveness of many recent UN peace operations with the under-trained, ill-equipped, and under-motivated forces that the UN typically deploys. Accordingly, training and experience differentials are intended to be an innocuously regrettable ‘fact’ of current UN peace operations, rather than a consequence of neo-liberal globalizing processes that weaken the ability of post-colonial states to train and equip their armed forces. Moreover, an undercurrent of paternalism is evident in such evocations especially when recalling that the vast majority of troop contributions for UN missions come from post-colonial states or by the statement that, “The only things that seem to work in peacekeeping are things done by Western military or things done by private companies” (Brooks quoted in Bourage 2003).

I do not wish to suggest that the story (pr) offered by the privatizing peace literatures relies exclusively or immensely upon colonial logics. Yet, by engaging (neo)colonial concerns by and through a limited economic perspective the (re)producers of privatizing peace literatures do appear to be missing another instance to ask pertinent questions while simultaneously failing to account for the very explicit ways that colonially-founded notions of race are evident in the material-semiotic activities of PMFs and UN peace operations. In other words, privatizing peace literatures, while correctly pointing to problems of training, equipment, and motivation that plague UN peace operations, do not consider how “peacekeepers themselves are... largely constituted by... elements of [a] broader context: their equipment, training, mandate, worldview, operating procedures and ethical frames are influenced by their position in the global economy and political system” (Bellamy and Williams 2004: 8). As such, the (re)producers of privatizing peace literatures (pr) offer a perspective that is laden with neo-colonial paternalisms that go unaddressed.

The Mercenary Distraction

Having now suggested that privatizing peace literatures offer limited (or non-existent) critical engagement with neo-liberal ideology, colonial logics, militarization processes, applications of a problem-solving/techno-managerial method, and no interrogation of the intersections between these areas, I want to return to the issue of the ‘mercenary’ aspects of PMFs. I return to this issue not to offer a moralistic pronouncement on the activities of PMFs but because I believe a tenuous commendation is in order. As noted above, proponents of privatizing UN peace operations regularly attempt to distance the activities of PMFs from those of the mercenaries that operated during the Cold War and for this I maintain that these literatures should be commended. Commended not because the motivation behind this distancing is anything more than an attempt to cover the exceedingly problematic similarities between current PMF and historical mercenary activity (in Africa for instance), but because I find moralistic condemnations such as “when I kill, it is because my president told me to... if a contractor shoots someone, it’s for another reason... to get paid” (quoted in Pape and Meyer 2003) distracting. Again, distracting not because the peace-profit or duty-adventure binaries are easily collapsible – the promotion of the Canadian Forces as a great career opportunity effectively troubles ‘altruistic motivations’ – but distracting because recourse to mercenary concerns

generates an atomized frame of reference. By moralizing and individuating personal or firm motivations the recourse to 'mercenary concerns' represents another instance by and through which privatizing peace literatures deploy and thereby (re)affirm a neo-liberal packaging of the proposal to contract-out UN peace operations to PMFs. Of course concerns regarding the mercenary-like character of PMFs are exceedingly valid. However, if such concerns are limited to moralistic and individuated motivations, then privatizing peace literatures have missed another opportunity to question the problematic intersections of problem-solving methodologies, (neo)colonialism, militarization, and neo-liberal ideology.

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