

Gendered Dynamics of Child Protection in UN Peacekeeping

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*This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandparents,
Walter and Maxine Goad, and my aunt Marian Goad,
who helped inspire my interest in science and the world,
and my desire to make a difference.*

Abstract

Since the mid-1990s, the United Nations (UN) has developed a substantial children and armed conflict (CAAC) agenda, aimed at preventing and responding to the Six Grave Violations of children's rights: killing and maiming, child soldiering, abductions, sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access. UN Peacekeeping missions, particularly its large multi-dimensional missions that are or were deployed across five central African states, are important implementers of this agenda through their child protection practices. These practices depend on and reproduce certain conceptions of childhood and assumptions about gender dynamics between peacekeepers and children which this thesis investigates.

In this thesis I analyze child protection guidance documents including policies, training materials, and manuals, and interviews with peacekeepers and humanitarian workers to understand how gender, childhood, and protection are constructed through UN peacekeeping child protection practices. I do this through a compilation of four journal articles, which discuss how UN documents portray children and gender dynamics in child protection, how gendered subject positions of women peacekeepers are produced and challenged through community engagement practices, tensions between the complexities of children's agency during war versus how it is understood by peacekeepers, and the logics of protection that help structure child protection.

Three key aspects of child protection in UN peacekeeping were illuminated in this analysis. First, logics of protection that inform the portrayals of and relationships between peacekeepers, children, and threats to children primarily rely on gendered stereotypes about peacekeepers and conceptions of children as only vulnerable and lacking agency, though there are shifts and implicit disruptions in these and more explicit challenges to these logics from peacekeepers themselves. Second, gendered subject positions of peacekeepers also draw on these stereotypes and assumptions, but peacekeepers' experiences of the complexities of gender dynamics in child protection and shifts in UN policy indicate openings for these to be transformed. Third, children continue to be understood in limited and narrow ways, focused on their vulnerability and without acknowledgement of their agency, by peacekeepers and in UN policy, which may foreclose more effective practices for preventing harm to children. Taken together, this analysis helps to reveal some of the intricacies of how gender, childhood, and conceptions of protection interact in peacekeeping practice.

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Statement on the use of “AI”

Over the past year, much attention has been devoted to the rapid development and use of sophisticated predictive text and image algorithms, generally known as “generative AI.” These systems, such as ChatGPT, have raised serious concerns about academic integrity, creativity, and ethics. As regulations, norms, and practices in academia on these algorithms are still in flux, I believe it is important to be transparent about whether and how such systems were used in the production of academic work such as this thesis.¹

In writing my thesis, I made no use of text or image producing algorithms except as noted below for translation, and all text aside from quotes is the product of my own work. While not commonly thought of as similar to “generative AI,” tools such as spell check and Grammarly in Microsoft Word (in which most writing for this thesis was done) also use predictive algorithms to suggest replacement text. I used spell check throughout the thesis to identify misspelled words and grammatical errors, and used Grammarly when proofreading Article I, but made the decision myself about whether to make a suggested change. The Swedish summary toward the end of the kappa (Svensk sammanfattning) was machine translated using DeepL, also a form of predictive text generation, and was graciously corrected by Pernilla Nordqvist.

¹ Inclusion of this statement was inspired by the following article in *The Guardian*: Kester Brewin, “Why I wrote an AI transparency statement for my book, and think other authors should too,” *The Guardian*, 4 April 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2024/apr/04/why-i-wrote-an-ai-transparency-statement-for-my-book-and-think-other-authors-should-too>

1

Introduction

Since late last millennium, international attention to the involvement of children in armed conflict has begun to shift from a focus solely on children's victimhood and non-combatant status to a more nuanced understanding of their participation in both war and peace. The United Nations (UN) beyond UNICEF began to take the role of and impact on children in armed conflict seriously in the late 1990s after Graça Machel's report for the General Assembly on the impact of war on children (Machel 1996). Subsequently, the UN Security Council has passed a series of resolutions on children and armed conflict (CAAC), a variety of best practices, principles, and international law have been introduced, and a range of organizations focused on children and armed conflict have been formed.

One key area of implementation of the CAAC agenda is in UN Peacekeeping missions. Currently, they are one of the largest forms of international intervention in the world, with over 75 000 military and police personnel in 22 peacekeeping and special political missions at present.² In these countries and globally, children are significantly affected by conflict. As of 2021, approximately 1/6th of the world's children were living in proximity to armed conflict, with the proportion living near high-intensity combat increasing (Strømme et al. 2022). In the four countries where about 90% of peacekeepers are deployed (Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lebanon, and South Sudan), the four African countries have median ages of 16 to 19, while in Lebanon the median age is 31.³ Consequently, a large proportion of the host communities peacekeepers are mandated to protect and support are children. The approach of the UN and other international organizations and NGOs to

² As of 31 May 2023, see "Troop and police contributors", *United Nations Peacekeeping*, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>, accessed 18 August 2023, data as of 31 May 2023.

³ Based on information from "Age Structure", *Our World in Data*, <https://ourworldindata.org/age-structure>, accessed 20 October 2021, and "Troop and police contributors", *United Nations Peacekeeping*, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>, accessed 18 August 2023, data as of 31 May 2023.

protecting children during armed conflict assumes a universalized depiction of children being only dependent, vulnerable, and lacking agency (Pruitt 2020; Tabak 2020), a construction that has been challenged for its Eurocentrism, orientalism, and lack of acknowledgement of how children navigate their social environment (Denov 2012; Drumbl 2012; de Castro 2021; Vigh 2006).

In this context, UN peacekeeping missions are mandated to carry out a range of child protection tasks to prevent and investigate violations of children's rights, primarily through physical protection, monitoring and reporting, and facilitating the work of civilian child protection actors. Gender is a key consideration in UN peacekeeping child protection, both in light of children's gendered vulnerability to various forms of violence, and in certain practices where gender dynamics are viewed as important for peacekeepers' operational effectiveness (e.g., Bevan and MacKenzie 2012; Henry 2012; D. Johnson 2021; Karim and Beardsley 2017; Pruitt 2013). Violence against and by children during armed conflict that the UN aims to prevent, such as sexual violence and child soldiering, are in part the result of gender dynamics and power structures. For instance, the production and valorization of militarized masculinities can make soldiering an attractive way for boys or prove they are men, or demand that boys take part in defence of their community (e.g., O'Neil and Broeckhoven 2018; Trenholm et al. 2013). Often-stereotypical discourses on gender that position boys primarily as soldiers and girls primarily as victims of sexual violence during armed conflict are influential in common understandings of the threats that children face (Denov 2012; Tabak 2020).

Similarly, gender dynamics and power structures are influential in both peacekeeping child protection practice and debates about the continued evolution of peacekeeping. For instance, the participation of women in UN peacekeeping has been advanced particularly through a discourse of what "added value" women bring to peacekeeping, focusing on stereotypically gendered skills, qualities, and practices such as interaction with women and children in the host community, empathy, de-escalation and negotiation, and providing care (Biskupski-Mujanovic 2019; Wilén 2020). In practice, this places an added burden on women to go above and beyond what is required of their male colleagues or police their behaviour (Penttinen 2013, 158–63; Wilén 2020). Such discourses have a limited basis in empirical evidence (Ghittoni, Lehouck, and Watson 2018), and largely ignore the social construction of gender and that gender does not equate to women (Hebert 2013, 107–9; Jukarainen 2013, 96; Biskupski-Mujanovic 2019, 414–16). These discourses are influenced by a logic of masculine protection that is prevalent in peacekeeping, which situates children as a paradigmatic protected group (Jennings 2019; Young 2003).

Research by academics, thinktanks, and NGOs has significantly developed our knowledge about the CAAC agenda and the challenges it aims to address. However, comparatively little research has taken place on child protection in UN peacekeeping in general, or on its gendered dynamics specifically. Some work has considered the interaction between the CAAC agenda, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, and the Protection of Civilians (PoC) agenda, which were mutually supportive of one another during their development, through the complementarity of their mandates and informing each others' strategies and approaches. More recently, however, they have come into competition in peacekeeping, as UN bureaucratic approaches incentivize their siloing and separation, and they compete for the same limited pool of funding (Kullenberg 2020). Other work has engaged how the WPS and CAAC agendas construct both gender and childhood: while the WPS agenda attempts to escape the conflation of "womenandchildren" through its participation pillar, this still ignores children's agency and women and children remain somewhat conflated in the protection pillar (Lee-Koo 2019; Pruitt 2020). The CAAC agenda maintains a framing of children that sees them entirely as victims in need of protection, particularly if they are girls (Pruitt 2020). This indicates the need to understand the hierarchies of gender and age involving adults and children in the CAAC agenda in UN peacekeeping (Jacob 2015; Lee-Koo 2019; Pruitt 2020).

Much of this past research has focused on analysis of high-level documents, especially Security Council resolutions and international law, leaving a lack of empirical focus on peacekeepers' actual practice in child protection and its relation to the normative commitments of and discursive constructions in UN policy. Recent work has examined systematically and in more detail the ways in which gender and other factors influence peacekeeping practices (e.g. Baldwin and Taylor 2020; Baldwin 2021; Henry 2012; Higate and Henry 2009; Jennings 2019; 2014; Karim and Beardsley 2017), but has so far not directly addressed child protection. Theoretical accounts of the production of both gender and protection in peacekeeping or security more generally have also largely neglected their intersection with age or how children are cast in relation to these (e.g. Jennings 2019; Stiehm 1982; Young 2003; Whitworth 2007). Child protection in UN peacekeeping thus provides a fruitful site for furthering both our empirical and theoretical understanding of gender and peacekeeping practice while bringing attention to the importance of understanding children and childhood.

Research Problem

Building upon this opening for research, my project is further motivated by developments in peacekeeping policy and practice over the past six years that illuminate the need for more systematic research on child protection, especially when it comes to gender, and by questions raised but unanswered in the current literature about relationships between gender, childhood, and agency. My PhD project aims to address these needs in relation to the current policies and practices of the UN on child protection through application of a theoretical framework drawing on gendered and age-based logics of protection, the role of children and childhood in global politics, children's agency during war, and feminist research on gender and the military. These areas of the literature provide important theoretical and empirical investigations into various aspects of gender and peacekeeping, yet they either insufficiently address children as both actors and symbols in peacekeeping logics in the case of peacekeeping-focused literature, or do not develop insights from child protection more generally in the militarized environment of peacekeeping in the case of literature on child protection. To understand these issues, I draw on empirical material from UN peacekeeping documents including policies, doctrines, and training materials, and from interviews with peacekeepers involved in child protection who have served in a variety of missions, along with child protection policymakers and people working in related areas of child protection.

An important focus of this research then is on the child protection practices that peacekeepers (are supposed to) carry out, and so it is necessary to briefly discuss what I mean by practices due to the varying ways they are conceptualized in the social sciences. Acknowledging the more deeply theoretical and ontological approaches to practices taken by various strands of poststructuralist and practice theories (e.g. Schatzki 1996; 2002), I take a more plain-language approach to practices as the most useful term for the various things that peacekeepers do. Consequently, I take practices to mean the various sets of activities and tasks peacekeepers (and others) carry out, such as patrols, collecting information, advocacy, quick impact projects, and so on. As I draw on both a variety of policy and guidance documents and interviews with peacekeepers, I use this terminological approach to help differentiate my analysis of what peacekeepers (say they) do and what documents say they should do and why. What is important for me to consider from this perspective is not necessarily how policy and training motivates actual practice and what differences might arise between them, but how these documents and peacekeepers themselves (re)produce discourses on gender and childhood, how these discourses configure relations between peacekeepers and children, and when

peacekeepers' experiences disrupt and contradict dominant discourses. Thus I speak about child protection practices that are discussed in documents and by peacekeepers, and practice-oriented documents such as training materials and manuals that discuss specific practices, as opposed to higher-level documents such as Security Council Resolutions that primarily provide the legal and normative foundation and overall mandates for peacekeeping operations. Hence the reader should keep in mind that when I refer to practices I do not mean a broader meaning of policy and discursive practices that would also encompass these documents.

In peacekeeping policy, especially since 2017, there has been growing attention to the role of peacekeepers in child protection, particularly with respect to preventing child soldiering, and not just aiding in disarmament and demobilization of child soldiers. This includes the development of UN peacekeeping policy, manuals, and training materials on child protection: a policy on child protection in UN peace operations released in 2017 and updated in 2020; specialized training materials on child protection for military peacekeepers published in 2018; and a manual for child protection staff in UN missions published in 2019.⁴ All of these address gender, both of children and peacekeepers, to some degree. Further relevant developments include the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers launched in 2017 in Vancouver (Global Affairs Canada 2017b), which aims to improve training for UN peacekeepers on child protection with respect to child soldiering and notes an important role for women peacekeepers in child protection. At the same event in Vancouver, the Canadian government launched the Elsie Initiative on Women in Peace Operations, which provides research and financial support for increasing the number of women in peacekeeping (Global Affairs Canada 2017a). In 2018 the UN launched its Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy, which aims to substantially increase the number of women in the military and police components of peacekeeping (Department of Peace Operations 2018). These efforts indicate the growing recognition and institutionalization of child protection in UN peacekeeping, the mainstreaming of gender considerations in its policy and practice, and the relationship between child protection and UN and member state efforts on gender and peacekeeping more broadly.⁵

⁴ Note that both the specialized training materials and the manual for child protection staff were updated in 2023, but this occurred after I had already analyzed the original versions. I reviewed the new versions but determined that they were not sufficiently different to justify redoing my analysis.

⁵ At present UN peacekeeping faces an uncertain future with the sudden end to the MINUSMA mission in Mali in June 2023, continuing discussion of the withdrawal of MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of Congo, while no new large missions with child protection mandates have been authorized since MINUSCA in 2014.

Several of these documents raise questions about how gendered dynamics are being understood and addressed in peacekeeping child protection practice. For instance, the Vancouver Principles note the “essential contribution of women” to preventing the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and that their role is both “critical” and “distinct” from that of men (Global Affairs Canada 2017b, 4). Similarly, the Implementation Guidance for the Vancouver Principles, published in 2019 with the intention of providing more detailed information for UN member states to implement the principles, notes “the essential contributions of women to peacekeeping operations, and specifically the distinct roles of *men and women* in the protection of children [emphasis in original]” (Global Affairs Canada 2017b) and suggests that women may be better placed to communicate with children, access places where men cannot go, and serve as role models for local⁶ women and girls. The Elsie Initiative’s website states that “Increasing the meaningful participation of women in peace operations is both the right and smart thing to do” (Global Affairs Canada 2017a). Such statements reinforce an approach to women’s participation in peacekeeping that is based upon the essentialization of gender, and the instrumentalization of women’s participation for other ends. While there are signs of movement away from this approach in the Vancouver Principles Implementation Guidance (D. Johnson 2021) and more recent research funded by the Elsie Initiative (Baldwin and Taylor 2020; Baldwin 2021; Nagel, Fin, and Maenza 2021), this raises concerns about how peacekeepers’ and children’s gender and related issues like agency, vulnerability, and protection are understood and acted upon in UN peacekeeping child protection.

Consequently, there is a need to explore more broadly in UN peacekeeping child protection policy, guidance, and practice how gender, childhood, agency, and protection are constructed and acted upon. This can both yield valuable theoretical insights to advance knowledge on these concepts in a militarized environment, contribute to our empirical knowledge of peacekeeping and intervention, and support improved policy and practice. My PhD project aims to contribute to these needs, and builds on calls for a more detailed and critical research agenda in peacekeeping. Scholars have called for research on peacekeeping that is critical, theoretically informed, and relevant to improving the conduct of peacekeeping (Olsson and Gizelis 2014, 523–25), attention to what

However, this study remains relevant for the remaining missions, and many aspects of it may be applicable to other forms of international military intervention.

⁶ As Kathleen Jennings and others have noted, “local” is a problematic concept in peacekeeping contexts. She argues that “[f]or simplicity, and consistent with peacekeepers’ own usage”, locals are those resident in the “host country living proximate to peacekeeping operations” (Jennings 2019, 30) and thus are not part of the international intervention.

is working well in peacekeeping, not just misconduct (Penttinen 2013, 161), and the need for “deploying a methodology that pays attention to the ordinary, mundane micro-details of peacekeeping life” (Henry 2015, 387), as the everyday practices of peacekeepers have received comparably little scholarly attention but are important for understanding peacekeeping’s effects. It also builds on the need for a more critical and theoretically informed account of how children and childhood matter in global politics and international relations (Jacob 2015).

It is important to note at the outset that my PhD is part of a broader project⁷ housed at the Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace and Security at Dalhousie University in Canada that concluded in March 2024. In addition to research, the organization is involved in advocacy and programming related to preventing the recruitment and use of children in armed violence. The Dallaire Institute played a key role in the creation of the Vancouver Principles through its advocacy, and works with the UN and various governments on their implementation. This helped to enable both access to interlocutors for the research, and more direct routes to influencing policy, but also required careful attention to issues of ethics and positionality, which are elaborated on later in the kappa. Also as a consequence of this, my focus on child protection centers on practices seen as most relevant to preventing child soldiering.

Research Aims and Questions

My PhD project aims to expand our knowledge of the construction and disruption of gendered logics of protection in UN peacekeeping, deepening consideration of how they also depend on hierarchies of age and understandings of childhood, and how they are changed and challenged through the inclusion of women as protectors in peacekeeping contexts. I also aim to further research on the relationship between gendered and age-based logics of protection and the production of certain visions of childhood and the gendered subject positions of peacekeepers, while examining how these are reproduced and challenged in practice. I also aim to contribute empirically through new knowledge on how child protection in UN peacekeeping is structured and practiced, drawing attention to this relatively understudied area of peacekeeping. These aims will contribute to ongoing debates by academics and practitioners about childhood, gender, and protection in UN peacekeeping.

To pursue these aims, my PhD project seeks to answer the following research question and sub-questions:

⁷ The project was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), and I was employed at the Dallaire Institute for the majority of my PhD studies, until December 2023.

How are gender, childhood, and protection constructed through UN Peacekeeping child protection practices?

1. *How are peacekeepers' protection practices related to gender and childhood?*
2. *How do peacekeepers engage with children as actors through their protection practices?*
3. *What gendered identities are (re)produced through UN peacekeeping child protection practices?*

This research question allows me to probe a variety of different sources of empirical material, including policies, manuals, guidelines, and training materials created by policymakers, often with input from peacekeepers, and interviews conducted with peacekeepers and policymakers from across the UN peacekeeping system, both of which are reflective of the practices carried out as part of child protection. Drawing on this material and theorization of logics of protection, childhood, and gender, I can investigate several different aspects of this question such as what logics of protection help to structure and inform UN peacekeeping child protection, how gender and childhood are officially (re)produced through policy, how these representations are reproduced or contested by peacekeepers, and what forms of peacekeeping practice they influence or leave out of consideration.

Contributions to Knowledge

Through answering this research question, I aim to contribute to knowledge in several ways. Theoretically, I deepen our understanding of how logics of protection are constructed in relation to gender and especially childhood in UN peacekeeping contexts, how gendered subject positions of peacekeepers are produced in relation to various child protection practices and to children and childhood, and how global discourses on children and armed conflict are reproduced and disrupted in specific child protection contexts. I also contribute to understanding the production of subject positions and how they are produced by and enable certain practices and policies through considering how those thought to occupy subject positions, in this case children, have agency or not. These findings contribute to our knowledge of gendered subject positions in military institutions and how they shift over time and in relation to contexts such as peacekeeping, and to how global discourses are transformed as they are reproduced at more micro levels by practitioners.

Empirically, my thesis contributes to our knowledge of peacekeeping policy and practice, primarily under the child protection mandate, by conducting analysis of practice-oriented documents that have received less attention than Security Council Resolutions or international laws, and providing novel interview material about child protection practices that have also received little study. This material allows me to demonstrate some of the different ways that gender, childhood, protection, and their interrelations are produced and contested in peacekeeping and investigate their relationship to policy and practice. I provide descriptions of key child protection documents, what practices they authorize for peacekeepers and what practices peacekeepers actually carry out, some of the reasons those practices are seen as important, and what barriers peacekeepers see to their effectiveness. Methodologically I also contribute to demonstrating the value of using online interviews to reach interlocutors and that they can produce sufficiently rich material compared to traditional in-person methods.

Limitations

There are two main limitations to my thesis that are important to keep in mind when reading and applying my work. First, due to my theoretical and methodological approach, I do not seek to produce widely generalizable knowledge or testable theorizations, but rather explore and understand the specific constructions of gender, childhood, and protection in one part of UN peacekeeping mandates since c. 2010. Consequently, I do not view my findings as being generally applicable to other peacekeeping practices, non-UN peacekeeping or peace operations, or international interventions or the military more generally, though I do produce insights which may be helpful for furthering understanding in these areas when properly adapted to the context. While the documents I draw on apply to many contemporary and recent UN missions, and my participants have experience in a range of UN missions, UN agencies, NGOs, and other interventions, I would also caution about the generalizability to older or newer UN missions or ones I did not reach in my research, especially ones without a child protection mandate. While these are limitations, I also consider them to be strengths in terms of producing an in-depth, theoretically informed, empirical view of a certain area of UN peacekeeping.

Secondly, the types of empirical materials I was able to access were limited to interviews with a range of peacekeepers and other people with child protection experience, and key guiding documents such as policies and training materials, but not, for instance, participant observation of peacekeeping practices or interviews with children being protected by a UN mission, or some mission-

specific documents that were classified. Due to this, my research primarily speaks to how UN peacekeepers and policymakers conceptualize, understand, and think about peacekeepers' and children's gender, visions of childhood, and what should be done to protect children. However, as practice theorists have demonstrated, the actual practices that peacekeepers carry out may be different in meaningful ways from what they plan in documents or convey in interviews, and they may be received by the protected such as children in very different ways than peacekeepers believe they are. Consequently, there are likely to be remaining gaps in our understanding of child protection practice in UN peacekeeping deserving of further study to both expand our knowledge about them and improve how peacekeepers can prevent harm to children.

Outline of the Thesis

The remainder of the kappa is structured as follows: I next turn to the theoretical framework I use to inform and guide my research and to help analyse and understand my empirical materials. It first discusses gendered and age-based logics of protection, exploring their discursive construction, how they relate to the formation of subject positions and identities, and how power operates through them. Next, I focus on the concept of childhood with a specific focus on child soldiering, and how nuanced approaches to children's agency during armed conflict are required to understand child protection in UN Peacekeeping. Finally, I address the specifics of gendered subject positions in the military and peacekeeping, focusing on the production of peacekeeping masculinities and femininities, before concluding with a summary of how I draw on my theoretical framework through the four thesis articles. I then discuss the project's methodology and its alignment with my underlying theoretical commitments, the choice of research design and methods, and my sources of empirical material. Next, I continue with a discussion of the ethical considerations for my research including my positionality, before concluding with a discussion of my key findings, contributions, and suggestions for future research. This is followed by appendices detailing my participants, key documents drawn on in my analysis, a sample interview guide, and the reference list.

Article Summaries

The analysis of my empirical materials and findings of the thesis are contained in four journal articles appended to this kappa section. Each one draws on various aspects of my theoretical framework to help understand different aspects of child protection in UN Peacekeeping to help answer the research question

of my thesis. Below I provide brief summaries of each paper's focus, theoretical approach, and key findings and contributions.

Article I, titled *Women as the Essential Protectors of Children?: Gender and Child Protection in UN Peacekeeping*, published in *International Peacekeeping* on 13 January 2022, conducts a discourse analysis of UN peacekeeping and child protection policies, manuals, and training materials to understand how they construct peacekeepers' gendered subject positions with respect to child protection, and how children in need of protection are understood. After providing a summary of how the child protection work of the mandate is carried out by the mission, it finds that children and peacekeepers are each seen in two main ways. Children are understood primarily as agencyless victims of adult wars, needing to be protected by peacekeepers, and their vulnerability is understood especially in reference to gender in stereotypical ways, with boys being seen primarily at risk of being recruited by armed groups, and girls being at risk of sexual violence. When it comes to child soldiering, children are seen as potential threats, while a focus is maintained on their vulnerability and victimcy and lack of agency, even as the discussion of how to deal with child soldiers implicitly acknowledges their agency. For peacekeepers, gender is notably absent in the construction of peacekeepers as soldiers who may need to use force to provide physical protection to children, implicitly reinforcing a masculine logic of protection. Gender is emphasized when it comes to community engagement, where particularly women peacekeepers are argued as more able than men to effectively engage the community due to their gender. Evident here is a shift in older to newer documents from an emphasis on women being ideally suited to engaging with women and children to an emphasis on both men and women being needed to engage the whole community. While this still implies that women are needed to engage with women and children, it opens the door to reconfiguring understandings of gender in peacekeeping practice.

Article II, titled *Community engagement, peacekeeping femininities, and the protection of children during armed conflict*, to be submitted to *Critical Military Studies*, focuses on the production of subject positions of the "woman peacekeeper" through community engagement practices in UN peacekeeping. Drawing on my interviews and UN policy and training materials, especially more recent documents on community engagement, it argues that through community engagement practices, women peacekeepers' subject positions are produced in a triadic relationship with the subject positions of men peacekeepers and children. Women peacekeepers are seen by the UN as inherently suited to conducting community engagement due to gendered assumptions about women communicating with and relating to children and being more

approachable than men. This portrayal is contrasted with an understanding of men as being inherently unsuited to engaging with children and potentially posing a risk to children through assumptions about men's lack of communication skills and relatability to children, children not wanting to engage with an armed man after facing violence from men during war, and the possibility for sexual exploitation and abuse. Both of these subject positions are related to those of children, who are seen by the UN as primarily vulnerable and lacking agency. However, many peacekeepers disrupt and challenge core parts of how these subject positions are produced by highlighting the more complex interaction of gender dynamics, trust in the mission, training and personality, and posture that modulate how engagement actually takes place, while sometimes providing much greater acknowledgement of children's agency. More recent guidance on engagement also begins to shift the emphasis on involving both men and women equally in engagement and putting more emphasis on the contribution of training, skills, and attitudes as important for successful engagement rather than just gender.

Article III, titled *Children's wartime agency and military child protection in UN peacekeeping*, to be submitted to *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, analyzes UN child protection documents and interviews with peacekeepers to examine how children's subject positions are constructed in three different child protection practices in terms of how they acknowledge or deny children's agency. The article considers advocacy on behalf of children by the mission, community engagement, and providing physical protection to children. In it I argue that each of these practices are configured based on certain subject positions of children, and while much is common between them, there are important differences. In advocacy, children are seen as entirely passive objects of protection, both lacking in agency and so vulnerable that it is too risky to involve them in advocacy, and so the mission must advocate on their behalf. In community engagement children are seen by peacekeepers as being important to engage with to provide some information to improve protection, while they can be educated on ways to help protect themselves. While these activities are not discussed as involving children's agency, the ways in which peacekeepers understand these practices to operate depend on children having agency. Finally, a notable component of physical protection is dealing with child soldiers who may be encountered during operations, and UN documents analyzed discuss child soldiers quite openly as having agency, yet also most explicitly deny children's agency and focus instead on their vulnerability to being exploited as soldiers by adults. These differing conceptions of children and their agency produced by the UN through these practices indicate the attempt to address the contradictions between dominant discourses that frame

children as only vulnerable and lacking agency, and on-the-ground experiences of peacekeepers that inform the guidance materials studied.

Article IV, titled *Childhood and gender in logics of UN Peacekeeping child protection*, intended for publication in *Security Dialogue*, draws on UN peacekeeping child protection documents and interviews with peacekeepers to interpret the gendered and age-based logics of protection that help to structure UN peacekeeping child protection. Drawing on previous research on gendered and age-based logics of protection, and children's agency in armed conflict, I argue that logics of protection in UN peacekeeping are productive of the subject positions of peacekeepers and construct them in relation to those of children and threats. As discussed also in article II, I identify a gendered division of labour between practices of physical protection on the one hand and community engagement and care on the other, with the involvement of women emphasized only as vital in the latter. These logics of protection relate peacekeepers both to a subject position of children which is premised on their vulnerability and lack of agency, and positions peacekeepers in relation to threats to children's physical safety from primarily armed groups that seek to harm them. I argue that while peacekeeping child protection tends to reproduce power dynamics that reinforce the domination of men over women and adults over children, attention to children's agency opens a potential avenue for better engaging children in their own protection through peacekeeping.

2

Theoretical Framework

This thesis investigates the gender dynamics of child protection in UN peacekeeping through a focus on the logics of protection that help structure relationships between peacekeepers and children. This approach necessitates attention to how children and childhood are constructed and represented in contexts of armed conflict, and to the construction of gendered subject positions in the military and peacekeeping. These three approaches of considering logics of protection, children and childhood, and gender draw on a discursive understanding of the social world and how relations of power produce and are productive of logics of protection, subject positions, and identities. In applying my theoretical approach I stake out an eclectic position with respect to theory to draw on multiple approaches that my work benefits from. The authors I draw on approach issues like subject positions and identities, power, agency, and gender from varying and not always complementary theoretical backgrounds and perspectives. Each of these approaches however provides me with tools to explore and understand some aspect of gender and child protection in UN peacekeeping which a singular theoretical perspective would not allow me to thoroughly illuminate. Consequently, I draw on these diverse areas of theory across the thesis with consideration of tensions and contradictions between them to maintain coherence in my analysis. Across the rest of the chapter, my theoretical discussion first focuses on logics of protection and how they shape subject positions and identities, before turning to the construction of children and childhood and questions about children's agency, and then the production of gendered subject positions and identities of peacekeepers. It concludes with a discussion of how to make these analytically useful in my thesis in understanding the relationship of these approaches to peacekeeping practice.

Logics of Protection

It is vital to understand the relationships and logics of protection (Châteauvert-Gagnon 2022; Young 2003) set up between peacekeepers and children, and the power relations underpinning them, in peacekeeping missions. Writing about security, Shepherd defines a logic as “the ways in which various concepts are organized within specific discourses of security” (Shepherd 2008b, 293) and so through this lens I can analyze how concepts like gender and childhood are organized in relation to each other in discourses of child protection. This is key for understanding the practices that are adopted or ignored for protecting children in UN peacekeeping and how they are imbued with meaning: Young argues that “[v]iewing issues of war and security through a gender lens ... means seeing how a certain logic of gendered meanings and images helps organize the way people interpret events and circumstances, along with the positions and possibilities for action within them, and sometimes provides some rationale for action” (Young 2003, 2). Previous scholarship has explored how protection tends to set up power relations where the protector is in a more powerful location compared to the protected. These logics are constructed in highly gendered ways, with protection often, though not always, understood as being masculine. Furthermore, logics of protection are also frequently racialized, and in the context of child protection also depend on hierarchies of age (Châteauvert-Gagnon 2022; Young 2003).

The concept of protection assumes that some identifiable group has their safety or existence threatened by some source of danger, and that group requires another actor to shield them from that threat. Relationships of protection are then structured according to a certain logic of who should be protected, who protects them and what practices are necessary to provide protection, and what/who they need to be protected from. Previous works in this area have primarily focused on a gendered (but also racialized and age-based) logic of protection, where men are portrayed as the protectors of women and children, who must be protected against external/foreign/racialized men (Kaplan 1994, 124; Stiehm 1982, 367; Young 2003, 3–6). This logic sets up two masculine subject positions: the benevolent, chivalrous, and self-sacrificial masculine protector; and the dominative and threatening aggressor who wishes to harm the women and children of the protector (Young 2003, 4). This understanding of protection as masculine establishes an asymmetrical relationship of power between protector and protected, and “puts those protected, paradigmatically women and children, in a subordinate position of dependence and obedience” (Young 2003, 2). This relationship both reinforces patriarchal relations of power, and makes those protected vulnerable as their protection is conditional on them being seen as sufficiently deserving due to factors such as obedience,

support to their protectors, identity, or proper behaviour (Jennings 2019, 38–39; Kaplan 1994; Stiehm 1982, 372–73). Construction of these subject positions of protector, protected, and threat tend to draw on sexist, colonial, and/or racial tropes (Henry 2012; 2015, 384–86; Jennings 2014, 325–26; 2019, 33–35; Stiehm 1982, 369; Young 2003, 19–20), reflecting the colonial rationale of “[w]hite men ... saving brown women from brown men” (Spivak 1999, 303).

The analyses discussed above have primarily focused on the gendered and racialized basis of logics of protection, but hierarchies of age are also evident. Reinforcing the discussion above, Iris Marion Young states that it is “paradigmatically women *and children* [emphasis mine]” (Young 2003, 2) in the protected group. Children are mentioned in several other places in relation to women, but the emphasis is entirely on gender. Similarly, in discussing the gendered relationship between protector and protected, Judith Hicks Stiehm notes that the young are among the protected group, but does not elaborate further on the role of age (Stiehm 1982, 369). Both authors’ key point is that gendered protector-protected relations underpin militarism, and that these need to be challenged. Stiehm’s argument is that we should move from women as being protected to both men and women as being defenders (Stiehm 1982, 367). This however still leaves children in the protected category, and challenging the gendered underpinnings of the military does not address power relations based on age. Clearly, the answer is not to also make children protectors or defenders; that is precisely counter to the practical aims of my thesis and the broader field of research and practice on children and armed conflict. Instead, we must be attentive to how children and childhood figure in the production of gendered subject positions and identities in peacekeeping and logics of protection or care.

The collapse of “womenandchildren” into a single category of the protected is also an important point to consider for how it produces a certain supposed similarity between women and children that must be challenged and its effects on the agency of both groups understood and countered. Being in the protected group tends to constrain or deny the agency of both women and children, compounding existing understandings of women and especially children having a lesser capacity for agency than men. Feminist scholarship has primarily challenged this from a gendered (e.g., Enloe 1993), but seldom age-based (e.g., Jacob 2015; Lee-Koo 2019), point of view. Children form perhaps the quintessential protected group, with a “prevailing view of vulnerability and dependency in childhood that locates responsibility in the adult world and informs a corresponding politics of protection” (Beier 2018, 165). This logic leaves little space for children’s agency or voice in their own security, while often being naturalized and seen as existing without question (Tabak 2020). Consequently,

“[t]he co-constitution of subject/object, perpetrator/victim, protector/protected, and adult/child positions enjoins us to closely interrogate the politics of protection and the circulations of power that operate, in particular, through its various inscriptions and erasures of [agency]⁸” (Beier 2018, 167).

Finally, it is important to see that logics of protection and the construction of subject positions and identities can be seen operating at the individual level, but can also be extended to analysis of protection and security nationally and internationally. At the level of the state, its protection of its citizens and territory, and its relation to the outside world, can be coded as masculine, with the population coded as feminine, protected, and subordinate. This logic can be seen for the state at large, and for particular components of its bureaucracy such as the military, police, and other security services, and within those components. Internationally, a similar construction is evident, with some states being seen as the masculine protectors of other states, or their populations when that state is seen as failing its protective obligations. In the latter case, the role of racialization in the logic of protection is particularly evident, where colonial-origin hierarchies between countries help to structure predominantly white, Northern states as the protectors of brown and black women and children or civilians from the threat posed by states or nonstate armed groups which are racialized as nonwhite (Stern 2011; Young 2003).

Consequently, using logics of protection as a lens to examine and understand my material has several advantages. First, this approach does not take protection and those involved as pre-given, allowing me to consider the underlying reasons and assumptions behind why children need to be protected and who they are assumed to be, why peacekeepers should protect them and what practices they should use to do so, and who is seen to threaten children and why. These questions help to reveal the basis and assumptions on which child protection in UN peacekeeping operates, rather than examining its practices from a primarily empirical point of view. Second, a logics of protection approach is well suited to considering the relationships between different subject positions, identities, and actors involved in child protection and the underlying basis and assumptions of protection. This is important for considering how gender and childhood matter in child protection across all of the thesis.

From these previous examinations we can see several elements that are vital to the construction of logics of protection: their discursive nature, the power relations involved, and their production of subject positions and identities. I next turn to examine each of these areas in more depth.

⁸ Note that Beier here refers to subjecthood but his understanding of it more closely aligns with how I am using the term agency, so to avoid confusion with my used of subject positions and agency I substitute the term here.

Discourse

The subjects and objects of protection and the threats to the protected are not pre-given, but constructed as part of the logic. Consequently, they are also discursive in nature and relate to the subject positions of the protector and protected. (Châteauvert-Gagnon 2022, 283; Beier 2018, 166). Therefore, an understanding of discourse is necessary for examining logics of protection. Discourses are social practices that produce meaning and allow us to make sense of the world. This includes not only spoken language or text, but symbols, actions, processes or events that convey or (re)produce meaning (Schatzki 1996, 37; Shepherd 2008a, 20–21). From this view, the social world and how we conceive of reality depends on discourses and their construction of subjects and objects. The meaning of material reality is thus mediated through discourse:⁹ “[o]ur analysis rejects the distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices. It affirms ... that every object is constituted as an object of discourse, insofar as no object is given outside every discursive condition of emergence” (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 107). Consequently, there is no fixed, external-to-society source of meaning; instead, meaning is continually (re)produced through discursive processes. This further entails that meaning, subjecthood, or identity are unstable, in flux, and only ever partially and temporarily fixed (Shepherd 2008a, 20–21). Logics of protection are therefore also unstable and require continuous maintenance for the reproduction and stability of the identities and relationships between the protector, protected, and threat. A multiplicity of discourses are always in circulation simultaneously, and so particular logics of protection are fluid, context-specific, and often produced in relation to multiple other logics of protection.

Any given person can simultaneously occupy multiple different positions in different logics. For instance, a woman military peacekeeper may be positioned as a protector both in the gendered, colonial, and racialized logics of protection of the national security state and international interventions in a “failed” or “fragile”¹⁰ state, while simultaneously positioned as a woman in need of protection by men peacekeepers in a gendered logic of protection in the peacekeeping location and therefore prevented from leaving the peacekeeping base (Vermeij 2020). Consequently, understanding logics of protection as discursive allows me to probe the relationship between logics of

⁹ For instance, paraphrasing Lene Hansen, the material existence of a tank both depends on discourses of national security, warfare, and engineering for it to be produced, and the tank’s meaning as a tank depends on being situated in these discourses. The same tank could take on very different meanings depending on the discursive formations it is situated in, such as whether its appearance and deployment are oriented towards fighting a war, peacekeeping, or being retired to a museum. Thus, we would want understand how the discourses that enable the production and use of a tank are produced and what their implications are (L. Hansen 2006, 19–20).

¹⁰ I further discuss and problematize these labels and how they fit into peacekeeping logics of protection below.

protection and the reproduction of other discourses on gender, race, or childhood that help inform and give meaning to child protection. It also aids in integrating my sources of empirical material, seeing UN peacekeeping documents and interviews with peacekeepers both as forms of reproduction of discourse. Both of these aspects of a discursive approach are important across all four articles in the thesis.

Power and Agency

While everyone participates in the (re)production of discourse, power is essential in the hegemony of certain discourses, the suppression of others, and resistance to dominant discourses. In turn, discourses help enable or legitimize the exercise of power by one actor over another. For instance, despite growing resistance to masculinist logics of protection over the past few decades, it remains a prevalent and powerful discourse, continuing to legitimize men as the proper wielders of violence and women and children as dependent on them (Châteauvert-Gagnon 2022; Elshtain 1995; Young 2003). Rather than power being something that an actor has by virtue of who they are or a formal position of influence, power can be understood as occurring through relationships between actors, in order to influence the actions of others: “what defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future” (Foucault 1982, 789). This approach to understanding power as a relationship between actors presupposes that both parties involved in the power relationship have some, if only minimal, capacity for action, and therefore resistance is always a possibility (Foucault 1982, 789).

Thus, power is distributed across all of the social world and underlies the exercise of discursive practices. This means that power relations, usually unequal, are productive of discourse, which is in turn productive of meaning and intelligibility, which in turn help to reproduce and structure power relations. Thus, the exercise of power is what works to fix certain meanings, construct identities, or “elevate one truth over another” (Der Derian 1992, 7). The exercise of power in the production of discourse tends to naturalize certain discourses as pre-given, or without question, when in fact they are socially constructed. For instance, a binary conception of gender that assigns certain traits and attributes as inherent to masculinity and femininity and anchors a gendered logic of protection is seen as natural and unchanging through patriarchal discourses, but is socially produced and thus in flux. Consequently, the exercise of power is also involved in challenging, undermining, or shifting discourses (L. Hansen 2006, 16–20; Shepherd 2008a, 22–25).

Bringing together discussion of logics of protection, power, and children, the agential aspect of the operation of power is important for me to consider in relation to logics of protection and children. Logics of protection tend to have an objectifying and agency-diminishing effect. The “positioning of a ‘protector’ and a ‘protected’” constitutes “an acting subject vis-à-vis an acted for (or upon) object” (Beier 2018, 166), focusing attention on the agency of the protector and the threat. While there still may be acknowledgement of the agency of the protected, for instance in ways in which they are expected to aid in their own protection through acts of “retreat, resistance, or resilience,” this remains an unequal relationship (Beier 2018, 166). Dominant discourses about children and childhood, particularly in contexts of armed conflict, construct children as inherently lacking agency and dependent on adults for education, care, and protection (Denov 2012; Tabak 2020). Yet, children have capacity for agency and take action in important ways during war (Denov 2012; Drumbl 2012; Vigh 2006). Attention to how logics of protection structure both constraints on actors’ agency and shape understanding of capacities for agency is a vital consideration in this thesis. We must also recognize children’s agency as without that capacity we cannot understand them as social actors embedded in power relations and capable of resistance and subversion. This raises the need to consider what exactly agency is.

Questions of agency have been an important strand in social scientific debate for decades and it is not necessary for me to provide an in-depth account of them here nor provide any sort of conclusive answer. Rather, it is productive in this study to operationalize an account of agency that allows me to satisfactorily address my research questions. At the most basic, agency is about the ability to take meaningful, intentional action: “[a]gency is about more than observable action; it also encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to their activity, their *sense* of agency, or ‘the power within’ [emphasis in original]” (Kabeer 1999, 438). Kabeer argues that this does not just cover major decisions and actions but also “bargaining and negotiation, deception and manipulation, subversion and resistance as well as more intangible, cognitive processes of reflection and analysis” (Kabeer 1999, 438). These manifestations of agency are important to consider here, as agency is not synonymous with having complete control of one’s circumstances, and much agency takes place in the margins subverting or resisting dominant power relations, discourses, or structural conditions (Kabeer 1999; McNay 2004). This can be helpfully typologized into “strategic” vs “tactical” agency, where in tactical agency the agent largely reacts to the conditions and opportunities afforded to them without the strategic capacity to influence and shape the broader social field to their ends or act with a longer time horizon in mind

(de Certeau 1988, 34–39; Honwana 2006, 51). This distinction is helpful for considering children’s agency during armed conflict, as in most cases children are disadvantaged in terms of the power dynamics, experience, knowledge, resources, and social capital that might help them act strategically. Finally, this highlights the embeddedness of agency in social relations between actors rather than in individuals: “agency is no longer something you possess or do not. Rather, it is something you maintain in relation to a social field inhabited with other social actors. Agency is thus highly dependent on specific social situations” (Utas 2005, 407). It is also important then to distinguish between agency and actors: agency is a product of a combination of social relations and individual capacities, while an actor is someone who is embedded in these social relations and so has the potential to act.¹¹

This modality of tactical agency as resistance to or subversion of power, hegemonic discourses, and forms of identity has tended to be privileged in previous feminist scholarship on agency, and thus agency has been advanced as identical or closely related to resistance and subversion. This emphasis raises two issues which are important to consider. First, McNay argues that an analysis of agency primarily as a subject’s resistance to or subversion of subjectification to patriarchal norms produces a negative reading of agency which overemphasizes a subject’s passivity. Rather, we should understand the “active process of self-interpretation that is inherent to the process of subject formation” and that “[t]hese creative or productive aspects immanent to agency must be conceptualized in order to explain how, when faced with complexity and difference, individuals may respond in unexpected and innovative ways that may hinder, reinforce or catalyse social change” (McNay 2003, 141). Second, Mahmood argues for a separation of the analysis of agency from resistance and subversion as the latter, developed for the study of patriarchal gender dynamics, does not always reveal the forms of agency and power in operation in other contexts. She argues that “it is best not to propose a theory of agency but to analyze agency in terms of the different modalities it takes and the grammar of concepts in which its particular affect, meaning, and form resides” (Mahmood 2012, 170). While subversion and resistance in the feminist tradition is one modality of agency, others such as survival and persevering through hardship or navigating systems of oppression without necessarily subversion of them are better understood through their specificity rather than in relation to resistance (Mahmood 2012, 144, 169–70). I note this to distance analysis of agency from a normative judgement of to what ends agency is used

¹¹ This notion of actors and agency should not be seen as dependent on humans being the only possible actor due to some inherently human characteristic or capacity for agency. However, as I only study actors as humans or collective groups of humans (e.g. the UN) I do not further consider the question of nonhuman agency.

for, e.g. seeing the agency in a child's actions to take up arms even though we might judge that action as a grave injustice. This lens is important especially in research on children and childhood as there is a tendency to only acknowledge children's agency when they make the "right" or "correct" choice according to the perspective of some adults (Hanson 2016).

This way of understanding relations of power and agency has several advantages for my thesis. First, seeing power as being exercised through relationships is valuable for a more nuanced approach to children's agency, where I can examine how children's agency is constrained by the social fabric they are embedded in rather than being only a result of their presumed lack of capacities, and opens up consideration of what strategies are available for children to pursue their own protection despite their disadvantage in these power relations. This is particularly useful in article III where I relate children's agency to peacekeeping child protection practices. Second, it helps to illuminate how logics of protection help to enable and legitimize the exercise of power by protectors over the protected and against threats, which will be particularly useful for exploring the problems of how child protection is structured in article IV and interrogating the hegemonic discourses that underlie logics of protection in peacekeeping child protection and how they draw on gendered and colonial discourses for intelligibility.

Subject Positions and Identities

Since logics of protection structure relations between different actors, they are also productive of the subject positions and identities of those actors. Adopting a poststructural view of subjectivity arising from my understanding of discourse, a person's identities are formed through the individual's attempts to emulate a socially constructed subject position. Discourses such as this gendered logic of protection produce certain acceptable subject positions – woman, soldier, peacekeeper – that the individual is "hailed to" and they desire to become: "The subject seeks a place in the social, a place that will confirm its existence as a subject" (Edkins and Pin-Fat 1999, 4). However, as discourse is always in the process of being (re)produced and transformed and is never finally complete or fixed, this process of the subject's identification with a subject position is also always in process and never complete (Edkins and Pin-Fat 1999, 4–5; Hall 2000, 4–5). Consequently, "identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us" (Hall 2000, 4), made temporary due to both the impossibility of fully adopting the subject position, and the constant flux of subject positions due to the continual reproduction of discourse. The hailing of the individual represents often-powerful social forces to conform to acceptable subject

CHAPTER 2

positions and discourage deviation from them. This is not only a one-way process where people have no agency in identification, though: the subject also “invests” in their attachment to a subject position to some degree, though this is never a perfect, smooth, or completed process as we must consider how:

individuals as subjects identify (or do not identify) with the ‘positions’ to which they are summoned; as well as how they fashion, stylize, produce and ‘perform’ these positions, and why they never do so completely, for once and all time, and some never do, or are in a constant, agonistic process of struggling with, resisting, negotiating and accommodating the normative or regulative rules with which they confront and regulate themselves (Hall 2000, 9).

This constant, ever-incomplete process involving the hailing of the individual to a subject position and that individual’s (partial) agency in how and in what ways they attempt to identify with the position then also open the door to the possibility of challenging or subverting the subject position at the same time (Edkins and Pin-Fat 1999, 4–5; Hall 2000, 5).¹² Thus, I understand subject position to mean the discursively constructed possibilities for identity, and identity as an individual’s attempts to occupy subject positions they are hailed to. This process is embedded in power relations, with different modes of power involved in the production of subject positions and the force with which they hail individuals. The capacity for agency which power relations presuppose enables resistance, subversion, and transformation of subject positions through the identification process.

The discursive production of subject positions takes place through a process of linking certain traits and attributes to a position, and its differentiation from an (often opposing or opposite) other (Hall 2000, 3; L. Hansen 2006, 16–20). For instance, the subject position of “man” might be constructed in a certain discourse through its association with traits such as strength, rationality, independence, and violence, and in opposition to the subject position of “woman”, which is linked to opposite traits such as weakness, emotionality, dependence, and passivity (L. Hansen 2006, 16–19). In gendered logics of protection, two primary masculine subject positions are produced: the benevolent, chivalrous, and self-sacrificial masculine protector; and the dominative and

¹² The literature on subject positions and identities primarily focuses on consideration of subjectivity rather than agency in analyzing how subjects are produced by and reproduce discourse while investing in identifying subject positions, subverting and resisting how they are made as subjects, in order to decenter the autonomous, pre-existing liberal or Cartesian subject (Holloway, Holt, and Mills 2019). While this decentering is important, in my thesis I focus on agency instead of subjectivity as I believe the term both better captures children’s day-to-day decision making and actions during war and not just identification, and better relates to literature and debates on child soldiering that I contribute to.

threatening aggressor who wishes to harm the women and children of the protector (Young 2003, 4). As this process is social and discursive, these constructions, linkages, and oppositions can be challenged or changed: “the link between some of the ‘positive signs’ might become unstable; or a negatively valued term of one discourse may be constructed as positive within another discourse” (L. Hansen 2006, 18). This means that subject positions are produced in relation to a constitutive other, which at the most extreme is the opposite of all that the self is, yet the self cannot exist as such without the relation to the constitutive other (Derrida 1981): there is no masculine protector without the opposing masculine threat to protect against.

While analytically we might separate out a subject position such as “man”, it is important to recognize that subject positions and identities are constructed in an intersectional manner (Staunæs 2003), and that a person identifies to a greater or lesser degree with a range of subject positions depending on their situation in the social world. This entails an understanding of how different subjectifying discourses combine to form subject positions, such as discourses on military identity and on gender forming subject positions of militarized masculinity. Such subject positions are not additive, where militarized masculinity=solider+male, but take their own specific form from the intersection of discourses that is not reducible to either apparent part (Crenshaw 1989). This is vital for considering how subject positions of peacekeepers and children are produced through discourses of gender, age, race, class, and militarism, the power relations implicated in these productions, how individuals identify with these subject positions, and how they enable and foreclose various child protection practices.

In studying these logics of protection and their related subject positions and identities, several further dimensions are important. To deepen the understanding that subject position construction occurs through differentiation from a constitutive other with varying degrees of difference from the self (L. Hansen 2006, 35–37), Lene Hansen argues that, particularly in discourses on foreign policy and security, the production of subject positions often involves spatial, temporal, and ethical dimensions (L. Hansen 2006, 41–45). This provides me with a useful theoretical basis to understand relationships between subject positioning, identity, policy, and practice in peacekeeping. Hansen argues that “[s]patiality, temporality, and ethicality are analytical lenses that bring out the important political substance of identity construction” (L. Hansen 2006, 42) as they reflect core issues such as how communities or states are bounded and demarcated, how they change or remain over time, and who holds responsibility, and cut across how subject positions and identities are gendered, age-based, and racialized. She notes that subject positions are “relationally

constituted and always involves the construction of boundaries and thereby the delineation of space” (L. Hansen 2006, 42). For instance, in a peacekeeping setting, this could be seen in seeing peacekeepers as representing the international community, as differentiated from national armed forces, or as responsible for a specific spatial area such as Darfur in the case of the former UN mission in Sudan. Spatial dimensions also often invoke colonial and orientalist discourses which, in the case of peacekeeping, produce the modern system of state sovereignty and the legitimation of intervention based on Western ideals that have been rendered the universal template for responsible states (Jabri 2017; Tabak 2020), or position certain Western-origin conceptions of childhood as universal and different, local childhoods as deviant and in need of correction (de Castro 2020; Tabak 2020).

Temporal dimensions of subject positioning provide a lens to examine how “discourses of religious, civilizational, political, and other forms of *progress* on the one hand and discourses of *intransience* on the other [emphasis in original]” contribute to the self and other (L. Hansen 2006, 43). Furthermore, “one might ask ... how the temporality of the Other is constituted in relation to the temporality of the Self” (L. Hansen 2006, 43), which may also invoke racialized or colonial ideas such as backwardsness vs. progressiveness or uncivilized vs. civilized, implying a linear, developmental progress with Europe(anness) as the universalized endpoint of progress (Grovogui 2001; P. Hansen 2004; L. Hansen 2006, 43; Stern 2011, 33–35). In a peacekeeping context, we might see temporal constructions of subjectivity in the idea of peacekeeping supporting a linear transition from war to (liberal) peace and the idea of a distinct war-peace separation that peacekeeping seeks to achieve, its relation to colonial tropes of intervening to end violence portrayed as “tribal” or “savage” and therefore pre-modern (Barkawi 2016; Eriksson Baaz and Verweijen 2018; Stern 2011, 33–35), or the urgency of providing protection or ending violence. Temporal dimensions also invoke the idea of childhood as a precursor to adulthood and the conception of children as future citizens-to-be rather than current political actors (Tabak 2020).

Finally, ideas of ethics and responsibility are clearly articulated in subject positions and identity in foreign policy and security discourses, particularly in peacekeeping. Hansen notes that a focus on ethical aspects of identity involves “the discursive construction of ethics, morality, and responsibility; with the moral force of particular representations, for instance of wars as ‘genocide’ and interventions as ‘humanitarian’; and ... the Self’s articulation of (non)responsibility towards the Other” (L. Hansen 2006, 45). These constructions clearly align with issues in peacekeeping such as the ethical responsibility of peacekeepers to protect civilians, especially women and children, respond to

various forms of violence, or act with integrity and respect towards the host community.

Drawing on this basis, the thesis explores the logics of protection produced through UN peacekeeping child protection, with a focus on how they structure relationships between peacekeepers and children and the subject positions they construct for peacekeepers and children. I particularly pay attention to how these subject positions are gendered and age-based, and how they are produced in relation to spatiality, temporality, and ethicality. I aim to do so in an intersectional manner, attending to how constructions of militarized and gendered subject positions and identity in relation to child protection are also raced and classed, for instance, and how spatial, temporal, and ethical dimensions may depend on gendered, racialized, or colonial ideas. As well, I also seek to understand how peacekeepers themselves identify or not with such subject positions and how they reproduce, contest, or disrupt them. In particular, building on the discussion in the previous section, I will examine when and how these constructions relate to children and childhood, such as the peacekeeper being a protector of children or the conception of children as future but not present subjects. Also vital is understanding to what extent peacekeeping discourse considers children's agency during war through the subject positions of children that peacekeeping practice assumes, and how children's experiences of agency may challenge these constructions.

This framework gives rise to questions for my empirical material such as: how do peacekeepers and peacekeeping guidance construct the protective relationship between peacekeepers and children, and what practices does this enable or exclude? How do peacekeepers and peacekeeping guidance produce gendered subject positions of peacekeepers and children, how do these subject positions relate to child protection practices and their assumed effectiveness, and how do peacekeepers reproduce or challenge these constructions? How do peacekeepers and peacekeeping guidance understand children and childhood in need of protection, do they acknowledge children's agency, and how do child protection practices depend on certain understandings of children? How do each of these areas of focus rely on racialized and colonial discourses, and how are they structured by temporality, spatiality, and ethicality?

Next, I first focus on ways in which children and childhood are often constructed in contexts of armed conflict and challenges to these conceptions from a focus on children's agency, before examining the production of gendered subject positions in peacekeeping more thoroughly. These areas of literature provide the needed depth to inform the questions I pose above and how I engage with my empirical material.

Children and Childhood: Representations and Agency

Children as actors and children and childhood as concepts and discursive constructs play an important role in considering how peacekeepers understand and carry out their child protection practices, in the logics of protection that influence child protection, and in how peacekeeping gendered subject positions and identities are constructed. Fields such as international relations and security studies have, until recently, largely ignored the role of children in the political world, usually only considering them as victims of conflict, and as emotionally powerful images that can motivate certain policies and responses (Beier 2020b; Berents 2019). Recently, these fields have increasingly taken children and childhood seriously in their scholarship, often from more critical perspectives. Earlier work has focused on how children are often portrayed uncritically as helpless victims of war as part of the category “womenandchildren” (Carpenter 2003; Enloe 1993, 166). This category both infantilizes women and denies agency to children, but previous scholarship on it has largely focused on separating women from children and considering women as actors, rather than also focusing on children (Jacob 2015). Especially drawing on the childhood studies literature, there has been increasing attention to both children as actors, and discourses on children and childhood, in literature dealing with issues of peace and conflict (e.g., Beier 2014; 2020a; Beier and Berents 2023; Berents 2020; Tabak 2020). A range of work has illustrated children’s agency and capacity for action and considers their involvement in war (e.g., Boyden 2007, 273–75; Drumbl 2012, 61–101; Jacob 2015, 16–18; Vigh 2006). Addressing these advances, Cecilia Jacob states that, “[children’s] presence is indeed instrumental and constitutive to the process of war” (Jacob 2015, 16).

Despite the recent expansion of literature on children, armed conflict, and global politics, there remains a lack of focus on peacekeeping, children, and child protection, whether or not from a gendered perspective. The primary focus in the existing literature in this area is on sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) perpetrated by peacekeepers, including against children, and subsequent children left behind after peacekeepers depart, alongside a few considerations of child soldiering and interactions with children. Since its initial exposure in the 1990s, the UN has grappled with ongoing revelations of SEA by peacekeepers against local civilians, particularly children (Blakemore, Freedman, and Lemay-Hébert 2019; Higate 2007; Martin 2005; Whitworth 2007). This issue has been extensively studied by Sabine Lee, Susan A Bartels, and their colleagues, in Haiti and DRC. They have investigated the role of poverty and access to resources in women’s and girl’s decisions to engage in sexual or

romantic relationships with peacekeepers; the experiences of peacekeeper-fathered children and the poverty and stigma they can face; and the perceptions of peacekeepers by locals related to SEA and how these actions undermine the efforts of the mission (Fraulin et al. 2021; King, Lee, and Bartels 2020; Lee and Bartels 2020; Vahedi, Bartels, and Lee 2020; 2021; Wagner et al. 2020). Further work has examined the gendered dimensions of SEA (further discussed in the next section of the chapter on gender and peacekeepers), the ways in which the UN has tried to safeguard children, and the effectiveness (or lack thereof) and impacts of these prevention measures (Blakemore, Freedman, and Lemay-Hébert 2019; Higate 2007; Jennings 2014; 2019).

Aside from this focus, there are only some anecdotes in the literature about gender and interactions between peacekeepers and children beyond SEA. A few papers have included some anecdotes from peacekeepers on their experience, such as women peacekeepers being seen as more approachable to children, and of being aware of gendered issues that men may miss (Dallaire, Whitman, and Holland 2016, 170). For instance, one of the women that Penttinen interviewed noted that her experience as a mother was a factor in leading her to act quickly and decisively to save a girl who had been forcibly recruited by an armed group in Sri Lanka (Penttinen 2013, 160). One peacekeeper interviewed by Singleton and Holohan noted that she thought male peacekeepers did not engage with women and children because of the rhetoric that women were more effective at this (Singleton and Holohan 2017, 243). However, to date it appears that there has been no systematic research on this topic, preventing us from drawing broader or more theoretical conclusions.

Drawing on this emerging and established literature on children and childhood, in my thesis I focus on two areas of theorization: first on how discourses on children and childhood are constructed, reproduced, and put into practice through the child protection practices of UN peacekeepers. Second, I consider children in peacekeeping locations as actors in relation to peacekeepers and their practices. These two foci allow me to both consider how children and childhood are understood by the UN and how this informs peacekeepers' practice, and how the practices of children, particularly child soldiers, directly interact with those of peacekeepers. A focus on children's agency during armed conflicts serves to challenge and disrupt dominant discourses on children and child protection, helping to reveal their gaps, contradictions, and openings for change.

Children, Childhood, and Child Soldiering

Before continuing, I first note that I particularly focus on children in armed forces and armed groups for two reasons, discuss what I mean by child soldiering and the terms I used to discuss it, and discuss who children are. Pragmatically, child soldiering is the focus of the research project that my PhD is part of, and the project aims to have practical impact on how UN peacekeeping can help prevent children being recruited during armed conflict. From a theoretical perspective, child soldiers are a group of children who can best exemplify my focus on protection and agency. As further discussed below, they are often portrayed as victims of the gravest violations during war, without agency to change their circumstances, but also fight, lead other soldiers, resist, and struggle for survival in ways that indicate agency.

All of the varying definitions or terms for child soldiering discussed below first depend on who counts as a child. The international legal standard of childhood has been set as anyone under 18 by the near-universally ratified Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), though this does not always align with social understandings of when childhood ends. The wide acceptance of this (primarily legal) definition means that it plays an important role in the empirical materials I draw on. However, children and childhood are more than legal definitions, and each element of childhood introduces diversity in who children are and their experiences and fuzziness in the boundaries of childhood. A key point for the definition of childhood is that it is constructed in opposition to adulthood, yet this relationship between the two is not often considered (Tabak 2020, 23). Perhaps the most obvious element of childhood is children's physical, psychological, and social development from birth to adulthood. Particularly for considering agency, there is clearly a vast difference in agentic capacities between a newborn and an adolescent who is almost an adult due to in part physical abilities, capacities for risk analysis and critical thinking, experiences to inform these skills, varying forms of education, personality, and more. This both of course varies individually between children, with no two children maturing along the same path, and extends past the child-adult cutoff of 18. Practically, this is widely acknowledged through both cultural norms about what is appropriate for children of varying ages to do, and what age children gain various legal rights and responsibilities (e.g. voting, driving, consuming alcohol, age of consent, age of criminal responsibility, if children can be legally emancipated). Childhood is also a strongly culturally specific and gendered phenomenon, involving norms about what practices it is appropriate or inappropriate for children of a given age and gender to engage in, what practices, rituals, or events mark transitions within childhood or to adulthood and at what ages, and how children should relate to other family members, adults,

and the broader community (Brocklehurst 2015; Cook 2009; D’Costa 2015; Oswell 2013; de Castro 2020; Tabak 2020). Consequently, the definition of children as anyone under 18 tends to obscure a great diversity among children in terms of their identity, experiences, and capacities and may not align with children’s own or a community’s understandings of who they are.

In contrast to these complexities of childhood, the international response to child soldiering and child protection more broadly produces a more universalized and standardized construction of childhood, which is key for my analysis of how UN peacekeeping addresses child soldiering. Jana Tabak analyses the discourses on child soldiering produced by the UN, NGOs, and international law, demonstrating how they (re)produce a certain vision of a progressive, orderly, and modern international community (Tabak 2020). Through international law such as the CRC, policy documents such as the Paris Principles, and discourses produced by children’s rights organizations such as UNICEF, in the realm of international development, peace and security, and humanitarian aid, childhood has been produced as a universal experience, lasting from birth until age 18. This reflects the “modern conception of childhood” identified by childhood studies, which includes the ideas that children are inherently innocent, irrational, and vulnerable, develop along a more or less set trajectory towards adulthood, and following this trajectory will turn them into a responsible adult citizen (Tabak 2020, 20–26). Tabak identifies this universal ideal of childhood as the “world-child,” which “speaks of an abstract and generalized child as if all children, irrespective of age, gender, culture, social class, race, and other particularities, shared an essential set of immutable characteristics and needs” (Tabak 2020, 47). While this is portrayed as a natural and universal conception of childhood, it is rooted in a specific and relatively recent Western conception of childhood, in which the development of children’s rights as part of the human rights regime has played an important role. In both these discourses and mainstream research on children and armed conflict, understandings of childhood that are Eurocentric, orientalist, and reinforce colonial relationships of dependence and protection are thus perpetuated (Beier 2020b; de Castro 2020; 2021; D’Costa 2015; Tabak 2020). Of particular note is how the universalization of the Northern/Western conception of childhood enables the production of childhoods seen as located in the South as potentially deviant. De Castro argues that “the child located in the far-off ‘Global South’ is thought to play a significant role in bringing about embodied differences and particularities to such a universalized view of the child” (de Castro 2020, 50), which enables a “colonial difference” between “between the universalized notion of childhood (towards which all childhoods should aim at) and its diversity to be invariably found in the Southern world depicted as *other, traditional, non-modern* and

embodied [emphasis in original]” (de Castro 2020, 51). Southern childhoods then are seen as not yet arrived at the ideal of the modern universal understanding of childhood, troublingly linking discourses on children’s rights and child protection to those of colonialism. Consequently, a thread through much of my analysis is understanding how peacekeeping practices relate to universalized constructions of childhood such as Tabak’s world-child and colonial ideas of Southern children as other, traditional, etc.

Similarly to childhood, the phenomenon of child soldiering is empirically complex, legally contested, and has given rise to a range of different labels for children in armed forces and armed groups in practice, policy, and scholarship. Several overlapping terms are commonly used, such as child soldier, child soldiering, recruitment and use of children, child combatant, junior soldier, and children associated with armed forces and armed groups (CAAFAG). A patchwork of different treaties of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), International Human Rights Law (IHRL), and International Criminal Law (ICL) set a variety of different age limits and prohibitions for children to take part in armed conflict, differing between state armed forces and non-state armed groups, and which treaties a given state has ratified. It is not necessary to go into the fine-grained details of these definitions, who uses them, and why in the thesis (For a detailed discussion, see Legassicke, Johnson, and Gribbin 2023).

For this thesis, I adopt the term child soldiering for the practice of children taking part in armed conflict as members of or being associated with state armed forces and non-state armed groups, considering children as anyone under 18 as this is the definition that the UN uses in child protection work, while keeping in mind the social construction of childhood and the great diversity among children discussed above. To refer to these children I use the common term “child soldier” for clarity among readers of various disciplines and “child soldiering” to refer to the practice of being a child soldier.¹³ Soldier and soldiering should be seen as broad terms, following the Paris Principles used by the UN and other child protection actors (UNICEF 2007). These terms do not refer only to those who carry a weapon or participate in combat, but also encompass other tasks that support armed forces and groups such as carrying messages or supplies, collecting intelligence, domestic tasks, or sexual slavery. These primarily apply to non-state armed groups, which do not always have as clear membership distinctions as state armed forces. It is also important to note that children of any gender can participate in soldiering, despite the stereotypical images of a boy carrying a weapon (Denov 2012; Kapur and Thompson

¹³ Note that I settled on this terminology after publishing the first paper in my thesis, *Women as the Essential Protectors of Children?*, so it does not always conform to this standard.

2021).¹⁴ These choices both help me approach the issue with a similar understanding to UN child protection actors as who is a child in need of protection from recruitment, and allow me to deconstruct the underlying assumptions about children's innocence, vulnerability, and lack of agency.

The Discursive Construction of Child Soldiers

Previous scholarship on child soldiering has, among other aspects, focused on how child soldiers are discursively produced in international law and policy, and how these conceptions of child soldiers often clash with the lived experience of these children. This is particularly the case when considering the agency that children exercise during armed conflict. As noted before, a broader range of scholarship has also analyzed the role of children and childhood in concepts such as protective masculinity and the definition of civilians. Children are seen as paradigmatically in need of protection and positioned in relation to the masculine protector. The child soldier seems to both strongly invoke the need for protection of that child from those who would recruit them, and potentially position the child as a threat requiring protection against. It may even position the child soldier as a protector in their own right.

Global discourses and legal mandates position children as the object of protection of adults and the state, particularly through the CRC's focus on the "best interests of the child" rather than the child's views, while their denial of children's agency removes the possibility of children being involved in their own protection (Tabak 2020, 55–57). When it comes to child soldiers specifically, Tabak identifies two discourses that are prominent: a discourse of the law that "build[s] an insurmountable barrier between child and soldier" (Tabak 2020, 73), and a discourse of norms that portrays child soldiers as either: dangerous (both directly as perpetrators of violence, and more broadly as a threat to a peaceful, orderly future); as innocent victims of adults; or as "redeemed heroes" who have overcome the adversity of their wartime experiences to become normal or even exceptional adults (Tabak 2020, 73–96; see also Denov 2012). Consequently, child soldiers are defined as abnormal or deviant from the proper conception and course of childhood, and thus become an international problem requiring intervention (Tabak 2020, 73). As protection of children, seen as the maintenance of the world-child as the proper role for children, is the responsibility of adults and the state, the presence of child soldiers in a

¹⁴ Note that the Dallaire Institute uses the terms "children recruited and used by armed forces and armed groups" or "children recruited and used in armed violence." I chose to not adopt this language as "use" reproduces the discourse that child soldiers are purely victims of adult commanders and do not exercise meaningful agency in their soldiering, a position I wish to challenge through this thesis. Thank you to Jana Tabak (if memory serves correctly) for pointing out this issue during a workshop.

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state, especially in its national forces, demonstrates the failure of that state to live up to its modern commitments. Consequently, this binary between the world-child and deviant children such as child soldiers also helps to uphold the regulation of the modern state system through dividing responsible, modern states from those that are not, and casting the use of child soldiers as a threat to the international order requiring immediate intervention (Tabak 2020, 83–96). Recalling the previous discussion of how the world-child is based on a universalization of particular Western/Northern understandings of childhood and a colonial othering of different childhoods in the South, we can see how this conception of child soldiering reflects and reinforces the positioning of the North as modern and progressive, and reveals peacekeeping, in part a response to child soldiering, as problematically colonial or imperial (Bakaki and Hinkkainen 2016; Macmillan 2009; Pugh 2004; Tabak 2020).

This way of understanding who children in areas of armed conflict are has important ramifications for what protection practices are endorsed, rejected, or left unthought. Katrina Lee-Koo writes that:

dominant conceptualisations of children as ‘innocent victims’ has animated an agenda that focuses primarily upon their victimisation that, in turn, reinforces the legitimacy of the protection ethic. It argues that this excludes a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of children in conflict. In this sense, the agenda is closed to exploring the ways in which children resist, adapt, shape, and survive conflict in ways that position them as agents of their own protection and – in some circumstances – agents of community resilience amidst conflict” (Lee-Koo 2018, 57).

This is not to deny that the protection of children from the harms caused by armed conflict is not important. However, the reproduction and operation of these discourses denies children’s experiences of armed conflict that deviate from the perpetrator-victim-redeemed hero construction, ignores their capacity for political agency, and fails to acknowledge that children may be able to play a part in their own protection. It also indicates that we should interrogate the different ways we consider militarized children across space and time. For instance, Tabak and Denov both point out how we deny any agency to modern children fighting in liberation struggles while praising children who joined the anti-Nazi resistance during WWII or fought for the Union in the US Civil War. Or, how we see the recruitment of sixteen and seventeen year old children in Northern states like the US, UK, and Canada as an important part of producing responsible adults, while seeing child soldiers recruited elsewhere as being a threat to their future in adulthood (Denov 2012; Tabak 2020, 123–26).

Tabak concludes that we can use a focus on child soldiering to denaturalize and challenge the structure and reproduction of the current international order

and better acknowledge the diversity of childhoods (Tabak 2020, 129–30). Most importantly, this also contributes a more critical and theoretical voice to increasing calls for child protection practice to take a more nuanced view of the use of child soldiers, particularly in acknowledging their agency and the degree of voluntariness of their recruitment (e.g., Charles and Fowler-Watt 2020; Drumbl 2012; Jacob 2015; Utas 2005). Tabak writes that “(re)producing the child-soldier phenomenon as an international emergency that needs to be urgently resolved by external others is not necessarily the best or only way of respecting these children, engaging with them, or, indeed, rescuing them” (Tabak 2020, 126).

While Tabak focuses on how these discourses are produced through international law, high-level UN documents, and by UN headquarters staff, she notes that they are also echoed by child protection practitioners working in conflict-affected areas. Consequently, it is likely that these discourses also shape the work of UN peacekeepers involved in child protection. For instance, we could see that the UN (re)produces discourses that construct a subject position that it is assumed that children identify with, enabling and justifying certain practices to protect children and excluding others. Yet, do children actually identify with or conform to that assumed subject position which portrays them as primarily vulnerable, dependent, and lacking meaningful agency? This understanding of how children and childhood are commonly perceived by child protection actors thus aides me in interpreting how UN peacekeeping child protection policymakers and practitioners understand children, and how it relates to the broader politics of international intervention.

Understanding Children as Actors

This image of the child soldier, or more broadly the child affected by armed conflict, centrally depends on a denial of children’s agency. Children are portrayed as too irrational, immature, and lacking decision making or risk analysis skills to make meaningful decisions about their future, especially in grave situations such as armed conflict. While there is some truth in this understanding of children’s capacities, especially for younger children, it ignores the diversity in these capacities across ages and between different children. We all intuitively understand that we do not suddenly go from being agencyless to fully agential when we turn 18, and the CRC and national laws on children reflect this. However, when it comes to addressing children affected by armed conflict, their agency is ignored or denied, such as by putting quote marks around “voluntary” recruitment. This is reinforced by gender with girls in general being seen as less capable of agency and particularly vulnerable to violence, especially sexual violence, and their participation in armed conflict has often

been ignored or portrayed in highly gender-stereotypical ways (Martuscelli and Bandarra 2020; Mazurana et al. 2002; Utas 2005). Research with children affected by armed conflict in a variety of contexts has similarly demonstrated both the ways in which children exercise agency in navigating their environment, and the constraints imposed on that due to age, violence, experience, information, and other factors (e.g., Brett and Specht 2004; Denov 2012; Drumbl 2012; Honwana 2006, 44–47; Kovats-Bernat 2014, 33; Vigh 2006; 2009). Taking a more nuanced approach to children affected by armed conflict, including child soldiers, is a central concern of my project, and is vital for advancing research on peacekeeping to more constructively engage with the social relationships that both peacekeepers and host communities are embedded in (Jacob 2015, 22).

While my empirical focus is on peacekeepers and peacekeeping documents, and I did not interview children for my thesis, it is important to specifically understand children's agency in order to understand whether and how peacekeeping child protection discourses take agency into account. For instance, my focus on practice-oriented documents and interviews with peacekeepers includes analysis of whether and how they reproduce the higher-level discourse on children's lack of agency identified above, or where they challenge or disagree with it. This enables me to consider how peacekeeping practices are shaped by consideration of children's agency or lack thereof, whether some practices are ignored or not developed due to how they would involve children's agency, and tensions between this global discourse on children and peacekeepers' actual experiences in dealing with children.

Recalling the theoretical discussion of agency in the previous section, I next discuss how agency has generally been considered with respect to children and armed conflict, and what specific approach is helpful in my analysis to better situate children's agency in war. My purpose is to both understand how agency appears in discourses on children, and to contrast this the capacities and forms of agency that children possess as discussed in existing literature. Iuliia Hoban notes that “[t]he discursive construction of agency allows for examining the ways in which subjects are ascribed with an agency in various discursive practices and the meanings attributed to such representations of agency” (Hoban 2020, 297), a perspective that enables me to analyze how agency is represented in peacekeeping discourses and what practices this enables or proscribes. The account of agency advanced in global discourses on child protection as identified by Tabak takes a binary view of agency, where one either has it or does not. This flows from an understanding of the rational, independent adult who is an “autonomous and absolute subject” (Vigh 2009, 432). Such an account of subjectivity has been thoroughly critiqued, as

discussed previously about the construction of subject positions and identities. Summarizing the poststructuralist dismantling of this form of subjectivity, Jenny Edkins and Véronique Pin-Fat write that “[t]he picture of the rational, conscious, autonomous individual has vanished. In its place, what we have is a subjectivity that is bound up with the social or symbolic order” (Edkins and Pin-Fat 1999, 4). To move beyond this when it comes to children and their agency, we need a more nuanced account of agency that is both socially situated and takes account of individual capacities and experiences, whether of children or adults. The concept of social navigation is particularly suited for this need. Developed by Henrik Vigh based on research with youth involved in and effected by armed conflict in Guinea Bissau, along with Guinean migrants in Portugal (Vigh 2006, 49–50; 2009, 420–21), social navigation provides a lens to understand how individuals deal with changing social forces and an uncertain future to the best of their ability, and through my analysis I primarily use the insights from social navigation to locate and understand examples of children’s agency and how it is represented in peacekeeping discourses. Vigh argues that:

Social navigation entails simultaneously moving toward a distant future location or condition (that is, movement toward future positions and possibilities), *and* making one’s way across immediate and proximate oncoming changes and forces of the near future. ... our environments and futures are, in such situations, contingent upon our knowledge of the past, our experience of the here and now as well as the emergent or potential possibilities and difficulties within it, entailing that the map is never a static set of coordinates but a dense and multi-dimensional imaginary, which is constantly in the process of coming into being [emphasis in original] (Vigh 2009, 429).

Engaging in social navigation requires both action and deliberation, as Vigh notes that “[w]e act, adjust and attune our strategies and tactics in relation to the way we experience and imagine and anticipate the movement and influence of social forces” (Vigh 2009, 420). It also incorporates attention to the role of power, both in how social forces affect individuals, and how individuals exercise power through the relations they have to navigate the social world. Using this perspective we can also connect how children or others in highly disadvantaged situations navigate modalities of power and subjectifying discourses that we might otherwise see as overwhelming their capacity to resist or subvert. Social navigation thus “highlights the limits of the power embedded in our capacity to define and control our social worlds. In other words, no matter what the level of power, we are never completely free to move as we want” (Vigh 2009, 432). This understanding of agency incorporates attention to both dynamic social forces, an individual’s complex social context, and individual

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capacities, experiences, and limitations. It is also dynamic, allowing for attention to changes in both the individual and in the social world. And it does not rely on an assumed or clear separation in agency between children and adults, both of whom navigate the social world based on their capacities, experiences, access to power, and other factors and are both capable of or subject to rational calculations, social pressures, coercion, ignorance, and more (Kovats-Bernat 2014, 38; Utas 2005; Vigh 2009).

Particularly for addressing child soldiering, this perspective on agency provides the needed complexity for considering their experiences. In their study on the voluntary recruitment of older children into armed forces and groups, Brett and Specht concisely describe the combination of vulnerability and political agency that (some) children experience:

Adolescence is a time of vulnerability with the uncertainties and turbulence of physical, mental and emotional development. It is also a time of opportunities with greater freedom, developing understand of one's own identity and place in the community and society, and a new capacity to make choices and to take on responsibilities ... it is a time when injustice and its unacceptability are strongly felt (Brett and Specht 2004, 3).

On average, younger children are less physically, mentally, and emotionally developed than older children, while still possessing a developing identity and sense of fairness at the very least, while these processes do not cease at 18 either and in some cases can go on for much longer. Vulnerability and agency should not be interpreted as mutually exclusive either. For instance, political agency in pursuit of a cause a child believes in could also be a vulnerability to being recruited by an armed group pursuing that goal. So while children and child soldiers do exercise agency during war, they do so in the face of serious external constraints. This can include actions that may negate their agency, such as forced recruitment; actions that make it difficult to do anything other than comply with the orders of adults, such as severe punishments and threats; and the lack of information and misinformation that is prevalent during war that makes decisions difficult. Added to this are various material and social pressures, such as poverty, hunger, abuse and violence at home or in the community, or social and peer pressure to defend the community or support a cause (Brett and Specht 2004; Bøås and Hatløy 2008; Kovats-Bernat 2014, 33; O'Neil and Broeckhoven 2018; Utas 2005; Willems 2022). Once a member of an armed force or group, children are subjected to discipline and measures to prevent their desertion or escape, which can include extreme violence or death. Despite this, many children choose to leave armed groups and forces to escape violence or due to unfulfilled promises of education or resources, or find other more minor ways of resisting such as intentionally missing when firing on their

opponents during battles (Denov 2012; Denov and Ricard-Guay 2013; Honwana 2006, 59–60, 63–68). Consequently, child soldiers experience a combination of “victimisation, participation and resistance” (Denov 2012, 286), yet they still “carefully and deliberately navigate the terrain of war, as well as highlighting their capacity for reflexivity, power and resilience” (Denov 2012, 284), even during the most extreme circumstances of warfare. Thus, rather than seeing such children simplistically as always victimized and at the whim of vicious adults, we can understand the agency involved in navigating and surviving difficult circumstances (Denov 2012; Drumbl 2012; Utas 2005).

These approaches to understanding children and child soldiers in the context of UN peacekeeping allow me to emphasize the power relations in which children are involved, their relational position as actors, and symbols in and victims of war and peacebuilding, and that they are involved in their own protection, not just recipients of it (Jacob 2015, 22–24; Lee-Koo 2018). Thus, I identify two main theoretical lenses with which to view the involvement of children and childhood in UN peacekeeping child protection. First, I can examine how children and child soldiers are constructed in peacekeeping child protection discourses that emerge in Security Council Resolutions, international policies, military doctrine, and training materials. Second, I can understand children and child soldiers as actors embedded in various power dynamics and relations to other actors, including peacekeepers, and who are more than just passive victims of adult conflicts. This understanding of children’s agency is then important for how it is or is not reproduced in discourses on children and peacekeeping and therefore whether and to what extent peacekeeping child protection practices account for children’s agency.

These two approaches meet in considering the practices and experiences of peacekeepers. How are peacekeepers’ understandings of the children encountered in their work framed by the prevalent global discourses of childhood and child protection? Do they shift as they interact with children in the mission location? Does their training and guidance portray children as actors or only passive victims? How are these discourses and attendant understandings gendered? In the next section, I turn to considering in more detail how the gendered subject positions of peacekeepers, principally from the military component, are constructed and their relation to conceptions of childhood through the idea of the protector.

Gendered Subject Positions in Peacekeeping

Dag Hammarskjöld, the second Secretary-General of the UN and one of the pioneers of UN peacekeeping, reportedly said that “peacekeeping is too important to be undertaken by soldiers ... [but] soldiers are the only ones who can do it” (DeGroot 2001, 33). This view has since been updated by the idea that peacekeepers need to be “soldier-diplomats,” capable of carrying out negotiation and de-escalation alongside more traditional military practices (Rubinstein 2008, 99), since peacekeeping is not a traditional military mission, and prioritizes different qualities and values than war fighting while maintaining some need for martial abilities. Current UN guidance emphasizes the combination of military and peacekeeping-specific training to prepare soldiers for peacekeeping missions (Department of Peace Operations 2020). However, skills and dispositions that are pointed to as being crucial for peacekeeping, such as negotiation, de-escalation, building trust, and empathy are often seen as feminine attributes that would erode the masculinity of soldiers (Whitworth 2007, 151–72), and so they are often not prioritized in general military training or culture (Curran 2013, 80–81; Singleton and Holohan 2017, 225–29; Whitworth 2007, 153–59). Despite this, it is seldom questioned whether soldiers should be involved in peacekeeping in the first place (Whitworth 2007, 137). These conflicts between what is required of peacekeepers, and how militarized masculinities are constructed and performed, is raised as a fundamental challenge to current forms of peacekeeping, with Sandra Whitworth arguing that “[c]aring, emotive human beings who feel a connection with other human beings are not, it seems, what most militaries are looking for ... [but] these may be the very qualities that are required of anyone involved in missions aimed at keeping, creating, promoting, or maintaining something called *peace* [emphasis in original]” (Whitworth 2007, 172).¹⁵ Nevertheless, soldiers remain the core of current peacekeeping missions.

Most peacekeepers receive as little as a short predeployment training before being sent to the mission and are expected to primarily rely on their existing military training (Cutillo 2013). Consequently, we might expect then that dominant forms of militarized masculinity and femininity enacted in contributor state militaries would continue to be reproduced by peacekeepers on deployment. Much research has focused on how militarized masculinities

¹⁵ I think it is important to highlight that I agree with this critique of peacekeeping and believe that the basis of peacekeeping on the military needs to be reimagined. At the same time I believe that peacekeepers do sometimes need to be armed, and pragmatically soldiers will continue to be the majority of peacekeepers, so it is important to engage with the current peacekeeping system while remaining critical and imagining alternatives.

contribute to peacekeeping failures, particularly abuses that peacekeepers perpetrate such as sexual violence against civilians, torture, and racist attacks (e.g., Higate and Henry 2009, 152–54; Martin 2005; Razack 2004; Whitworth 2007; c.f., Higate 2007). As noted above, this mismatch between militarized masculinities and peacekeeping tasks and values presents a fundamental challenge to peacekeeping. However, there are also shifts in how military gendered identities are enacted in the contexts of peacekeeping and other peace support operations. These peacekeepers and peacebuilders produce “softer” forms of militarized masculinity in contrast to more traditional militarized masculinities seen as too violent and aggressive for work outside of combat. Instead, they prioritize collaboration, working with civilian and humanitarian actors, and “winning hearts and minds”, while remaining firm enough to provide harder forms of security (Duncanson 2013, 46–50, 60; Khalili 2011, 1487–91; Sanghera, Henry, and Higate 2008, 4). Claire Duncanson argues that these shifts and their influence on peacekeeping and peacebuilding practice are important to pay attention to, and are not negated by the totalizing nature of military institutions or patriarchy (Duncanson 2013, 46–50), and the understanding of power and subject positioning discussed above also demonstrate the potential for resistance and change even within such discourses and institutions. Consequently, it is important to build on my previous discussion of the construction and reproduction of subject positions and identities to examine how they are produced in gendered, intersectional ways in military contexts, how they relate to children and childhood, and enable or prevent certain peacekeeping practices.

To do so, I focus on how gendered subject positions are produced using the concepts of masculinities and femininities, and the specific forms they take in military and peacekeeping contexts. Connell writes that “‘Masculinity’, to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture” (Connell 2012, 71). This approach understands gender as a social practice, connected with but not reducible to the body, and masculinity and femininity are “configurations of gender practice” (Connell 2012, 72). The most obvious site for the understanding of gender is at the level of the individual, which is situated in larger sites of “discourse, ideology or culture” and the gendered configuration of institutions such as the military or the state (Connell 2012, 72–73). Connell argues that gender is structured in at least three important sets of relations, those of power (as seen in the domination of men over women in patriarchy), of production (as seen in gendered divisions of labour), and of cathexis (as seen in the investment of emotional and sexual energy). As

gender is a social practice that is productive of subject positions and identities, it intersects with other such forms of social ordering like race and class to produce specific masculinities and femininities, such as white men's masculinities and their relation to white women's femininities and black men's masculinities (Connell 2012, 73–75; Crenshaw 1989). Consequently, we can analyze how masculinities and femininities structure “stereotypes, behavioral norms and rules assigned to people based on their perceived membership in sex categories” (Sjoberg 2007, 84), the binary patriarchal construction of gender that places men in a position of domination over women (Connell 2012; Gentry 2016, 19), how masculinities are not always produced through opposition to femininities (Henry 2017, 188), and how masculinities and femininities are “liable to be contested, reconstructed, or displaced” (Connell 2002, 37) through social processes and power relations.

Masculinity and femininity are not monolithic, and in any given context there are multiple forms of masculinity and femininity that are produced through people's actions and relations, and internal contradictions make them unstable (Connell 2002, 35–37). There are hierarchical relations between and among different masculinities and femininities, with certain ways of enacting masculinity being dominant, hegemonic, and/or more socially valued, implicating power relations and violence in their maintenance (Connell 2012). These hegemonic forms tend to be fragile, especially in the military, and require constant reinforcement to be maintained against the contradictions between their promises and lived experience (Whitworth 2007, 165–66). As well, certain forms of femininity are sometimes constructed as superior to certain forms of masculinity, usually through intersections with racial and class hierarchies, such as with women in the US military in Afghanistan and Iraq compared to local men (Khalili 2011, 1475; Sjoberg 2007, 93–95).

Masculinities and femininities are also embodied, not just discursive in nature. R.W. Connell writes that while men's bodies do not determine masculinity, “men's enactment of gender constantly involves bodily experience” (Connell 2002, 36), and the same can be said of femininities and those who enact them. The discursive production of masculinities and femininities both draws upon notions of biological sex and bodily difference to articulate and naturalize the division of gender into men and women or even deny the existence of gender entirely through seeing gender as biologically determined, and seeks to regulate and discipline bodies to conform to gendered bodily norms (Corredor 2019; Morgan 1993; Shildrick 1997). The focus on disciplining the body towards a gendered idealization comes at the expense of individual bodies that do not conform, as is visible in the military and its regulation of dress, appearance, and fitness (Morgan 1993; Whitworth 2007). As well, different ways of

bodily enactment of gender between men and women help to reproduce dominant gendered subject positions and draw attention to or away from the body, such as the stereotype that women express their emotions through the body in a way that men do not (Morgan 1993). While the meaning of different bodies in relation to gender is produced through discourses, bodies are biological and material and always escape discursive attempts to regulate them, requiring constant attempts at maintenance and enforcement of subject positions in relation to the body (Shildrick 1997; Stern and Strand 2022). While I do not focus substantially on bodily dimensions of gender in my analysis, it is important to consider how physical expression of gender, such as how women are expected to look so they can be known as women, is understood by peacekeepers to be important in practices such as engagement.

Neither are masculinities and femininities independent aspects of the constitution of individual subject positions and identities; rather they always interact with other vectors of identity and hierarchies such as race, ethnicity, and class to produce individuals with shifting, complex identities and subject positions. Consequently, an intersectional attention to the co-constitution of gender, race, class, sexuality, and other vectors of identity is important when considering masculinities and femininities (Duncanson 2013, 31–34; Khalili 2011, 1474–76; Young 2003, 19–20). Prevalent and hegemonic conceptions of masculinities and femininities, how they are ordered and related to one another, and the hierarchies and power dynamics between them depend heavily on class, sexuality, and race. For instance, patriarchal power relations and subject positions are inextricable from the definition of heterosexuality as natural and homosexuality as deviant and linked to femininity. These discourses further construct the white, middle or upper class, heterosexual man as the norm, naturalizing this subject position while producing all others as lesser or inferior in various ways (Connell 2012; Morgan 1993).

An intersectional analysis considers how multiple forms of identity are not parallel and separable, but intersect and produce combinations that are not merely additive. Such an approach is widespread now in the social sciences and beyond, and is based primarily on the pioneering work of Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989; 1991). Her analysis is rooted in examining how the American feminist and antiracist movements' failure to adopt an intersectional perspective often failed or compounded the harms to those at the intersection of identities, particularly Black women and women of colour. Examining employment discrimination, domestic violence, rape, and their portrayal in popular culture, social scientific research, and legal proceedings, she examines how the feminist movement has tended to advance arguments based on the experience of white women, and the antiracist movement on the experience of Black men.

Consequently, each of these movements neglected the specific experiences, needs, and politics of Black women and women of colour (Crenshaw 1989; 1991). She argues that such an analysis should not be confined to only the specific contexts she examined, but is important for considering other marginalizations and differences (Crenshaw 1991, 1299).

Intersectional analysis has become a staple of feminist research, including in IR and studying the military, and is important for my project as well. As elaborated further below, peacekeeping missions are sites where gender, class, national, racial, and other identities intersect and where gender cannot be studied separately. In using intersectionality, however, it is important to retain links to its original purpose of strengthening and bringing together antiracist and feminist struggles (Henry 2017, 185). Marsha Henry notes that the use of intersectionality in some studies of military masculinities risks denying its political potential by focusing on already-privileged groups without connection to broader structures of power, and by its use instrumentally or as a sensitizing concept (Henry 2017, 189–91). I view it as critical for my project to understand not just the specific gendered dynamics of child protection in UN peacekeeping, but their relation to broader structures of power in society, and the wider relations between peacekeeping as a form of international intervention and global inequalities (Pugh 2004, 41). Consequently, my analysis aims at not just being scholarly, but aims at advancing understanding and critique of the gendered basis of the military in order to transform the ability of peacekeeping to better provide protection (Cockburn and Hubic 2002, 116–19) and escaping the problem-solving mindset that constrains the potential of standard approaches to gender in the UN (Whitworth 2007, 119–21), while being cognizant of the discourses of intervention, protection, and trusteeship common in UN peacekeeping that derive from colonial roots and reflect modern forms of imperialism (Pugh 2004, 41–42; Whitworth 2007, 185).

Militarized and Peacekeeping Masculinities and Femininities

Militaries as organizations tend to rely on and reify certain forms of militarized masculinities,¹⁶ and identity as a soldier is often bound up with the enactment of such masculinities (Connell 2002, 38; Enloe 1993, 73; Whitworth 2007, 159–61). In militarized environments, masculinity often becomes associated with “authority, coercion and violence” (Cockburn 2013, 32), cast in contrast

¹⁶ The term militarized masculinities is used, rather than military masculinity, to reflect both that they are established through militarizing processes, not already existing in society or the military, and that there are plural masculinities being enacted in military institutions, not just a single masculinity pervading the military (Henry 2017, 187–88).

to a femininity that is weak, peaceful, and in need of protection. This gendered, hierarchical dichotomy between masculine war and feminine peace, between masculine protector and feminine protected, is central to broader constructions of gender in society and is most strongly reinforced in the military (Kaplan 1994, 124; Stiehm 1982, 374; Young 2003, 2). Militarized masculinities prioritize and value bodily, behavioural, cultural, and affective qualities that are reinforced as being essential to practices of soldiering, such as:

[C]ourage and endurance; physical and psychological strength; rationality; toughness; obedience; discipline; patriotism; lack of squeamishness; avoidance of certain emotions such as fear, sadness, uncertainty, guilt, remorse, and grief; and heterosexual competency (Whitworth 2007, 160).

While many of these ideals also underlie masculinities more generally, they are more explicitly connected to combat, violence, and brotherhood in the military. Militarized masculinities are produced and perpetuated through military training, institutional cultures and rules, and the practices of soldiers to police what is considered properly manly and soldierly (Ombati 2015, 409; Stiehm 1982, 371–72; Taber 2009, 27–29; Whitworth 2007, 151–59). Often central to their construction is a hierarchical, dichotomous relationship between “(masculine)war/(feminized)peace” (Duncanson 2013, 66), where values of militarized masculinities are constituted by a denigrated, feminine Other. However, this picture of militarized masculinities has been nuanced by the acknowledgement of the importance of traditionally feminine values such as “sacrifice, compassion, and cooperation” and that militarized masculinities are not always produced through opposition to femininity (Belkin 2012; Titunik 2008). The centrality of militarized masculinities to military practice then contributes to resistance to including more women or those of “othered” groups in the military, for fear of their presence undermining these constructions and the myths they depend on (Whitworth 2007, 162–63).

Furthermore, there are a range of militarized masculinities produced in militaries, with differences between units, such as between infantry and artillery (Sion 2008, 572) or between air and ground units (Duncanson 2013, 98–99), and differences between national militaries with some less emphasizing violence and aggression (Duncanson 2013, 85–87; Haaland 2013, 69–72). While much of this research has focused on Western militaries, especially those of the US, UK, and Canada, a number of scholars have explored the forms of militarized masculinities in other states, including in the Global South (e.g., Haaland 2013; Ombati 2015) and in non-military institutions such as the police (Bevan and MacKenzie 2012). Of course, not all soldiers enact the militarized masculinities present in their militaries completely or exclusively, and the

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multiplicity of masculinities, their dynamism, and internal contradictions all provide space for avoidance, subversion, and resistance (Connell 2002, 36–37; Taber 2009, 29).

While most militaries remain overwhelmingly male in their membership, women are increasingly recruited and involved in war, leading to changes in militarized masculinities, and the construction of militarized femininities. Many militaries have increased the proportion of women serving over the last few decades, and opened more or all roles, including combat, to women. However, the inclusion of women in the military does not automatically challenge the masculine culture of the institution. Women often adopt various strategies to gain acceptance, which can include enacting militarized masculinities themselves, or emphasizing femininity in ways that do not threaten the attributes or dominance of militarized masculinities (Ombati 2015, 408–11; Sion 2008, 569–70). Such acceptance is contingent and fragile, however, and does little to challenge the underlying gender regime of the military (Duncanson 2013, 100–101; Sion 2008, 572). Despite the opening of roles and some women enacting militarized masculinities, women in the military continue to serve primarily in roles that are seen as appropriately feminine, such as nursing or administrative work, including in peacekeeping missions, even when they are qualified for a broader range of tasks (Karim and Beardsley 2017, 74–81; Sion 2008, 575–80).

Some scholars have also focused specifically on militarized femininities, particularly in the context of the American military in the Global War on Terror. While there are important differences between counterinsurgency and peacekeeping, there has been significant influence of the former on the latter, visible in the militarization of missions like MINUSMA in Mali and MONUSCO in DRC (Gauthier Vela 2021; Russo 2021). This is also apparent in the adoption of language and practice from the War on Terror in peacekeeping, such as female engagement teams and discussion of the “human terrain” (Department of Peace Operations 2020). Consequently, these insights are also relevant for peacekeeping, especially where counterinsurgency-focused militaries are involved in peacekeeping or training other states’ peacekeepers.

The development and acceptance of militarized femininity in the US military has departed from what might be viewed as appropriately feminine activities such as engaging civilians and humanitarian work to an emphasis on women being just as capable and lethal soldiers as men, while not compromising a white, middle class femininity (Dyvik 2014, 411–12; Greenburg 2017, 1112; Sjoberg 2007, 83–85). Two currents can be seen in this development of militarized femininities, one more focused on a “softer” approach to counterinsurgency emphasizing women’s role in “winning hearts and minds” and

procuring intelligence that men cannot access (Dyvik 2014, 410), and the other on women being lethal soldiers on par with men and taking part in special forces operations (Greenburg 2017, 1120–21). While both of these constructions of militarized femininity have been explicitly promoted in the US military, the second would seem to present a greater challenge to militarized masculinities due to its emphasis on women in combat, and proponents of women in the US military of explicitly focused on women's involvement in combat to gain greater acceptance in the military (Greenburg 2017, 1118). However, several public accounts have illustrated the importance of race and class in allowing this inclusion of women while still protecting militarized masculinities. In particular, military women's white middle class femininity and motherhood is emphasized alongside their combat roles, and this "acceptable" form of femininity helps to neutralize the threat to militarized masculine identity (Greenburg 2017, 1119–21).

Finally, militarized masculinities intersect with race, class, nationality, and other forms of identity in important ways. Difference based on race and sexuality are often important in the construction of militarized masculinities (depending on the national context), for instance with denigration taking racist and homophobic forms during training and until recently being largely official policy (Whitworth 2007, 161). As noted in the discussion of protection above, gendered logics of protection produce protective masculinities in relation both to women and children in need of protection, as well as to a threatening and often foreign or racialized masculinity (Young 2003, 19). As well, there are often class differences between soldiers of different ranks and units (Duncanson 2013, 79–81, 98–101). The literature of militarized femininities discussed above also highlights the production of these femininities in opposition to racialized local men as a strategy to secure them in the military gender hierarchy (Greenburg 2017, 1121; Khalili 2011, 1474–76; Sjoberg 2007, 98). In peacekeeping contexts the production of gendered subject positions and identities also intersect with race and class through the colonial overtones of contemporary interventions. The aims and logics of interventions such as peacekeeping draw on discourses reminiscent of the "civilizing mission" of colonialism, the perpetuation of global economic inequalities under neoliberal statebuilding, and the racist and sexual violence perpetrated by some peacekeepers (Henry 2012; Jennings 2019; Paris 2002; Pugh 2004; Razack 2004; Zanotti 2011). As noted above, an intersectional analysis of militarized masculinities needs to take a broader and political perspective that does not just consider the differences between various forms of masculinity in the military, some more marginal and others hegemonic. As Marsha Henry writes, "while intersectionality can sensitize researchers to the complexity of militarized masculinities and the

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marginal position of some men, especially in conflict zones, it does not go far enough in challenging patriarchal power relations that persist” (Henry 2017, 192). I further expand on my approach to these issues in the peacekeeping context in the next section, discussing the differences in construction of militarized masculinities and the importance of intersectionality in this multinational site.

Existing scholarship on gender in UN peacekeeping has primarily examined protective masculinities, forms of peacekeeping femininities, barriers to the inclusion of more women in peacekeeping, and the negative consequences of militarized and protective masculinities. Prevalent across these areas is the continued reinforcement of gendered stereotypes, based on binary and naturalized assumptions about how men and women are and their roles in peacekeeping. Writing on the interventions in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, Cockburn and Hubic write that:

to introduce more women to SFOR, or to any peacekeeping military, in order to strengthen the fulfilment of its ‘soft’ functions, would be both ineffective and wrong. It would be ineffective because there is no guarantee that women will identify feminine and act ‘womanly’. On the contrary, they may well adapt to masculine military cultures. It would be wrong, because if we wish to change male cultures for the better we should not exempt women from, and load exclusively onto men, responsibility for wielding just and necessary violence. (No more, of course, should we load onto women the stereotypically womanly tasks) (Cockburn and Hubic 2002, 116).

While there have been some recent shifts in discourses on gender and peacekeeping, such views remain commonplace, shaping the subject positions for women peacekeepers and their practical experiences in mission (Baldwin and Taylor 2020; Baldwin 2021; Karim and Beardsley 2017; Vermeij 2020). Consequently, it is important to consider how UN peacekeeping child protection discourses construct masculinities and femininities, how they relate to children and childhood, and what stereotypical or essentialist discourses they evoke or challenge.

Several scholars have examined how peacekeeping masculinities are primarily produced on the basis of protective masculinities (Jennings 2019; Sanghera, Henry, and Higate 2008; Whitworth 2007). Such a construction of masculinity is focused on protection rather than violence, which might be seen as more appropriate for peacekeeping, and is reflected in official UN discourses (Jennings 2019, 37), and should be seen as a form of masculinity produced by gendered logics of protection. Drawing on work from Liberia, Haiti, and DRC, Kathleen Jennings has analyzed how protection is cast as masculine in UN peacekeeping, and depends on racialized and sexualized representations of local people and is made conditional on their proper behaviour. She argues

that the UN presents a view of peacekeepers' protection practices, both publicly and to peacekeepers themselves through training and policy, that "paints the peacekeeper as protector—benevolent, firm, and driven by altruism rather than self-interest or the pursuit of power—and the local chiefly as beneficiary: alternately valiant peacebuilders or piteous victims, with the selfish spoiler as foil and common adversary to the 'good' local" (Jennings 2019, 37). In this we can clearly see a gendered logic of protection positioning peacekeepers with respect to the protected and threats. However, she finds that the ways in which peacekeepers themselves portray locals makes their protection conditional. Peacekeepers tend to have little contact with most local people due to security regulations and rules regulating socializing intended to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse (Jennings 2019, 32, 38), and much of what contact they do have beyond those working in the mission or for the government and civil society are locals who perform domestic, security, or sex work for peacekeepers (Jennings 2014, 314).

Many of the peacekeepers Jennings interviewed used gendered, racialized, and sexualized language to construct "the local person as capricious, scheming, exploitative, and predatory" (Jennings 2019, 38) and therefore not necessarily worthy of protection, and potentially even threatening to the peacekeeper through concerns about, for instance, false allegations of sexual exploitation (Higate and Henry 2009, 147). While not drawing a causal link between these, arguing that "[t]he connection between peacekeepers' representations of local people and their (non)performance of peacekeeping duties is not straightforward" (Jennings 2019, 30), she notes that these discourses about local people indicate that "violation of the idealized role on the part of locals justifies" peacekeepers' withholding of protection (Jennings 2019, 38). As well, by seeing local people in these derogatory ways, "the peacekeeping knowingly or unwittingly emphasizes their own vulnerability ... [this] complicates notions of how power, masculinities, and femininities operate in peacekeeping sites" (Jennings 2019, 38). While she does not focus on peacekeepers' relationship to children they are mandated to protect, given the highly idealized way in which children are understood versus their lived realities discussed in the previous section, this raises questions about how peacekeepers might condition protection based on children's behaviour and how this would be influenced by gender, race, class, or other factors.

Despite the increasing number of women deployed in UN missions and growing attention to gender and peacekeeping in the literature, there has been little attention to militarized femininities in peacekeeping, with the focus of the literature primarily on militarized masculinities and their transformation towards peacekeeping and peacekeeping masculinities, whether they are enacted

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by women or men. The primary exception is Marsha Henry's work on Indian and Uruguayan women peacekeepers (Henry 2012). Members of the first all-women police unit deployed from India to the UN mission in Liberia were depicted and depicted themselves as well-trained and possessing significant martial skills equal to those of men while remaining feminine through association with the domestic space and emotional skills (Henry 2012, 23), similar to some of the depictions of women in counterinsurgency discussed earlier. In contrast, the Uruguayan peacekeepers she interviewed were not in peacekeeping roles that demanded such martial skills, nor did they view there being as much gender inequality in their military. Instead, they positioned themselves as serving equally with men, and demonstrated greater sympathy and solidarity towards local women than the Indian peacekeepers did (Henry 2012, 26–28). Analyzing these significant differences between women peacekeepers, Henry demonstrates the importance of an intersectional perspective that pays attention to race and class and their situation in global hierarchies (Henry 2012, 28–29). The parallels between the militarized femininity of the Indian peacekeepers and the work on militarized femininities in counterinsurgency indicates the usefulness of this literature to understanding women in peacekeeping, and this is also apparent in the adoption of female engagement teams from counterinsurgency to peacekeeping (Baldwin and Taylor 2020, 6–8; Dyvik 2014, 412–16).

Thus, peacekeeping and peacebuilding masculinities and femininities provide a key lens through which to understand the gendered subject positions and identities of peacekeepers and the production of gender in UN peacekeeping child protection. With this I can analyze how peacekeeping child protection discourses construct certain gendered subject positions for peacekeepers, and how peacekeepers invest in, contest, and disrupt these subject positions. The ways in which gendered subject positions of peacekeepers are produced in relation to skills and attributes such as trust building and communication, and to ideas about who is to be protected by peacekeepers and why, need to be understood specifically in a child protection context. As noted above, children affected by war and child soldiers are constructed in UN discourses in ways that may not align with their lived experience, and so it will be important to understand how this interacts with peacekeeping masculinities and femininities. Child protection practices are also likely to invoke specific attributes that peacekeepers are supposed to have and involve skills such as communication and negotiation that are a key part of peacekeeping masculinities.

From Theory to Analysis

I conclude my theory chapter by briefly discussing how I apply these areas of theory to analyzing my empirical material and provide an overview of how they are applied in the four thesis articles. Overall, I apply a discourse analysis, discussed further in the next section, focused on interpreting the logics of protection that help to structure UN peacekeeping child protection. Within this, I examine the construction of gendered subject positions of peacekeepers and children and how they are produced in relation to one another, and what practices of protection they help to enable, disable, or legitimize. I analyze these in comparison to how peacekeepers identify with, challenge, or subvert peacekeeping subject positions and how the assumed subject positions of children relate to the lived experiences of children involved in armed conflict identified in the literature through a focus on agency.

The overall focus on logics of protection is primarily implemented in Article IV, “Childhood and gender in logics of UN Peacekeeping child protection.” In this article I draw on the literature on how logics of protection are structured by gender and childhood to interpret the logics structuring the child protection practices discussed in my material. This involves identifying the range of practices discussed in policy, training, and by peacekeepers, and ask questions about why those specific practices were chosen and not others, what understandings of gender and children they are explicitly or implicitly based upon, and how the selection of practices and those understandings relate to hierarchies of gender, age, race, or other factors.

Understanding how UN peacekeeping child protection discourses construct children and childhood and how these relate to children’s agency is primarily implemented in Article III, “Children’s wartime agency and child protection in UN peacekeeping.” In it I draw on the literature on children, childhood, and children in armed conflict, and on children’s agency, to interpret how UN peacekeeping child protection discourses construct children in need of protection. To do so, I examine how several key child protection practices relate to the subject positions of children and ask questions about how through these practices children’s agency is explicitly or implicitly acknowledged or denied, how this relates to the design and function of chosen protection practices, and what the understandings of children’s agency present in these practices prevent peacekeepers from doing to better prevent harm to children.

In Article II, “Community engagement, peacekeeping femininities, and the protection of children during armed conflict”, I focus on the production of gendered subject positions of women UN peacekeepers involved in child protection, and how they are constructed in relation to both men peacekeepers and children and childhood. I build upon a discursive understanding of subjectivity

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and identity, and insights from Hansen, Hall, and Edkins and Pin-Fat, to analyze my material and interpret what subject positions and identities of peacekeepers are produced through it. This involves asking questions of my material such as: what connections are drawn between peacekeepers' gender and specific practices or effects in child protection? What skills and attributes are discussed as needed by peacekeepers involved in child protection? What connections are drawn between who peacekeepers are and who the children they are mandated to protect are? This analysis is conducted in reference to the literature on militarized and peacekeeping masculinities and femininities to examine similarities and differences to previously identified constructions.

Supporting these three articles is Article I, "Women as the Essential Protectors of Children?: Gender and Child Protection in UN Peacekeeping," which focuses on UN peacekeeping child protection documents and interpreting how they produce peacekeepers' gendered subject positions and children in need of protection, and how these have shifted from older to more recent documents. It asks questions about how peacekeepers' gendered subject positions are constructed in relation to various child protection practices, paying attention to where gender is foregrounded or absent, about how children in need of protection, especially child soldiers, are understood in relation to gender and agency, and how different peacekeeping subject positions are constructed in relation to children. This allows the other three articles to focus more on the most relevant material from UN documents and on my interview materials.

Throughout these approaches an intersectional perspective is critical to understand the co-constitution of gender, race, class, and other aspects of identity. I will also draw upon postcolonial literature and other sources to be mindful of how racial, colonial, and Orientalist ideas are implicated in UN peacekeeping child protection. Next, I turn to discussing how I operationalize these theoretical approaches through my methodology for collection empirical material and analysis before turning to questions of research ethics.

3

Methodology

Studying the discursive construction of gendered subject positions and identities, childhood, and logics of protection requires a suitable methodology aligned with my theoretical commitments and tailored to the empirical materials I draw on. Feminist scholars argue for the importance of aligning and explicating the ontological, epistemological, and methodological orientations of one's research in order to achieve the coherent, meaningful results required for adding to the cumulative production of knowledge, and to explore the ethical and political implications of research (Ackerly and True 2020, 19–36; Nicolini 2017, 26; Beach and Pedersen 2016, 15; Ahmed and Sil 2012, 939). J. Ann Tickner argues that “feminists start from an ontology of social relations in which individuals are embedded in, and constituted by, historically unequal political, economic, and social structures” (Tickner 2006, 24–25). It is important to keep in mind that discursive practices, including gender, should not be seen as having an existence beyond their performance or reifying them as some form of externally existing object (Nicolini 2017, 21). Furthermore, feminist approaches tend to be pragmatic approaches to theory, with the aim of better understanding aspects of the world and how to improve it, rather than offering predictions or all-encompassing explanations or covering laws (Weldon 2006, 63, 68–71).

Particularly due to my focus on gender and childhood amidst armed conflict and intention to critique the gendered basis of the military, I proceed guided by a feminist research ethic that draws attention to ethical questions in research including positionality and the possibility of causing harm, and the power of epistemologies (Ackerly and True 2020, 22–26; Lund 2014; Pillow 2003; Rose 1997). Based on this ontological and epistemological orientation, this section will discuss my research design, and then focus on my methods for generating empirical material and how I conduct my analysis.

While I had originally planned on conducting a case study focused on child protection in UNMISS in South Sudan, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented this from being possible due to travel restrictions and the physical risk it

caused. Consequently, my research design as implemented has taken a more pragmatic path influenced by what sources of data were available to me. This ended up encompassing document analysis, online interviews, and briefer research visits to South Sudan and Uruguay at the end of data generation, and so my analysis covers UN child protection more broadly, rather than being focused on a single mission. I view this as having produced stronger results than my original plan would have as I was able to interview a much wider range of people involved in UN peacekeeping child protection who were involved in a wider range of missions over a longer time, and especially were involved in missions with more established and developed child protection efforts like MONUSCO in Democratic Republic of Congo. This did however prevent me from carrying out any observational research in UN missions as I had originally hoped to pursue in South Sudan.

The original case study idea provides inspiration for the methodology I apply in this thesis, as a case study allows for the analysis of the situated and idiosyncratic details of an empirical case over time that uncovers the relevant processes at work and allows the researcher to make logical inferences about broader mechanisms at play, when done through a well-constructed theoretical framework. Such an approach can both help to develop theory, and demonstrate the existence of a particular process, mechanism, or practice (Small 2009, 19–24). It also allows for the justification of the existence of a phenomenon or mechanism in a way that does not draw on the logic of statistical inference. Through conducting semi-structured interviews or similar techniques, each individual or instance studied provides some new empirical material, with questions asked each time potentially changing from one interview to the next as understanding of the phenomenon of interest is developed. Eventually, each new interview does not provide much novel information, and saturation is reached. This provides an “increasingly refined and continuously re-evaluated understanding of the underlying phenomenon” (Small 2009, 26; 24–27). While determining when and if saturation is reached, and whether it even can be reached, are topics of debate (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson 2006), the underlying logic provides a sound justification for this approach.

Brought together, these perspectives on identifying important mechanisms and processes that may be identifiable in similar situations from a solid theoretical and empirical basis point to the use of a combination of methods, including longer-term ethnographic-style methods, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and textual analysis. Further, Yazan, in reviewing several of the main approaches to case study methods, notes their common emphasis on gathering empirical material from a wide range of sources “to capture the case under study in its complexity” (Yazan 2015, 142). Consequently, I drew on a range

of sources of empirical material in order to address the complexity of my topic of study and provide confidence in my findings. These are elaborated on in the next section.

Methods, Sources, and Analysis of Empirical Material

In this thesis I used a complementary set of methods that help explore the complexity of gender, childhoods, and protection in peacekeeping child protection contexts. Such a combination of methods allows for accessing different aspects of the phenomenon under study, and allows for findings to be triangulated and stand up to scrutiny (Höglund and Öberg 2011; Salter 2012). Feminist theory accounts have also highlighted the importance of using a combination of (usually qualitative) critical methods for accessing various aspects of the phenomena under study (Halkier 2017; Kronsell 2006) and providing a better, though still partial, account of the complexity of the social world (Zalewski 2006, 52).

Feminist scholarship on gender and peacekeeping has primarily focused on discourse analysis of available documents and interviews, and deconstructing how gender is implicated in the constitution of peacekeeping (e.g., Henry 2015; Jennings 2019; Sion 2008; Whitworth 2007). No single document, interview, or observation site will provide the full range of gendered relations, conceptions, and subject positions important in peacekeeping, however, so analysis is needed through “juxtaposition and layering of what [is] found in different sites, in different contexts, with different constituencies” (Cohn 2006, 107). Consequently, discourse analysis provides one important tool for analyzing my empirical material. Such an approach must pay attention to a number of aspects. Despite the prevalence of gender as an organizing pattern in society, its operation is often hidden or silenced. Consequently, analysis of gender requires attention to silences, what is not said, and reading between the lines (Kronsell 2006, 109–11; Sjoberg 2007, 91), revealing when gender is considered unimportant, where men/masculinity are considered the default, or where conditions prevent the discussion of gender. This also entails paying attention to what I as the researcher did not notice (Zalewski 2006, 53). As gender tends to be constructed on the basis of hierarchical binaries and dichotomies, these need to be identified and deconstructed (Zalewski 2006, 56; Gentry 2016, 19, 24–25). Finally, an intersectional view is needed due to the co-constitution of gender, race, nationality, and other factors, particularly in sites of military intervention (Gentry 2016, 22–24; Henry 2012, 28–29; Jennings 2019, 33–35). This is critical for addressing the interaction between gender and childhood in my analysis, as methodological writings on research on children and childhood

has primarily focused on research where children are the participants, which is not the case in my study. As I see childhood as a discursively produced organizing principle of society and set of subject positions involved in various power relations, the insights provided by intersectional feminist thought on methodology are also helpful for considering childhood and children in my analysis in a similar manner. Following this deconstructive analysis of how discourses help structure and inform practices in peacekeeping, reconstruction is needed to inform emancipatory alternatives grounded in the experiences of women and others facing oppressive structures (Tickner 2006, 25; Weldon 2006, 82).

Methods and Sources

This thesis draws on a mix of semi-structured individual interviews and relevant documents, providing empirical material for my discourse analysis. These methods and sources form the core of much qualitative research on both gender and childhoods (Ackerly and True 2020, 7). My materials come from two main sources: first, relevant documents from the UN; second, semi-structured interviews with current and former peacekeeping and humanitarian personnel who have been involved in child protection practice and policy in a range of missions or at the headquarters level.

Selection of interlocutors began with reaching out to existing contacts who worked or had worked in various aspects of child protection in peacekeeping, and proceeded with snowball sampling (Small 2009) from there to reach further participants. I focused on people who worked in child protection-specific or relevant roles in UN peacekeeping missions, from the military, police, and civilian components, along with some participants who had experience in non-UN missions and related work for NGOs or UNICEF. Due to the disruptions caused by COVID-19 preventing a focus on a single mission, I attempted to reach a broad range of interlocutors with varying gender, national and professional background, and what mission(s) they had worked in. This selection of interlocutors was significantly aided by a contact at the UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO) who put me in touch with current military peacekeepers responsible for child protection in each mission, a position called the military and gender protection advisor (MGPA) in most missions. This also aided me in South Sudan, as I contacted the MGPA there ahead of my visit and she put me in touch with other members of the mission. For the second field visit to Uruguay, I took advantage of a conference co-organized by the Dallaire Institute and primarily attended by members of the Uruguayan military with peacekeeping experience to meet potential interlocutors at the conference and conduct interviews. In the end, interviews were conducted with 36 people, of whom 53% identified as women and 47% as men, and 67% were military, 25%

were civilian, and 8% were police, from 16 different countries in the Americas, Africa, Europe, Asia, and Oceania. Several interviews online and in Uruguay were conducted with project collaborators, and three interviews were conducted by project collaborators while I was not present. More details can be found in Appendix I.

Document selection began with a review of the UN websites on UN peacekeeping¹⁷ and peacekeeping training¹⁸ which link to relevant UN policies, documents, and training materials. Citations to further relevant materials in these documents were followed to find new documents to consider. As well, interlocutors were asked what documents were important for informing their work and these were either located or provided by the interlocutor, aside from some documents which were classified.

Semi-structured interviews are useful for in-depth exploration of topics that involve lived experience, sensitive and personal concerns such as gender and identity, and provide the interlocutor with the space to narrate their perspectives and meanings, highlight what is important to them, and construct their own identities (Brounéus 2011; J. M. Johnson 2001; Tickner 2006, 35–36). Due to COVID-19, the first 19 interviews I conducted were carried out online, and 16 more were later conducted in person in settings such as offices, cafes, and hotel lobbies. Interviewing online rather than in person raises concerns about whether sufficient rapport can be built, whether nonverbal cues such as body language can be read, and whether the conversation is sufficiently in-depth (D. R. Johnson, Scheitle, and Ecklund 2019, 2–3; Seitz 2016, 229–30). These concerns can be overcome to a degree through ensuring a good internet connection, quiet location, and watching facial expressions attentively (Seitz 2016, 230–32), but according to some scholars there is still a loss in richness of the material (D. R. Johnson, Scheitle, and Ecklund 2019, 13). Close attention to these issues was required as I conducted my interviews. However, I have found that online interviews do not suffer greatly from these challenges and most participants were excited to participate and willing to share their experiences, as discussed further below (Żadkowska et al. 2022).

Based on this discussion and my research questions, I asked peacekeepers I interviewed to discuss what kind of training they received on child protection and how it discussed gender and children; what their child protection activities consisted of, what ones they viewed as being most relevant to preventing the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and how they perceived the children these activities are directed towards; how they have experienced their gender and children's gender influencing their work and what other aspects this interacts

¹⁷ See "Child Protection", *UN Peacekeeping*, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/child-protection>

¹⁸ See *United Nations Peacekeeping Resource Hub*, <https://peacekeepingresourcehub.un.org/en/training>

with or are more important; how they understand what it means to be a peacekeeper; and how they perceived how their gender and other elements of their identity matter in their child protection work. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner drawing on an interview guide (see Appendix III), and not all questions were asked to all interlocutors, depending on how the conversation flowed, the participant's experiences in peacekeeping, and the available time.

Drawing on their answers, I interpreted how they produce and perform their gendered identity as a peacekeeper and how they relate this to their practices through the lens of military and peacekeeping masculinities and femininities; how they understand protection and the practices involved; how they understand the children they aim to protect, and how these reproduce, challenge, and/or subvert dominant discourses on gender, childhood, and protection. Throughout this interpretive process I remained open to surprises and what I am not seeing, as these surprises are more likely to yield interesting results than remaining confined to a predetermined theoretical framework (Zalewski 2006, 53).

In researching institutions of hegemonic masculinity such as the military, Kronsell (2006) notes that interviews can be problematic, especially with women, as they may feel pressured by superiors to take part in research, and the significant focus on issues of gender in the security sector can lead to women being over-researched (Clark 2008; Kronsell 2006, 121–23). Consequently, she advocates also drawing on other narratives such as those found in relevant texts, symbols, and procedures of the institutions under study (Kronsell 2006, 117–18), which also play an important role in defining and regulating the production of gender in military organizations (Taber 2009, 29). In formal, political organizations such as the UN, documents are an important component of practice: “they belong to the very basic material out of which the field of political practice is made. They are basic glue by which people relate to each other and organize their activities” (Bueger 2014, 398). However, they do not provide a complete picture of a practice. Some, like manuals and handbooks, provide a collective and idealized picture of a practice, while others such as reports from individuals tend to not be honest about failures, drawbacks, and problems (Bueger 2014, 401–2).

Consequently, I draw on a wide range of relevant documents such as UN child protection policies, mission mandates, and training materials. Selection of these documents was also guided by initial online interviews with child protection advisors and civilian policymakers who were asked about key documents informing child protection practices.

Discourse Analysis

In order to analyse my empirical material in light of my theoretical framework, I performed a discourse analysis. I take a discursive view of the (re)production of meaning, its relation to power, and the production of subject positions, identities, and logics of protection, and thus the phenomena of interest for my study are discursively constituted. I primarily draw upon the discourse analysis approaches of Lene Hansen (2006) as it usefully links the production of subject positions and identity with the construction of foreign and security policies, with some further insights from Laura Shepherd (2008a) as her consideration of power and discursive practices is helpful for linking Hansen's approach with attention to agency and how dominant discourses on childhood are reproduced and taken as natural and self-evident.

At the basis of analyzing discourses present in areas of foreign policy such as peacekeeping is understanding how the security problem, such as child soldiering, is represented by policymakers and practitioners involved, and how this relates to the articulation of collective identities of those involved (L. Hansen 2006, 5). At a deeper level, this reflects how the world is understood to be known, thus setting the boundaries of intelligibility for how policymakers and practitioners can envision what can be done to act upon that understanding of the world (Shepherd 2008a, 20). Building on the discussion in the theory chapter, subject positions and identities are political, relationally produced, and socially constituted (L. Hansen 2006, 5–6). For instance, peacekeeper identity might be articulated as a self in relations of varying degrees of difference to civilian peacekeepers, other international humanitarian and development actors, local civilians, peacekeepers, and children. This focus is important because “the goal of foreign policy discourse is to create a stable link between representations of identity and the proposed policy” (L. Hansen 2006, 16). Consequently, my discourse analysis focuses on the construction of the subject positions of peacekeepers and children in need of protection, particularly child soldiers. Gender is a key aspect of subject positions and identity in this analysis, but is understood in an intersectional manner, primarily with attention to age and race.

As discussed in the theory chapter, subject positions and identities are produced through a process of linking and differentiation: certain traits or attributes are linked to a given identity, which is differentiated from an opposing identity through the differentiation of these traits (L. Hansen 2006, 17). Methodologically, this calls for a careful analysis of how subject positions and identities are linked to certain attributes and differentiated from others in the texts under study and how these vary or are contested between competing discourses and over time (L. Hansen 2006, 37–40), while considering the meanings

attached to these identities and the power dynamics implicated in their (re)production (Shepherd 2008a). At its basis, this process involves the discourse analyst asking questions such as “which Selves and Others are constituted in foreign policy discourse? How radical is the difference between them? And how is difference constituted through the articulation of spatial, temporal, and ethical identity?” (L. Hansen 2006, 45). For instance, Tabak identifies how global child protection discourses constitute children in relations of difference to adults through their lack of agency (as opposed to adults’ capacities for agency), status as future citizens (as opposed to adults being current citizens), and vulnerability demanding protection (as opposed to adults being the providers of protection) (Tabak 2020).

The discourse analyst works to construct several basic discourses that structure the issue under investigation (L. Hansen 2006, 46). Other researchers have already contributed substantially in this area as discussed in the theory chapter. Consequently, my focus in analysis is on how these discourses and their production of peacekeepers, children, and policy and practice are articulated in relevant documents on child protection, and by peacekeepers who are involved in child protection. Following Hansen, this involves the identification of the signs or attributes linked to different subject positions and identities, how self and other are related, the spatial, temporal, and ethical dimensions of identities, and how policy and practice are linked to these. Of particular importance for this research, since policy is linked to subject positioning and identity, different articulations of identity are likely to lead to different policies or practices (L. Hansen 2006, 46–48), as these are produced through discourses which structure what is possible to know about the world and enable or preclude certain practices and courses of action (Shepherd 2008a). When it comes to children, for instance, this could be seen in differing approaches to addressing child soldiers by the international community depending on whether they are seen as victims or perpetrators (Tabak 2020).

Analysis of the selected texts should also address the forms of authority and knowledge that they mobilize, the different genres of text (e.g. speeches, policies, travel writing, fiction), and how they explicitly or implicitly refer to one another and depend on the broader discursive field through intertextuality (L. Hansen 2006, 50; Shepherd 2008a). Texts are linked to one another through quotations, references, citations, as uncited sources, or through reference to specific concepts. This is an interactive process, where “one text gains legitimacy from quoting and the other gains legitimacy from being quoted” (L. Hansen 2006, 51), and meaning is transformed through each new text: “Even a direct quote is situated inside a new textual context, reconstructed by it, and meaning is therefore never seamlessly transmitted from one text to another”

(L. Hansen 2006, 51). Because of this, and because earlier texts are interpreted in light of more recent ones, it is important to consider both the articulations of identity and policy in individual texts, how these are altered or contested in later texts, and the differences between them (L. Hansen 2006, 51–53).

Drawing on these methods and previous works focused on how the gendered subject positions and identities of peacekeepers and children are constructed, my discourse analysis focused on how my textual material (documents and interview transcripts) produce the subject positions and identities of peacekeepers and children in need of protection, and how these identities are linked to the proposed and enacted policies and practices. I view this as a top-down approach that examines prevalent discourses on gender and child protection articulated by the UN, and how these are (re)articulated by UN staff working in child protection. While these discourses do not prescribe exactly what peacekeepers do, they do certainly influence it, such as through their articulation in training and policy. Discourse analysis allows me to identify these higher-level discourses that get reinforced through policy and training, and examine in detail how peacekeepers reproduce these discourses themselves, and how they seem to interact with what they actually (say they) do.

Across these methods and sources of material, I used a mix of techniques to conduct the required analysis and interpretation. Documents, interview transcripts, and field notes were coded and analyzed, drawing on a combination of NVivo and paper-based approaches (Chowdhury 2015; Gibbs 2002; Maher et al. 2018). While research is often presented as a linear process in the final publication, I proceeded in an abductive manner, moving back and forth between the empirical material and my theoretical framework to produce coherent interpretations of the former and adjust the latter as it is challenged by my empirical findings (Timmermans and Tavory 2012, 179–81). As my analysis was also conducted in parallel with my data collection, I was able to adjust who I sought out for interviews, what questions I asked them, and what documents I analyzed to help further probe emerging themes in my material.

My discourse analysis began with the document analysis that appears in Article I. Based on my theoretical development at that point focused on childhood and children's agency during war, and on construction of gendered identities and subject positions, I created a set of initial codes. These included concepts like children's agency or lack thereof; explicit mentions of peacekeepers' gender and where it was linked to practices; explicit mentions of children's gender; and the Six Grave Violations. I then began to code the documents in NVivo, starting with the higher-level policy documents and moving towards training materials and manuals. During this coding, I developed new codes based on interesting things I noticed in the material in light of the theoretical

framework. This included codes relating to discourses about children and childhood, such as the urgency of child protection or the uniqueness of children, relating to other identity factors like race or religious affiliation, or relating to more specific child protection concerns and practices such as civil-military cooperation. As I developed these new codes, I went back to recode previously coded documents with the new codes.

During this coding process, I took notes in parallel about trends and themes I was noticing across the documents in light of my theoretical approach, and about specific passages in the documents that were particularly insightful or revealing. For instance, the UN Specialised Training Materials on child protection contain a series of vignettes about children affected by armed conflict that were particularly insightful for how policymakers were thinking about childhood, gender, agency, and protection when developing the materials.

For Articles II-IV, I drew on this existing set of materials, coding, and notes from the discourse analysis conducted for Article I for their discussion of relevant documents. I approached my interview material in a similar manner. All interviews that were recorded were transcribed¹⁹ and doubled checked, and then I coded these. I first attempted to use the same coding approach as for my documentary sources using NVivo. However, I found that this was too difficult and time-consuming, as the existing codes were quite precise and difficult to fit well into transcripts due to the differences in how people speak versus how they write and how ideas are organized and conveyed in these different media. Instead, I coded the transcripts on paper, using six higher level themes each represented through six different colour highlighters: child protection tasks, ideas, and practices; children and childhood; gender; intersecting factors (e.g. race, nationality, class, religion); the Six Grave Violations; policy and training; other areas of interest. I then went through the electronic files of the transcripts and copied out each highlighted section into a document of the relevant theme, adding some notes about context from the transcript when necessary. I then copied from these theme files into files for each of articles II-IV, based on what I interpreted to be relevant for each article's focus. After this, I reorganized the material for each article into subthemes based on what I saw in the material and on the article's sub-foci, such as logics of protection, community engagement, physical protection, etc. During this process, I highlighted key quotes that I judged were important to include in the articles. Finally, I went through each file and rewrote the material copied from the transcripts into notes that helped to organize my final analysis and interpretation of discourses, which I drew on to write up the articles.

¹⁹ The project my PhD is situated in included funding for transcription, and I am eternally grateful to the two transcribers I worked with, Allyssa Walsh and Nilakshe Jayakody.

In each article, further developing my analysis and writing it up was done by me going back over the notes, rereading key sections of the documents and transcripts, and using the codes in NVivo to see where there were interesting combinations of codes or to look for broader patterns and omissions in the documents and transcripts. I followed an abductive process to think through what my theoretical approach and the questions it generated allowed me to see in the materials, and to interpret how they reproduced or challenged previously identified discourses. This was also an iterative process, repeatedly revisiting the documents, transcripts, and notes under analysis, especially key passages, to further refine my analysis and conclusions. Articles II-IV were largely written in parallel after Article I, allowing me to simultaneously consider the analysis across all three, while drawing on the already-published Article I.

Implementing this methodology also required significant attention to ethical considerations of informed consent, security, and positionality. The next section of the kappa addresses these issues in more detail and discusses how I considered them during data collection and writing.

4

Ethical Considerations

My research project raised significant ethical considerations. I conducted interviews about potentially sensitive matters of identity and past experiences, some of which occurred in a fragile, authoritarian context. The safety of both my interlocutors and myself could have been threatened by the context in which research happened, and potentially by the involvement in research. Finally, significant reflection on my positionality as a researcher was required due to various aspects of my identity, the subject matter of my project, and my insider/outsider status.

Consent and Confidentiality

For semi-structured interviews, I obtained informed consent via an oral script (Gordon 2000).²⁰ This included an overview of the purpose of the research, why the participant's experiences would be beneficial for the project, how the interview material is used, provisions for anonymity and withdrawal, and if they grant permission to record the interview. As peacekeeping missions, the military, and police are hierarchical organizations where permission from a commanding officer or supervisor is sometimes needed to conduct interviews, my interlocutors may have felt pressured to take part in interviews. The consent script specifically addresses this, noting that both whether they chose to participate or not, and anything they said during the interview, will be kept confidential and not disclosed to their superiors or other members of the mission (Cohn 2006, 100; Higate and Cameron 2006, 222). Several participants noted the need to confirm with a superior about whether they could take part in an interview, though none mentioned that they were either encouraged or

²⁰ This, along with interview guides, were approved by the Research Ethics Board of Dalhousie University, as the project was situated there. A national ethics approval was not needed in South Sudan, as their ethics approval process only applies to medical research. It was determined that an application to Etikprövningsmyndigheten was not needed as the questions asked during the interviews did not fall into one of the categories requiring review.

dissuaded from participating due to this. At the end of an interview, the interlocutor was asked if there is anything they have said that they would like to alter or remove from the collected material.

Two main challenges in terms of confidentiality were anticipated. First, South Sudan is an insecure, semi-authoritarian context where both foreigners and locals may be subject to surveillance and suspicion. While the subject matter of my research is not of high political sensitivity, standard precautions were taken to protect the confidentiality of empirical material, including storage of all recordings and contact information separately and on encrypted media, conducting needed online conversations, including internet and phone interviews, and transfer of files via encrypted means, and ensuring physical security of notes and devices (van Baalen 2018; Wackenhut 2018). Second, publication of quotes or information about interlocutors could potentially identify them, especially in cases where I interview someone in a specific and singular role, such as the mission's child protection advisor. In publication of results, I will only include the minimum information relevant to the analysis about the quote or piece of information. During interviews, interlocutors were asked what would be an appropriate way to anonymize them, as they are more familiar with what can be inferred about someone in their context (Cohn 2006, 100). Some interlocutors requested anonymity, and one requested that the interview not be audio recorded, and most said they did not mind being anonymous or not, though none specifically requested that they be named.

Security

South Sudan is facing an uncertain road out of armed conflict (Crisis Group 2020) and faces high levels of general insecurity, both in the capital Juba and around the country. This had security implications for both myself and my interlocutors. As my interlocutors were members of the UN mission or other UN agencies, I assumed that they were proactive in addressing normal security concerns, and my focus was on not contributing further to their insecurity through the consent and confidentiality considerations detailed above. My personal security was facilitated by the project's basis at the Dallaire Institute, which maintains an office in Juba and has close relations with the UN mission. This helped provide secure accommodation, office space, transportation, and access to up-to-date security information. Through the Dallaire Institute I was covered by their security plans, evacuation and medical insurance, and previously received field safety training. Originally, I planned to make a second visit to interview peacekeepers in the UN mission in Democratic Republic of Congo, MONUSCO, but due to the deteriorating security situation in eastern

DRC during early 2022 caused by the renewed M23 insurgency, this trip was cancelled. Instead, I was able to attend a conference organized by the Dallaire Institute in Montevideo, Uruguay in November-December 2022, at which I was able to conduct further interviews with conference attendees with peace-keeping experience. No significant security concerns were raised by this trip as Uruguay is relatively stable, peaceful, and democratic.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented significant ethical concerns, including in terms of physical security due to the need to avoid spreading the virus, and electronic security of online interviews. Planning for in-person research addressed COVID-19 as a central concern. This included not carrying out any in-person activities until I was fully vaccinated, and included balancing health and ethical concerns with regards to a booster dose of vaccine, government health regulations and current transmission and vaccination rates in the context visited, and availability of effective testing. During the in-person research, I followed required health regulations on vaccination, testing, and masking, conducted interviews outdoors when possible, and used rapid tests before interviews. Consideration was also given to additional precautions that were needed to protect interlocutors, and safeguard electronically stored data due to heightened surveillance accompanying the pandemic (Burman et al. 2020).

Reflections on Positionality

The production of knowledge in the social sciences is unavoidably influenced by who is doing the research, who they are in relation to their interlocutors, and who they think they are (Pillow 2003, 176). A specific person is asking questions, and who they are influences what different people will say to them or leave unsaid, and what the researcher is able to perceive in what is said and unsaid (Cohn 2006, 96–97). Researchers have motivations for choosing certain research questions to pursue, and do not randomly pick them from a hat (Ackerly and True 2008); in other words, our research “*is not objective; we have objectives [emphasis in original]*” (Lund 2014, 226). Rather than trying to distance oneself from their positionality and make a claim for interviewing, observing, or reporting objectively, the researcher should be self-reflexive in considering how their positionality influences the knowledge constructed through their research (Ackerly and True 2008, 695–96). However, our own positionality and those of our interlocutors are not fixed and fully knowable; they are complex, multiple, and shifting, and cannot be fully understood and represented by the researcher (Pillow 2003, 180; Rose 1997, 313–14).

Explicitly addressing positionality is critical in social science research in order to improve the knowledge produced through it, but it is not an easy task

and there has been considerable debate about how it is and should be done. Wanda S. Pillow warns that many of the standard ways that reflexivity has been used in the academy has been in a “comfortable” way that “leads us to the familiar” and risks reproducing the hierarchies that we are concerned by (Pillow 2003, 192). She advocates for an approach to reflexivity that pushes us towards the uncomfortable and unfamiliar, “in a way that would continue to challenge the representations we come to while at the same time acknowledging the political need to represent and find meaning” (Pillow 2003, 192). Attempting to be fully “transparent” about positionality risks trying to view it as wholly knowable. Rather, the uncertainties and tensions encountered during the research process should be written into the text (Rose 1997, 315).

Both my position personally and professionally have important influences on my research project in terms of motivation, access, relationship to the security sector, and production of knowledge. The project my PhD is situated within was based at the Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace and Security at Dalhousie University in Canada, where I was employed from March 2016 to November 2023 in various research-related roles, and previously volunteered at during my masters education. The design of the overall project, the application for which I played a central role in conceiving and writing, and my PhD role within the project, were primarily motivated by my experiences at the Dallaire Institute, in combination with my knowledge of the literature.

In 2017, the organization collaborated with the Government of Canada to produce the Vancouver Principles, a set of guidelines for peacekeeping contributing countries to endorse and commit to providing training and support for their peacekeepers to make them more effective in child protection, particularly preventing the recruitment of child soldiers. They state that states should “recognize the essential contribution of women to peacekeeping operational effectiveness, and the distinct and critical roles of both men and women in the protection of children” (Global Affairs Canada 2017b, 4). I soon realized this statement, and the way it was talked about, was troubling me²¹ due to its assumption that men and women play “distinct and critical roles” based on gender in child protection, without a systematic basis in empirical research on peacekeeping effectiveness, and was problematized by my understanding of how gender is produced. Fortunately, I was able to transform this concern into a research project intended to both explore empirically the role that gender plays in child protection in peacekeeping, and critique this essentialist understanding of gender in child protection.

²¹ Unfortunately, I did not think to raise these points when I was able to comment on a draft of the Vancouver Principles in August 2017.

In addition to motivating my research question, this position within the Dallaire Institute was also important for providing access to interlocutors, but also raised questions about positionality and insider/outsider dynamics that required reflection. The Dallaire Institute has been working in South Sudan since 2018, with an office in Juba, and has a close relationship with UNMISS and civil society organizations in the country. While the organization is part of a university and carries out academic work, it is primarily focused on NGO-style program implementation that broadly falls within the realm of security sector reform.

As part of my work for the Dallaire Institute before starting the PhD program, I went to Juba for a week in mid-2019 to take part in various meetings with UN, government, and civil society actors, and conduct program evaluation interviews with peacekeepers who had taken part in Dallaire Institute trainings. I have previously conducted similar work in Sierra Leone as well. Consequently, I already had some in-person familiarity with where I intend to conduct my research and with interviews with members of peacekeeping missions.

Being part of this organization while simultaneously carrying out my PhD research meant that I entered the field on the basis of existing relationships that were primarily based on the non-academic work of the Dallaire Institute, which may have been an advantage in terms of interviewing members of the security sector on issues of gender as it provided an initial impression besides that of researcher (Cohn 2006, 100). Being associated with the name Roméo Dallaire was also likely beneficial due to the esteem he is held in by many involved in peacekeeping due to his actions in Rwanda in 1994 where he disobeyed orders to withdraw the peacekeeping force he commanded in an attempt to protect civilians during the genocide there, and a few interlocutors commented on this. While these factors were likely helpful for access and productive interviews, I needed to ensure they also did not distract from the fact that I did academic research based at the University of Gothenburg, which was reinforced in the informed consent process. Because of this hybrid arrangement, the organization I worked for could also be seen as a research broker for my project, as I relied on it for access, and security and logistics while in South Sudan and Uruguay. In addition to making the nature of my research and its relationship to the Dallaire Institute clear to my interlocutors, it also called for reflection on the relationship between my research and the non-research work of the Dallaire Institute in South Sudan and Uruguay (Lewis et al. 2019). I finished my employment with the Dallaire Institute in November 2023 however, before the last three articles in the thesis were submitted for publication. Overall, I found that while working with the Dallaire Institute during the PhD provided

important contacts, access, and security for some of my interviews, many participants were not aware of the organization's work, while several expressed disagreement with some of the organization's approaches. Consequently, I did not observe that working for the Dallaire Institute during the research introduced substantial sources of bias or unduly influenced my research or findings beyond providing the initial framework of focusing on gender, children, and peacekeeping.

In addressing reflexivity in research on the military, Higate and Cameron note the strong insider/outsider dynamic that can be set up between civilian researchers and military interlocutors (Higate and Cameron 2006, 224). Previous work on the military and peacekeeping notes a variety of ways this can influence research. Carol Cohn noted that early in her research on the US military, being a civilian outsider led to the assumption that she did not know much about the military, and so her interlocutors provided more thorough explanations that were valuable for her research (Cohn 2006, 96–101). In her research on peacekeeping in Liberia, Marsha Henry found that her outsider (in this case non-UN) status caused interlocutors to discuss ways in which they were taking advantage of the “stupid UN” (Henry 2015, 381). Similarly, Kathleen M. Jennings found that peacekeepers in the DRC were very willing to talk to her, even about the sensitive topic of sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers (Jennings 2019, 33). However, in each case this civilian-military/insider-outsider dynamic was also intertwined with age, race, and gender. Furthermore, being an insider/outsider should not be viewed as a binary. Rather, they are unstable and dynamic categories that intersect with other facets of positionalities and change with time (Mullings 1999, 340).

Attentiveness to this later perspective is important in reflecting on my research. While I am a civilian, peacekeeping is in some ways a “civilianized” (Henry 2015, 381) use of the military, and peacekeepers often work in closer collaboration with civilian staff than in the military at home. The close relationship between the Dallaire Institute and the UN and UNMISS and my work for them may also place me partially in a more insider category, compared to someone who is positioned solely as a university researcher. Attention to this dynamic must also be combined with consideration of risks to the researcher and the researched in a military setting, where standard assumptions of both the relative power of the researcher, and the military (or police) personnel are called into question (Eriksson Baaz 2019; Malejacq and Mukhopadhyay 2016).

Research on peacekeeping also requires reflexive attention to race, gender, class, and their intersections. I am a white, cis male, Northern, middle class researcher conducting data generation in South Sudan and with other UN missions located in the South, while my interlocutors were positioned in diverse

ways in these hierarchies: peacekeepers, both military, police, and civilian, come from a wide range of countries, many in the Global South, and are both men and women.²² For example, UNMISS was comprised of military and police peacekeepers from almost 70 countries in every region of the world during my visit. Of those, no country outside of Africa and Asia contributes more than 100 personnel.²³ As noted above and in Appendix I, my participants came from a range of countries across the world. Peacekeeping has an uneasy and problematic relationship with race, colonialism, and imperialism, echoing the “civilizing mission” of colonialism, trusteeship (including in South Sudan),²⁴ and exploitation of Southern labour to maintain security (Henry 2012; Henry, Higate, and Sanghera 2009; Paris 2002). While peacekeepers are relatively privileged compared to the people living in the mission location, many peacekeepers pursue such a career due to the economic benefits it confers and come from more or less precarious backgrounds at home (Henry 2015). As a man studying gender through interviews with interlocutors who may identify in a diversity of ways with respect to gender, close attention to gender dynamics during my research was required, including how they interact with race, civilian status, etc. to position me in various ways with respect to my interlocutors.

Consequently, I remained vigilant to understand as far as possible about how these factors affected who I had access to, how and what interlocutors said to me, what I understood from them, and how I wrote up and presented my results. As a Northern researcher working primarily in the South, it was particularly important to be attentive to how my representations “set up or neglect” certain power relations (Kapoor 2004, 628). For instance, the way in which concepts such as war, peace, or gender are conventionally defined and understood in the social sciences are commonly rooted in a western or Eurocentric basis that is assumed to be neutral, normal, and/or universal, obscuring or denying plurality in the world and the inherent value of other perspectives, knowledges, and relations to the social world (Mohanty 1984, 336–37; Arnfred 2011, 105–7; Barkawi 2016, 200–201). Such research can also reproduce colonial tropes such as portrayal of “Africa” as backwards, passive, and illiberal (Eriksson Baaz and Verweijen 2018, 57). As noted earlier, it is important to

²² As Kathleen Jennings notes, peacekeeping missions are heteronormative spaces (in relation to sexuality) (Jennings 2019, 33), but this likely also applies to gender identity, so it will likely be difficult or impossible to consider queer, trans, or gender identities beyond the male-female binary.

²³ Data from https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/04_mission_and_country_48_march_2022.pdf, accessed 9 August 2023, data for March 2022.

²⁴ Vanderperre, Julie. 2017. “Can a Trusteeship Rescue South Sudan? Unlikely, Experts Say.” *PassBlue*. February 22, 2017. <https://www.passblue.com/2017/02/22/can-a-trusteeship-rescue-south-sudan-unlikely-experts-say/>.

interrogate how such tropes influence peacekeeping, rather than reproducing them (Henry 2015; Jennings 2019). I have worked to be as attentive as possible to this issues in how I collected, analyzed, understood, and wrote about my empirical material.

Another issue is questions raised by my desire to conduct research that is both critical and policy relevant, as the feminist researcher “must be actively engaged in political struggle and be aware of the policy implications of her work” (Tickner 2006, 29). Similarly, Bueger and Mireanu, building on the practice-relevant work of Latour, argue that critical scholars working on security should consider how research is a social practice embedded in relationships beyond those within the academy, and that critical proximity to security practitioners can provide a pathway to enacting “new and better realities” (Bueger and Mireanu 2015, 122). They advocate for the use of participant observation and developing networks beyond the academy, which due to the location of my research I have already done to a degree. However, it is easy for proximity to become complicity, and critical security scholars need to consider that “participating in security practices means that there are other stakes involved, besides the generation of knowledge” (Bueger and Mireanu 2015, 130). Participating in security practices raises “serious ethical problems for how this participation reinforces the violence of security” (Bueger and Mireanu 2015, 131). Close engagement with powerful military institutions and a desire to be able to influence their policies through proximity risks self-censorship and “scholarly militarization” (Enloe 2010).

A second key consideration in this is being careful about how I portray children, especially when it comes to questions of agency. As discussed in the theory chapter, dominant understandings of children in child protection discourses frame them as innocent, vulnerable, victimized by adults, and lacking meaningful agency. Due to capacities, power dynamics, and lack of access to resources among other issues, many children are made vulnerable, are often victims of violence by adults (or other children), and may not have the experience, knowledge, risk analysis, or critical thinking needed to protect themselves in a situation where an otherwise equivalent adult could manage. So, preventing harm to children and providing protection in some form remains an admirable goal, but the forms of protection provided and the discourses that enable them deserve analysis and critique. Practitioners have raised concerns about how acknowledging children’s agency, especially in soldiering, may put them at greater risk of, for instance, prosecution (O’Neil and Broeckhoven 2018) while there remains a tension between protecting children and acknowledging their agency and enabling their participation in peace and security (Beier 2018; Willow 2021), noting the need to avoid seeing children as just

“mini adults.” At the same time, it is easy to reproduce dominant discourses that frame children in problematic ways while attempting to balance these tensions. Consequently, how I engage with peacekeepers at various levels of seniority and policymakers in the UN and member states, and how I portray children and childhood, requires careful reflection to prevent foreseeable harms arising from my recommendations and findings.

Finally, with a large portion of my interviews having taken place online, I have had to further reflect on how this different setting influences a reflexive approach to research. As noted in the methodology section, online interviewing reduces the ability of the interviewer to take in the interlocutor’s body language and context, especially when the online interview is audio-only. The interviewer only briefly and virtually enters the interlocutor’s setting, further increasing the difficulty in gaining additional clues that contribute to more reflexive research. Prior to the pandemic, there was relatively little guidance available on online interviewing, especially on addressing reflexivity, leaving it largely to the researcher to navigate this new reality. To address these difficulties I attempted to be as attentive as possible to interlocutors’ body language when visible, tone of voice, and choice of setting for the interview, and considered these factors for myself in how I presented to the participant. While imperfect, these initial and improvised practices reflect what has since been identified by other researchers exploring this issue (Żadkowska et al. 2022). Overall, I found that my interviews were rich and productive, and the ones conducted online did not differ significantly from the later interviews I conducted in person.

Other issues that involve my positionality that I could not anticipate at the beginning of the project were also a concern over the course of my research, and so continual awareness and reflexivity was needed as I proceeded with developing my questions and theoretical framework, collecting empirical material, analyzing, writing, and publishing. To aid in doing so I frequently took contemporaneous notes on these and other similar issues that I encountered during research, engaged in conversations with my peers and supervisors, and aimed to be transparent about these issues in my publications and thesis.

Reflexive Experiences

In my interviews, both in person and online, I noted that generally my interlocutors came across as being very open about their experiences and happy to talk to me about them. Most peacekeepers I spoke to were unconcerned about remaining anonymous in the research, with only two overly stressing their preference for anonymity significantly compared to the few others who asked for anonymity. Only two mentioned that they had to clear the interview with

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their chain of command, which did not seem to cause any guardedness subsequently. In particular, those from the military component of peacekeeping, whether on mission, having previously been in a mission, or retired were the most open and forthright seeming, and civilians currently employed by the UN the least so. I speculate that two reasons contributed to this. First, military peacekeepers are in most cases only deployed once or twice to a mission, and their deployment does not have a substantial effect on their career progression. Civilian staff however are employed long-term by the UN, sometimes in the same mission for over a decade, and so may be more likely to feel that they need to be careful what they say to an external researcher, while military personnel may feel that they can be more open. The one exception to the career progression factor is in the Uruguayan military, as they provide a large number of peacekeepers per capita and many of their military peacekeepers are deployed ten or more times. However, in my experience they were also very open in their answers, likely due to a combination of the country's pride in being a major peacekeeping contributor, and due to their positive relationship with the Dallaire Institute. I did not observe this positive relationship as causing participants there to be less candid or as far as I could tell say things that they thought I wanted to hear, as several participants discussed their views of some issues in peacekeeping that they likely knew were different from those of key Dallaire Institute colleagues. As I am aware that my position with the Dallaire Institute may have helped to encourage participants to talk more openly as they were familiar with its programmatic work, I decided to err on the side of caution and leave participants anonymous in my thesis (as none specifically requested to be named) as my approach in this text is more critical than that of other work from the Dallaire Institute.

Second, due to the international and more open and public nature of peacekeeping, there may be fewer confidentiality issues involved compared to other military operations, though my interlocutors noted a few internal mission documents that they were unable to share due to classification. This was likely also impacted by the fact that most military peacekeepers I interviewed were of relatively high rank and were in important mission roles such as being the military gender and protection advisor at the force headquarters, a senior staff officer, or being military observers who operate relatively independently. They would likely feel they had more authority to be open with a researcher compared to someone of a lower rank. A final potential factor is that other researchers, both academics and consultants hired by the UN, focus on peacekeeping, thus increasing familiarity with participation in research. For instance, one of my interlocutors was also scheduled to speak with consultants conducting another project, and had mixed up the two interviews in their schedule and

assumed that I was one of the consultants when we first spoke. Compared to previous research on the military discussed above, there seemed to be almost a reversed insider/outsider dynamic with the greater openness of military peacekeepers despite me being a civilian researcher.

Finally, I was attentive to how gender, age, racial, and other identity dynamics may have impacted my interviews. As noted in the table of participants in the appendices to this kappa, my participants were slightly over half women, two-thirds military, and they came from a wide range of countries in North and South America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Oceania, and were of varying ages, and racial, religious, and class backgrounds. As a (relatively) young, white, middle class American/Canadian man working in Europe, some aspects of my identity and experiences were quite close to some participants and distant from others. Overall, I did not perceive any substantial barriers to my interviews arising from identity dynamics, though of course this does not mean they did not happen, only that it took place in a way that was not observable to me. Throughout my interviews I aimed to be attentive to what my participants spoke about, how they spoke about it, and their body language in light of these issues. Several participants spoke candidly about gender, racial, and/or class dynamics, such as the personal struggles they encountered as women in the military or reflecting on their relative privilege compared to people in the mission's host population, indicating their comfort in talking about potentially sensitive topics with me. While this cannot be generalized across my participants, it does indicate that I was able to generate an open environment for discussion and was not missing substantial challenges in this area.

5

Conclusions

This thesis sought to answer the research question “How are gender, childhood, and protection constructed through UN Peacekeeping child protection practices?” Across the four thesis articles drawing on UN documents and interviews with peacekeepers and others involved in child protection, I have explored this question from several different angles, addressing issues of the construction of gendered subject positions and identities, how childhood is understood and acted upon, whether and how to acknowledge children’s agency, and how child protection in UN peacekeeping is structured. In doing so I have made several useful contributions to advancing knowledge on these topics. I conclude the kappa section of the thesis by discussing these contributions and suggesting some future avenues for further research prompted by this thesis.

Gendered and age-based logics of protection

Child protection in UN peacekeeping is in part structured by logics of protection that relate peacekeepers, children, and threats to children. This thesis expands on the previous work on gendered logics of protection to further develop how children and childhood figure in these logics and explore aspects of power dynamics beyond protector-protected relationships of obedience and dependence (c.f. Kaplan 1994; Stiehm 1982; Young 2003). I argue that logics of protection in UN peacekeeping child protection depend on portrayals of children as being primarily agencyless victims of armed conflict in need of protection by adults. There is a strong and often stereotypical gendered element to children’s vulnerability, where boys are considered to be primarily vulnerable to being recruited by armed forces and groups, and girls being subjected to sexual violence. When children’s agency is acknowledged, it is explained away as not being real agency or truly present due to the circumstances of war and poverty (discussed primarily in articles I, III, and IV).

The peacekeeper as protector draws on a gendered division of labour between different child protection practices. Gender is centred in discussion of community engagement, where women are seen as essential for successful engagement for reasons ranging from an assumed innate ability to relate to women and children to an understanding that gender diversity provides legitimacy and choice for community members, including children, on which peacekeepers to engage with, for instance during a patrol. Gender is not raised as relevant in other child protection practices, and so the overwhelming majority of men among military peacekeepers and the masculine logic of protection in peacekeeping tend to leave physical protection of children as a masculine practice (discussed primarily in articles I, II, and IV).

However, men including those in the mission are also understood as potential threats to children due to the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse of children by peacekeepers. Consequently, women peacekeepers' subject positions are constructed in relation to both men peacekeepers and children in need of protection as constitutive others. While this does portray women as essential members of the military component who need to be soldiers on patrol engaging with civilians, this downplays their martial abilities in favour of communication skills and empathy needed to interact with civilians, build trust, and gain vital information from them, while men are (usually) implicitly reinforced as primarily in peacekeeping to provide physical protection to children through military practices including the use of force (discussed primarily in articles I and II).

The logics of protection that structure UN peacekeeping child protection rely on and reproduce gendered power dynamics that tend to reproduce the dominance of men over women, and age-based power dynamics that tend to reproduce the dominance of adults over children. This focus of my thesis contributes to debates about protection and security through expanding our understanding of how logics of protection are structured in relation to both gender and childhood, and further illuminates the importance of considering childhood in gendered logics of protection.

Production of and emerging shifts in gendered subject positions in peacekeeping

The focus in my thesis on community engagement as one of the main child protection practices and the one that is most explicitly gendered leads to analysis of how constructions of gendered subject positions in peacekeeping are produced and potentially shifting. This shift is primarily related to the goal of better protecting civilians, especially children, through gaining the host

community's trust and information. Earlier documents I analysed and previous scholarship on this issue primarily emphasized the importance of having women peacekeepers to interact with women and children in the host community to gather information and build trust, often drawing upon ideas that women are inherently or naturally more empathetic and better at communicating, and that there is some sort of inherent connection between women and children. More recently, the UN has shifted towards an emphasis on having men and women participate equally in engagement, arguing that gender diversity is what makes engagement work better. This tends to still maintain a view that women engage with women and children and men engage with men. However, some peacekeepers emphasized that having mixed gender engagement teams gives community members choice in who to approach, gives more legitimacy to the mission, and helps differentiate UN peacekeepers from the state military and armed groups which are mostly men (discussed primarily in articles I and II).

While this shift provides a potential opening for reimagining gendered subject positions in the military and peacekeeping, it may also reinforce the gendered division of labour between protection and engagement. This is a valuable area for future research as discussed below, given the recentness of the latest engagement guidance from the UN and continued emphasis by the UN and member states on increasing the participation of women in peacekeeping. This focus contributes to ongoing debates about how gendered subject positions are (re)produced in militarized settings like peacekeeping, and highlights the utility of considering childhood as an aspect of subject positions that is involved in their relational construction in meaningful ways.

Children's agency and participation in protection

Across the documents and interviews I analysed, there is a near constant and explicit denial of children's meaningful agency during armed conflict, particularly when it comes to their decisions about how to protect themselves, their families, and their communities, reproducing the discourse of the world child discussed by Tabak. However, there are also many implicit acknowledgements of agency in my material, such as the importance of interacting with child soldiers as if they are actors with at least some of the agency and intention afforded to adult soldiers, or the lack of denial of children's agency when they make the often very risky decision to leave an armed force or armed group. A few peacekeepers discussed children's agency more explicitly and viewed that

it was important to acknowledge both their agency and the victimization that such children face (discussed primarily in articles I, III, and IV).

The tensions between the often-explicit denial of children's agency and the frequent implicit acknowledgement of it demonstrates one way in which the reproduction of high-level discourses, such as that of the world child, encounter friction when reproduced by practitioners with contradictory experiences. It also opens the door for a more nuanced and productive acknowledgement of both children's agency and vulnerability. There may be better ways of preventing harm to children through acknowledging that they play a role in their own protection, that they may seek to take part in armed conflict to do so, and there may be alternative practices peacekeepers can engage in to address these issues. Finally, the application of social navigation to understanding agency in relation to subject positions and logics of protection provides a potentially productive way of understanding the implications of agency across identification with subject positions and everyday experiences of armed conflict.

Future directions for research

One limitation of my study is that I only have the perspectives of peacekeepers, all adults, and not of people from peacekeeping host countries, especially children. It was originally planned during the project my PhD is situated in to also reach youth in peacekeeping contexts, but this was not possible due to COVID and time constraints. There has been little research in general on the perceptions of peacekeeping by those living in host communities, and especially for understanding the intersections of gender, age, militarization, race, and other factors in practices such as community engagement and physical protection. Considering their perspectives alongside those of peacekeepers would be invaluable.

I identified care as a potentially important theoretical lens to use alongside protection, particularly as it is also integral to the conceptualization of adult-child interactions in general, and some of my interviewees specifically identified care in certain forms as part of what the mission does to protection children. This was primarily evident in terms of often going to significant length to provide medical care to children. Teasing out the logics of care rather than considering them within the logics of protection could be fruitful both for better understanding child protection and theoretical development in this area.

The potential shifts in the construction of peacekeepers' gendered subject positions and identities, especially in regard to community engagement, deserve continuing study and unpacking. Originally in article II I had identified the lens of regendering the military as a productive route for exploring this

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issue, but decided it was not a good fit with the rest of the thesis. The emphasis on women's participation in community engagement in peacekeeping may serve as a valuable entry point for a broader transformation of gender dynamics in the military, particularly with the shift towards gender diversity. At the same time, the emphasis on women in community engagement is often linked to it being seen as an appropriately feminine practice and one that relies on women's assumed gendered traits and abilities, potentially mitigating its transformative potential. Examining this through the lens of regendering the military would be a valuable way of understanding this issue.

Svensk sammanfattning

Sedan mitten av 1990-talet har den internationella synen på barn i väpnade konflikter ändrats. Fokus har förflyttats från att enbart se barn som offer och icke-stridande aktörer till att omfamna en mer nyanserad syn på deras deltagande i både krigs- och fredstider. Sedermera har FNs säkerhetsråd antagit mandat med fokus på barn och väpnade konflikter (Children and Armed Conflict, CAAC), samtidigt som ett antal, praxis, principer och internationell rätt har inrättats på samma ämne. Ett av dom viktigaste implementeringsområdena för FNs CAAC mandat är FNs fredsbevarande uppdrag. Dessa uppdrag har bland annat mandat att förhindra och utreda kränkningar av barns rättigheter. Ett arbete som sker främst genom bidragande till skydd av barn, övervakning och rapporteringsuppdrag samt genom stöttning av det barnskydds-arbete som civila aktörer utför.

FNs och andra internationella organisationers arbete för att skydda barn i väpnade konflikter utgår ofta från ett universellt synsätt av barn som beroende, sårbara och med avsaknad av agens. En förståelse som på senare tid har ifrågasatts för sin eurocentricism, orientalism och brist på erkännande av hur barn navigerar i sina sociala miljöer. Fortsättningsvis är kön en viktig faktor i FNs fredsbevarande skydd av barn, både i relation till barns könsrelaterade sårbarheter för olika typer av våld, men även genom viss praxis där dom fredsbevarande styrkornas könsdynamik anses som viktig för arbetets operativa effektivitet.

Våld mot och utfört av barn under väpnade konflikter, det våld som FN strävar efter att förhindra – såsom sexuellt våld och rekrytering av barnsoldater – är delvis ett resultat av en stereotyp förståelse av könsdynamiker och maktstrukturer. Diskurser baserade på stereotypa förståelser av genus där pojkar ses främst som soldater och flickor som offer för sexuellt våld under väpnade konflikter, påverkar även den allmänna uppfattningen om dom hot som barn står inför. Därav ses stereotypa könsstrukturer och maktstrukturer vara inflytelserika i utvecklandet och användandet av fredsbevarande skydd av barn. Dessa strukturer visar sig även påverka debatter om den generella utvecklingen av

FNs fredsbevarande arbete. Till exempel har kvinnors deltagande i fredsbevarande insatser främjats särskilt genom en diskurs om det ”mervärde” kvinnor tillför i dessa insatser. Detta ”mervärde” baseras på stereotypa könsbundna färdigheter, egenskaper och metoder, såsom interaktioner och relationer mellan kvinnor och barn i värdsamhället för insatsen. Dessa diskurser är ofta baserade på begränsade empiriska bevis och ignorerar till stor del den sociala konstruktionen av kön. Fortsättningsvis påverkas dessa diskurser av en maskulin skyddslogik som är rådande inom fredsbevarande insatser och som placerar barn som en praxisorienterad skyddad grupp.

Forskning genomförd av forskare, tankesmedjor och icke-statliga organisationer har avsevärt utvecklat vår kunskap om CAAC-agendan och dom utmaningar som den syftar till att ta itu med. Det har dock gjorts relativt lite forskning om skydd av barn i FNs fredsbevarande insatser i allmänhet, och om dess könsrelaterade dynamik i synnerhet. Teoretiska redogörelser för produktionen av både genus och skydd av barn i fredsbevarande insatser har i stort sett försummat en intersektionell förståelse av barndom. Skydd av barn i FNs fredsbevarande insatser är därför ett viktigt empiriskt exempel som kan komma till användning för att främja både vår empiriska och teoretiska förståelse av genus och fredsbevarande praxis, samtidigt som det uppmärksammar vikten av att förstå barn och barndom i relation till dessa.

Min avhandling syftar till att adressera dessa frågor i förhållande till FNs nuvarande policy och praxis för skydd av barn. Detta genomförs av att tillämpa ett teoretiskt ramverk som bygger på genus- och åldersbaserade skyddslogiker, barns och barndomens roll i global politik, barns agens i krig samt feministisk forskning om genus och militarism. För att förstå dessa mekanismer nyttjar jag empiriskt material bestående av dokument från FNs fredsbevarande insatser, så som policys, doktriner och utbildningsmaterial. Jag använder mig även av material från intervjuer med personal med lång erfarenhet av arbete med skydd för barn samt intervjuer med beslutsfattare inom området skydd av barn och personer som arbetar med relaterade områden.

Teoretiskt fördjupar den här avhandlingen vår förståelse av hur skyddslogiker konstrueras i förhållande till genus och barndom i FNs fredsbevarande sammanhang. Specifikt fokuserar avhandlingen på hur fredsbevararnas könade subjektpositioner produceras i förhållande till olika metoder för skydd av barn och hur globala diskurser om barn och väpnade konflikter reproduceras och förändras i specifika praxis av skydd för barn. Fortsättningsvis bidrar jag även till att förstå produktionen av subjektpositioner och hur dessa produceras av och möjliggör vissa praktiker och policys. Detta sker genom att jag överväger hur dom som antas inta subjektpositioner, i det här fallet barn, har agens eller inte. Empiriskt bidrar min avhandling till kunskap om fredsbevarande politik

och praxis, främst under barnskyddsmandatet. Detta sker genom att jag analysera praxisorienterade dokument som har fått mindre akademisk uppmärksamhet i jämförelse med säkerhetsrådets resolutioner eller internationella lagar på ämnet. Jag tillhandahåller även nytt intervjumaterial om barnskyddspraxis. Sammanfattningen ger detta material mig möjlighet att illustrera några av de sätt som genus, barndom och skydd produceras och ifrågasätts i fredsbevarande insatser.

Analysen av mitt empiriska material och resultaten av avhandlingen presenteras i fyra artiklar som bifogas till denna kapp. Varje artikel bygger på delar av mitt teoretiska ramverk för att söka förstå olika aspekter av skydd för barn i FN:s fredsbevarande insatser. Artiklarna utgör även den analys som ligger till grund för att besvara min avhandlings övergripande forskningsfråga.

I Artikel I, med titeln ”Women as the Essential Protectors of Children? Gender and Child Protection in UN Peacekeeping”, utför jag en diskursanalys av FN:s policys, manualer och utbildningsmaterial för fredsbevarande insatser och skydd av barn. Detta med syfte att förstå hur fredsbevarande styrkors könnade subjektpositioner konstrueras i dessa dokument i relation till arbetet kring skydd av barn och hur barns behov av skydd förstås. Genom analysen finner jag att barn främst ses som handlingslösa offer för vuxnas krig och att dom behöver skydd av fredsbevarande styrkor. Förståelsen av barns sårbarheter grundas särskilt i en stereotyp förståelse samt definition av kön och könsroller. Pojkar ses främst som utsatta för risken att rekryteras av väpnade grupper medan flickor ses som utsatta för risken att utsättas för sexuellt våld. Vid arbetet med barnsoldater så ses barn som potentiella hot, där analysen visar på en komplex förståelse av barns sårbarhet, offerroll och brist på agens samtidigt som diskussioner om hantering av barnsoldater implicit erkänner barns agens och aktörskap.

Fortsättningsvis är genus särskilt frånvarande i konstruktionen av fredsbevarande styrkors roll som soldater. Soldater som kan behöva ta till våld för att bidra till fysiskt skydd för barn, vilket underförstått förstärker skyddsmekani- kers maskulina logik. Istället betonas genus i relation till samhällsengagemang, där särskilt kvinnliga fredsbevarare, på grund av sitt genus, framställs som mer kapabla än män att kunna delta effektivt i samhälleliga engagemang. Tydligt i dessa resonemang är en förändring i formuleringar över tid gällande dokuments betoning på att kvinnliga fredsbevarare är ideala i rollen för arbete med kvinnor och barn. Istället framhävs det i nyare dokument att både kvinnor och män behövs för samhälleliga engagemang. Samtidigt som denna formulering fortfarande innebär att kvinnliga fredsarbetare behövs i arbetet med kvinnor och barn, öppnar det upp för en omformulering av synen på kön och genus i fredsbevarande verksamheter.

Artikel II, med titeln "Community engagement, peacekeeping femininities, and the protection of children during armed conflict", fokuserar på produktionen av subjektpositioner för den "kvinnlige fredsbevararen" genom metoder för samhällsengagemang i FNs fredsbevarande verksamhet. I artikeln argumenterar jag för att kvinnliga fredsbevarares subjektpositioner produceras, genom deras samhällsengagemang, i en triadisk relation med manliga fredsbevarares och barns subjektpositioner. Kvinnliga fredsbevarare ses av FN som naturligt lämpade att genomföra samhällsengagemang på grund av genusbundna antaganden om att kvinnor kommunicerar med och relaterar till barn på ett bättre och mer lättillgängligt vis än män. Denna bild kontrasteras mot en uppfattning om män som olämpliga att ha kontakt med barn och som potentiellt utgör en risk för barn. Detta synsätt produceras genom antaganden om, mäns bristande kommunikationsförmåga och förmåga att relatera till barn, barn som inte vill ha kontakt med en beväpnad man efter att ha utsatts för våld från män under krig, samt risken för sexuellt utnyttjande och övergrepp. Dessa subjektpositioner relaterar till förståelsen av barn, som av FN främst ses som sårbara och saknar agens. Samtidigt utmanar många fredsbevarare centrala delar av dessa ståndpunkter genom att lyfta fram den mer komplexa samverkan som sker i praktiken mellan könsdynamik, förtroende för uppdraget, utbildning och personlighet. Delar som påverkar hur engagemang faktiskt sker i praxis. Samtidigt visar nyligen producerat material till samhälleliga engagemang på att en större vikt läggs vid att involvera både män och kvinnor i detta arbete, där man istället för fokus på genus, lägger mer tonvikt på utbildning, färdigheter och individuella attityder som viktiga för ett framgångsrikt arbete.

Artikel III, med titeln "Children's wartime agency and military child protection in UN peacekeeping", analyserar hur barns subjektpositioner konstrueras i tre olika praxis för skydd av barn i termer av hur dessa praxis erkänner eller förnekar barns aktörskap. Artikeln tar upp hur fredsbevarande insatser bedriver påverkansarbete för barnens mående, hur man engagerar sig i lokal-samhället samt hur man ger barn fysiskt skydd. Jag hävdar att var och en av dessa metoder är utformade utifrån vissa förståelser av subjektpositioner av barn, men även om det finns många likheter mellan dessa finns viktiga skillnader att poängtera. I påverkansarbete ses barn som helt passiva skyddsobjekt, som både saknar agens och är så pass sårbara att det är för riskabelt att involvera dem i påverkansarbetet, och därför måste insatsen agera å deras vägnar. När det gäller metoder i samhällsengagemang anser fredsbevararna att barn är viktiga att engagera då dom kan bidra till förbättrat skydd, samtidigt som dom kan utbildas i hur dom kan skydda sig själva. Även om dessa aktiviteter inte diskuteras som något som involverar barns agens, är dom sätt på vilka fredsbevarare förstår att dessa metoder fungerar beroende av att barn har agens.

Slutligen är en viktig del av det fysiska skyddet att hantera barnsoldater som kan påträffas under operationer. Dom FN-dokument som analyserats diskuterar barnsoldater som aktörer med agens, samtidigt som dom uttryckligen förnekar barns aktörskap och istället väljer att fokusera på barns sårbarheter; exempelvis hur barn blir utnyttjade som soldater. Dessa olika uppfattningar om barn och deras aktörskap som FN producerar genom dessa praxis visar att man försöker hantera motsättningarna mellan dominant diskurser som framställer barn som enbart sårbara och utan agens, och fredsbevararnas praktiska erfarenheter som ligger till grund för det material som studerats.

Artikel IV, med titeln ”Childhood, gender, and power in logics of UN Peacekeeping child protection”, tolkar de köns- och åldersbaserade skyddslogiker som bidrar till att strukturera FNs fredsbevarande insatser för att skydda barn. Med utgångspunkt i tidigare forskning om genus- och åldersbaserade skyddslogiker och barns aktörskap i väpnade konflikter, argumenterar jag för att skyddslogiker i FNs fredsbevarande verksamhet är produktiva för fredsbevararnas subjektpositioner. Dessa konstrueras i relation till barns subjektpositioner och dom potentiella hot barn står inför. Som också diskuteras i artikel II, identifierar jag en könsbunden arbetsfördelning mellan å ena sidan fysiskt skydd och å andra sidan samhällsengagemang och omsorg, där kvinnors deltagande endast framhålls som viktigt i det senare fallet. Dessa skyddslogiker skildrar fredsbevarare både i relation till en subjektposition av barn som utgår från barns sårbarhet och brist på agens, och positionerar fredsbevarare i förhållande till hot mot barns fysiska säkerhet från främst väpnade grupper. Jag hävdar att även om fredsbevarande skydd av barn tenderar att reproducera makt-dynamiker som förstärker dominansen av män över kvinnor och vuxna över barn, öppnar uppmärksamheten av barns aktörskap en potentiell väg framåt för att på ett bättre sätt engagera barn i arbetet med skydd för barn i fredsbevarande insatser.

Appendix I: Participants

Demographics: 53% women, 47% men; 67% military, 25% civilian, 8% police.

Figure 1 Table summarizing research participants

Number	Gender	Sector	Mission(s)	Role	Nationality
1	M	Military	Bosnia, Eritrea, DRC	Military Observer (UNMO), Child Protection	Canada
2	W	Civilian	DRC, Afghanistan, Syria	Child protection	Unknown
3	M	Civilian	DRC, Côte d'Ivoire	Child protection	USA
4*	W	Police	East Timor	Police	Canada
5	W	Military	DRC	Child protection	UK
6*	M	Civilian	South Sudan	Child protection	South Sudan
7	W	Civilian	Afghanistan, others	Child protection	UK
8	M	Military	DRC	Child protection	UK
9	W	Military	Bosnia	Military	Canada
10	W	Military	India/Pakistan	UNMO	Thailand
11†	W	Police	Sudan	Police	Sierra Leone
12†	W	Military	DRC	Child protection	UK
13*	W	Civilian	Sudan, South Sudan	Gender	Ethiopia
14	M	Civilian	Sudan	Child protection	Nepal
15	W	Military	Mali	Child protection	Sierra Leone
16	W	Military	DRC, Bosnia, Iraq	Child protection	UK
17	W	Military	CAR	Child protection	Burundi
18	M	Military	Mali	Child protection	Senegal
19	W	Military	CAR	Child protection	Brazil
20	W	Military	South Sudan	Gender	Ghana
21	W	Military	South Sudan	UNMO	Germany
22	M	Civilian	South Sudan	Child protection	South Sudan
23	W	Civilian	South Sudan	Child protection	South Sudan
24	W	Military	South Sudan	Child protection	Australia
25	M	Military	South Sudan, Afghanistan	UNMO	Germany
26	M	Military	South Sudan, Afghanistan	Protection of Civilians	USA
27	W	Police	South Sudan	Gender	Kenya
28	M	Civilian	South Sudan	Child protection	Unknown
29	W	Military	DRC	Military	Uruguay
30†	M	Military	DRC	Military	Uruguay
31†	M	Military	DRC, Haiti, Colombia	Military	Uruguay
32†	M	Military	Cambodia, DRC, Western Sahara, CAR, Chad	Military	Uruguay

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33†	M	Military	Haiti, DRC	Military	Brazil
34*	M	Military	Angola, DRC, Haiti	Military	Uruguay
35†	M	Military	DRC, Syria/Israel	Military	Uruguay
36	M	Military	DRC, Haiti	Military	Uruguay
<p>*Interview conducted by project collaborators: Dr. Catherine Baillie Abidi (formerly Dallaire Institute, now Mount Saint Vincent University) and/or Dr. Marion Laurence (Royal Military College of Canada). † Interview conducted along with project collaborator.</p>					

Appendix II: Analysed Documents

The following documents are the primary sources for the portion of my discourse analysis that focused on UN policy, training, and guidance on child protection.

Department of Peace Operations and Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. 2019. *Manual for Child Protection Staff in United Nations Peace Operations*. New York: United Nations. https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/1_protection_-_4_manual_for_child_protection_policy.pdf.

Department of Peace Operations, Department of Field Support, and Department of Political Affairs. 2020. "Policy: Child Protection in United Nations Peace Operations." New York: United Nations.

Department of Peace Operations. 2020. *United Nations Infantry Battalion Manual (UNIBAM)*. Second. New York: United Nations. <http://dag.un.org/handle/11176/401024?show=full>.

Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support. 2017. "Lesson 2.7: Child Protection." In *Core Pre-Deployment Training Materials*. New York: United Nations. <http://repository.un.org/bitstream/handle/11176/400653/Lesson%202.7%20Child%20Protection.pdf?sequence=7&isAllowed=y>.

Department of Peacekeeping Operations. 2017. "Specialized Training Materials on Child Protection for UN Police." New York: United Nations. <https://research.un.org/en/peacekeeping-community/training/STMUNMU/childprotectionunpol>.

Department of Peacekeeping Operations. 2018. "UN Military Specialised Training Materials on Child Protection." New York: United Nations. <https://research.un.org/en/peacekeeping-community/training/STM/UNMilitaryonCP>.

APPENDIX II

Integrated Training Services. 2022. “Reinforcement Training Package UN Engagement Platoon.” New York: United Nations. <https://peacekeepingresourcehub.un.org/en/training/rtp/unep>.

Office of Military Affairs. 2022. *UN Engagement Platoon Handbook*. 1st ed. UN Department of Peace Operations. [https://resourcehub01.blob.core.windows.net/\\$web/Policy%20and%20Guidance/corepeacekeepingguidance/Thematic%20Operational%20Activities/Military/2022.11%20UN%20Engagement%20Platoon%20Handbook.pdf](https://resourcehub01.blob.core.windows.net/$web/Policy%20and%20Guidance/corepeacekeepingguidance/Thematic%20Operational%20Activities/Military/2022.11%20UN%20Engagement%20Platoon%20Handbook.pdf).

Appendix III: Sample Interview Guide

This is the final interview guide I developed and was used during the in-person interviews in South Sudan and Uruguay. Earlier online interviews were conducted with a similar guide. Not all questions were asked to all interlocutors, depending on the evolution of our conversation and how much time was available.

What is your understanding of who is a child vs an adult?

Why do you think it is important to protect children? And what is it exactly that child protection aims to protect?

When you think about children here and what they need to be protected from, how do you view those children?

- Are they vulnerable, resilient, at risk, victims?
- Do you think children have a role in their own protection?
- Do they have the ability in an armed conflict context to make decisions, express their opinions, or challenge adults' views of their best interests?
- Are there times when children don't agree with how adults aim to protect them?

What do you think of when you think of a child soldier? Who are they, how were they recruited, what do they do?

- Has this changed based on your work here?

Compared to how you view children in general here, how do you view child soldiers?

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- How do you think about their vulnerability versus the threat that they can pose? Can a child soldier be both vulnerable and threatening?
- When children join an armed group or force not through being abducted or forced, do you think they have any real choice in doing so? How about when they self-demobilize from an armed group?

What do you view as the greatest dangers children face here? What makes children vulnerable to those dangers, and how does that depend on their gender? Which children are more or less vulnerable? Who causes those threats to children?

How does the mission protect children from those threats?

When you think about what child protection should be, rather than what is officially defined as child protection in the mission, what activities does that include? Does it go beyond the military providing physical protection to children?

- Does that include/how does that include providing care for children? Engaging the community? Addressing root causes of children's vulnerability?

What are the broad areas of child protection the mission is responsible for?

What areas of child protection are done by other organizations?

What part of child protection are you specifically involved in? What tasks and activities do you do as part of that?

- **(If relevant)** what other tasks and activities does your job involve?

Are there tasks and activities the mission carries out that protect children but are not part of the official child protection mandate?

Are there any tensions between the protection needs children have here, and what the mission can do or is mandated to do?

Do children's experiences or opinions or preferences have an influence on how child protection is carried out here and what is done?

How do you think child protection is perceived by the mission? Is it seen as important?

How do documents such as manuals, orders, guidelines, or doctrine, whether UN or national, versus your previous experience, versus learning on the job and from colleagues inform your work in child protection?

For MGPAs: what are the benefits and downsides of having your position involved in child protection, protection of civilians, SGBV, and gender?

When we talk about gender in peacekeeping, what is your understanding of how gender is defined?

Do you think it is important to consider gender in peacekeeping, and why?

When it comes to child protection, what is your understanding of how gender should be considered in this work?

Based on your experience in the mission, have you seen your gender as influencing your work? Whether that is through previous experiences influencing what you do now, in interactions with others in or outside the mission, or in interactions with children.

- Have you observed similarities or differences between your experience, and those of other peacekeepers? Does that seem to be influenced by their gender, whether they are military or police or civilian, or other factors?
- When it comes to interacting with children, what is your experience for how gender matters? Both your gender and the child's. Can you give some examples?
- Do you think both men and women are needed in child protection work? How come? Are there differences in this between the military, police, and civilian components, or between different child protection activities?
- If this matters or if there are differences, what is it about men and women that matters for child protection activities? Their behaviour, their experiences, how they are perceived?

We know that under international and national law, childhood ends at 18, but that does not always match how childhood is defined culturally or what is expected of children at certain ages. In your work here, how do you consider who is a child?

APPENDIX III

- How do you address differences between legal and cultural definitions of childhood?
- What is your understanding of those differences in the mission location specifically?

How well do you think you understand the cultural context in the mission location? Is there support to improve your understanding?

- Do you think the mission's activities, especially child protection, are contextualized for the mission location? Are there gaps or problems with how the mission addresses South Sudanese understandings of childhood or gender?

Before or at the start of the mission, did you have any training or education on child protection? On gender?

- Have you found this training useful for your work? If so, how?
- Based on your experience so far, are there things you wish had been included in the training that would have been useful?

Based on our discussion, is there anything else you'd like to share that you think is important?

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