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Clients, Contractors and the Everyday Masculinities in Global Private Security

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Abstract:

This article explores the intimate relationships between the client and the security contractor. It draws upon autoethnography to bring into focus the client/contractor encounters and demonstrate how such encounters (re)shape the marginal and hegemonic men/masculinities of the security industry—masculinities which not work to legitimise who and what are appropriate security providers, but how value/valuation of security is understood and practiced. As such it contributes to the broader debates about gender and war by 1) demonstrating how the researcher is always embedded in and shaped by the research she produces and 2) by bringing to the fore the multitude of masculinities, beyond the hegemonic militarized, that emerge in private security markets.

Keywords: autoethnography, military, militarization, private military and security companies, masculinities, feminist political economy

Militarism, Markets and Everyday Gender Encounters¹

Between 2008-2010, I made two trips to Kabul, Afghanistan to research on private security contractors in conflict zones. At the time I had just finished some graduate research on private military and security companies (PMSCs) and was curious to find out more about the men (and sometimes women) who worked in the global armed security industry. During both stays in Kabul I received protection from a variety of security contractors from nationalities including British, South African, Afghan, and Nepalese.

I remember vividly the first time I arrived in Kabul. As I and the other passengers disembarked the plane on an old tarmac I was a bit confused as to which door of the dusty small building to enter. I tightened the scarf around my head and made sure none of my hair was sticking out. I looked to the other passengers and watched how they were walking and what they were wearing. The white women, of which there were few, walked confidently up to the building and into a queue that was beginning to form with the other passengers. I followed these women with caution but tried to act confidently, like I had flown into hostile environments numerous times. I politely smiled at the Afghan immigration officer as I handed over my passport and then quickly withdrew the smile. Did I smile too wide? Was I unintentionally being flirty? I checked to make sure my hair was tightly tucked under my headscarf again and looked around at the other passengers, through immigration now, waiting for their luggage. They were mostly white

¹ I want to thank Saskia Stachowitsch, Matt Davies, Joanna Tidy, the editors of Critical Military Studies and the peer reviewers for their important intellectual guidance and support in developing this article.

men, dressed in desert-coloured cargo pants, polo shirts with puffer jackets—the informal dress of the white security contractor I would later find out. They, like the female passengers, appeared both casual and annoyed at how long it was taking to get their luggage. I was completely out of my element and became concerned everyone could see this. My insides were turning and I was feeling nauseous. What was I doing in a conflict zone? I calmly walked up to the luggage carousel and quietly waited for my luggage as I checked to make sure my hair was tucked into my headscarf.

These initial feelings I had about my own insecurity and how I then attempted to *perform* a calm female academic who could be taken seriously did not completely go away. I needed to feel safe, not only to come across as credible, as someone who could be taken seriously, but also so I could physically do the research I wanted to do in the city. As I've written elsewhere, these private security contractors played a vital role in helping me feel safe (Chisholm, 2016). They appeared calm and confident in everyday life in Kabul. I wanted to feel this way and so I listened to them, watched them, and tried to comply with their security advice.

In security briefings I listen to these men using technocratic language like risk mitigation and talk through various strategies to avoid *making contact* with dangerous people that lurked outside the compound. I watched them monitor the armed local contractors who stood in front of the compound where we lived. Through these interactions I was repeatedly reminded that I did not have the security knowledge and the *ground truths* to handle my own security, truths that come through years of military service in dangerous places.

Despite spending five years training as a military medic with the Canadian military, I never experienced combat—I was never on the frontline and so I had no previous skills or experience to refer to. Such ground truths, as Tidy (2016) reminds us, are not objective but act as authority claims to knowledge of war. These truths are highly gendered. They reinforce authority rooted in *boots on the ground* experience through the embodied masculine model of the combat soldier (Tidy, 2016). My female sexed body and my lack of combat experience prevented me from obtaining such truths. I could only ever be a friendly ally of these contractors, one who could empathise immediately with the military culture, but could not fully participate as a security expert.

I recall one morning hearing an explosion and then some small bursts of gunfire. At the time I was finishing up a field note entry from the previous night. Sharing an office space with one of the security contractors living in the compound with me, I was amazed at how he knew the type of gun that made those sounds and the direction it was coming from. He quickly jumped up and began directing other guards, who were already performing security drills of locking down the compound we were staying in. I followed him up to the rooftop of the compound where we both could get a better look at what was happening outside. A few streets down we saw a plume of smoke coming from a

house. He said it was the UN guesthouse. I was cautious and curious as I absorbed what he was saying. I stayed a few feet behind him and watched as he calmly and casually approached the rooftop outer wall and peered over. Suddenly we heard another bang. I instantly ducked. He looked back at me and laughed. That's only kids with firecrackers, he said. Shaken, I quickly retreated into the house. I was amazed at his ability to know the source of all these noise bursts. They all sounded the same to me.

His demonstration of knowledge about firepower and military tactics alongside the calm demeanor and habitual drills set immediately into motion reminded me who the security experts were and my place as the female client was—the one who complies, who watches with awe at the tactics and abilities. It is through these everyday encounters that my understanding of security and the role these men played in making my life safe is where my gender analysis begins.

Autoethnography in Critical Gender Studies of Global Security

To date, any self-reflections within feminist and critical literatures on private security industry remain absent. Yet it is these autoethnographic reflections that show how valuations of military masculinities and security are constructed through everyday gendered performances. As such, autoethnography offers an important methodological intervention into how knowledge about the industry is produced through these gendered encounters. It turns the analytical gaze onto the researcher who is a part of the social she researches. It touches upon feelings, observations and the messiness of the field she constructs in her knowledge claims about security.

The autoethnographic reflections throughout this article are heavily indebted to the intellectual work of feminist poststructuralists who see gender and security as something that is not an ontological given but produced through repetitive performances of them (Butler, 1990; Shepherd 2008; Higate and Henry, 2010; Wadley 2010). Security, as demonstrated in the above reflections, came through repetitive performativities of particular military masculinities. The regular drills, the technocratic language, the immediate response to incidents all told me these militarized men were confident and were in charge.

I also owe much intellectual credit to the feminist autoethnography writings before mine; those that interweave the vulnerabilities and fluidities of the researcher self into the social that they research (Taber, 2006; Dauphinee 2013; 2014); and to black feminist thinkers (Collins, 2009; Griffin, 2012) who continue to understand writing as a political, emancipatory, hopeful, emotional and complicated process. These writings combined have all argued for the importance of listening and giving voice to the experiences of women who are often written out of global politics writings and highlight the politics that underpin their racialised and gendered marginal status. They demand a type of writing that brings to the fore the “murmurs” and the “silences” that are a part of global politics (Dauphinee, 2014).

Autoethnography of everyday encounters also helps us get at the ways in which the militarised field speaks to theory (Baker et al., 2016). It allows us to be accountable to the research we produce (Gray, 2016) as well as how we produce knowledge (Cohn, 1987; Enloe 2010). These everyday encounters I opened with and discuss throughout the article are not disconnected from theory—rather they shape and speak back to the ways we draw upon masculinities to understand violence, insecurities and war (Enloe, 2000). These everyday encounters show in concrete ways how the personal is always international and how masculinities and militarism shapes both (Enloe, 2000; 2011).

Militarism and masculinities have been important concepts for feminists studying gender in global politics. Feminists have understood them as rationales and modes of behavior that frame how we perform, enact, incite and evaluate security (Shepherd 2008). Yet masculinities, like security itself, have no ontological given. Rather, inspired by Butler's (1990; 1993) informative work on performativities, feminist International Relations (IR) scholars have demonstrated how both security and masculinities remain ambiguous concepts, codes of conduct and broader rationales made meaningful through the language we use to describe them, in different political and social interactions and the practices and performances/performativities of them (Sylvester 1994; Shepherd 2008; Higate and Henry 2010).

Feminist scholars such as Agathangelou and Ling (2009) and Richter-Montpetit (2016) have highlighted that military masculinities cannot be understood solely within the frames of gender, but how gender intersects with race and coloniality. By doing so, these scholars have been able to show how military violence occurs under broader colonial logics of gender. It is these very ambiguities and infinite flexibilities of masculinities, practiced through logics of (neo)coloniality, that we as feminists curious about security and violence need to pay attention to. My personal reflections detailed above and the dialogues that are discussed below then cannot be divorced from the broader colonial geopolitics that informs how we understand what security is and are conditioned to look for and to feel, when we are encountering (in)security through the everyday.

Masculinities and Security Markets

Feminists studying the commercialization and privatization of security have detailed the various masculinities that are brought into neoliberal security markets. Theoretical discussions have talked about how the industry remasculinises and valorises traditional notions of masculine security (Stachowitsch, 2014; 2013; 2015), how the industry draws upon and reconfigures the global workforce of military labour (Eichler, 2014; Chisholm, 2015), and is rendered intelligible through broader gendered neoliberal and racial projects (Eichler, 2013; Joachim and Schneiker, 2012; Chisholm, 2014a). Empirical focused analysis looks at the on the ground operations through a sociological/ethnographic based inquiry that positions the men of the industry as the main site of inquiry. Scholars such as Higate (2012), Ware (2016), Barker (2009),

Chisholm (2014a; 2014b; 2015), and Chisholm and Stachowitsch (2016) use such empirical insights to highlight how the industry categorises the men (and sometimes women) who work as racialised, gendered and classed contractors. While this research remains important in understanding the gendered practices of the industry, the ways in which masculinities in the industry are produced through everyday encounters—and the researchers who write about them remain absent.

This article attempts to address this gap in two important ways. The first is methodological. As mentioned, most research on gender and war the feminist researcher continues to be written out of the actual analysis. Consequently, we know very little about the ways the everyday remains important in shaping how we as academics think about, empathise with, and write about masculinities in war (Cohn, 1987; Enloe 2000; 2010; Dauphinee, 2014). Here I move beyond the self reflective disclaimers which often briefly appear in the methods sections of articles, to actively engage with Cohn's, Dauphinee's and Enloe's important works by asking: how does being protected by the very people who are researching impact upon the knowledge you produce?

By making commitments to better theorising military masculinities within the market and to autoethnographic methods, this article opens up space to pose these important questions of knowledge production of military masculinities in the neoliberal security era. An era marked by diverse forms of militarisms and masculinities (Henry, 2015; Tidy, 2015; Richter-Montpetit 2016; Myrntinen, 2004). The second contribution is an empirical one. By focusing on the client and contractor relationship, this article is able to consider how hegemonic conceptions of military masculinities change when they collude with neoliberal market logics. This article shows how market value and valuation of security labour, articulated through gendered embodied relations between the client and contractor, is a process that does not always privilege traditional notions of hegemonic masculine security.

Autoethnography and the Everyday

Feminists have for a long while reminded us that the everyday is fundamental in shaping experiences of violence and (in)security. It does more than just showcase how international relations and global economics impact upon everyday lives, but demonstrates how everyday encounters intellectually shape how we understand gender and war (see for example the works of Cohn 1987; Henry, 2015; Tickner, 2003; Enloe, 2000; 2010; 2011 and Ware, 2016). I draw upon these feminist insights to demonstrate how conceptualisations of global security practices are, whilst largely unacknowledged, fundamentally rooted in our gendered embodied experiences with the field—broadly defined to include those who engage in the field from “afar”, through mediums such as blogs, websites and secondary sources, to those who engage in dialogue and participatory practices with industry practitioners.

I begin with the everyday. The everyday is understood as both a practice of banal activities including consumption practices and daily routines as much as it is a geographic and spatial marker of the ways in which global capital discursively sections off the international from the local (Davies 2006; 2016). These conceptual moves are profoundly gendered, and include for example, the feminisation and racialisation of work and workers globally (Elias and Roberts, 2016). The everyday points to the embodiment of global capital and war. It captures “the mess, pain and pleasure of everyday life” (Pettman 2003, pg. 158 cited in Elais and Roberts, 2016 pg. 790) and how the global comes to bare upon and constituted through the local (Elias and Roberts, 2016).

Foregrounding my own positionalities as both a researcher and client can illuminate how knowledge production about security in the everyday needs to also account for the gendered relations between the researcher (and client) and those she researcher. By acknowledging our own implications in and reproductions of gender knowledge as researchers, we can begin to unpack/reorientate the authority claims behind these gendered ground truths—ground truths that, as Tidy reminds us, continue to maintain an unquestioned “objective” legitimacy for hegemonic conceptions of military masculinities in how we understand and talk about gender and war (Tidy, 2016).

I focus on the everyday local processes by which certain masculinities appear dominant, professional, dangerous or otherwise. I demonstrate how gender positionality matters in the types of research we produce; in how we navigate the field and who we have access to, what language we can use to describe the field experiences directly shaping our research. Locating the researcher as a valid object of study raises important analytical questions: how does the gendered researcher, specifically that one being protected by the very security she seeks to research, impact upon the analysis she says and the stories she tells about the security industry? What do the masculinities that are marked dangerous, lazy, insecure tell us about the broader knowledge productions and practices of global security assemblages? Further, what can the marginal masculinities tell us about how such masculinities shape the broader cultural circulation of knowledge about security actors?

Taking these questions seriously means that militarised masculinities is not a concept we apply onto the field, but one that is given meaning and shaped through how we relate to the field—the logics, practices and subjectivities we empathise and connect with and how we later tell their stories of security (Cohen, 1987). Consequently, this article highlights how the masculinities we come to value and to vilify are, in part, a result of our own situated and gendered encounters with the field.

In Conversation with Other Security Clients

My own experiences are coupled with dialogues with other men and women who were protected by security contractors. I say dialogues as opposed to interviews because dialogues, as Collins argues, is a method that sees the interview process as productive of

knowledge and not an extraction of knowledge by the researcher from the researched (Collins, 2009). It therefore immediately accounts for the research process as productive of particular kinds of knowledge—foregrounding how both gender and racial subjectivities of the interviewer/interviewees. During the dialogues those I conversed with asked questions of me, for my opinions and feelings on the questions I posed to them. I followed the important methodological work of Gunaratnam (2003), and treated the engagement with those interviewed to be productive of race and gender, as opposed to seeing them as a reflection or an empirical fact that supports an already preconceived understanding of what race and gender look like. In many ways my own reflections are echoed in the experiences raised through the conversations, in some ways they are not. These tensions are not flattened out but given space throughout the article. They show how meaning about security is not a straightforward process, but produced through contradictions.

The security clients I talked to all worked in Kabul for extended periods of time with the United Nations or commercial construction companies. I was introduced to these people through personal contacts I had made during my time in Kabul and who still remain in the city. These people were all white, western nationals. In total, three men and five women were interviewed. Their names have been changed to protect their anonymity.

The dialogues took place in 2014, four years after my own experiences, and ranged from one to two hours and occurred over Skype. During these sessions I took on a position as both a group member but also an academic concerned with how security practices are experienced by the clients. However, just because I was a member of this group, in so much as I shared a commonality of being protected by private security while in Afghanistan, this does not allow me to represent clear, constant and coherent patterns of being protected. A lack of a clear and coherent story of the protected is in part because one does not exist and in part because my own embodiment as an academic will invariably foreclose on accessing different perspectives.

Instead I envisioned my role as self-conscious participant and my understandings not emerging from either the participant or the researcher, but from dialogues (Anderson, 2006: 382). In conversations, I openly acknowledge my own position as both an academic and a client who was protected. I used the former identity marker to collectively explore with the interviewee experiences and feelings around sensitive topics such as how racialisation informs how we understand what constitutes good security, how we are complicit in these often problematic racial profiling of security contractors and where our own assumptions were challenged.

This article highlights some of the topics raised in these discussions. It unfolds with a discussion of two archetypes of security providers in Kabul, the Gurkhas and the white Westerners. These categories of contractors arose during initial discussions that primarily focused on Gurkha contractors—something I have written extensively about elsewhere (Chisholm, 2014; 2014a; 2015) and was particularly interested in exploring

with others. I was curious about how others felt about being protected by them and their value and worth within broader security practices. As to be expected, Gurkha value was understood in relational terms—how they measured against other national/ethnic contractors. The categories of security contractors are not as discrete as this article divides them. They are meant to illuminate the role race and nationhood play in how clients value particular security and how this valuing is bound up with how the security market places value on these men's labour and skillsets.

The remainder of the article proceeds with the following sections. *Intimate Encounters: The Martial Gurkha and the Flawed Westerner* details two relational archetype security contractors who were described and categorized through my dialogues with other female and male clients. They demonstrate the ways in which the everyday encounters act as important spaces/practices that inform broader understandings of the ideal and the dangerous security contractors. Such encounters, and the way we make sense of them, are articulated through the gendered encounters between the client and the contractor.

It is within broader political economic landscapes where the value of security is further defined through these everyday encounters. Just as feminists have cautioned us, the point is not to read these classifications as fixed or universal but the product of racial, gendered, spatial and temporal logics that produce particular seemingly fixed hierarchies of contractors. Instead, these articulations of security contractors and loose typologies should be read as not the result of the "authentic ground truth" nor should they be read as one derived from "high" theory. Instead, these articulations are the result of re-articulations of security through everyday encounters with the men who were contracted or otherwise to protect me.

The final section, *Bringing the Researcher into the Gendered Critique* discusses how positionality of the research matters in the types of research they can produce. The researcher, like the subjects she researches, is gendered and her encounters are always mediated through not only how she imagines herself and performs, but also how she is interpreted by those she engages with in the field.

Producing the Martial Gurkha and the Flawed Westerner through Everyday Encounters

During both my visits to Afghanistan I was protected by the very men I sought to research. Neither I, nor the clients I conversed with, hired these men directly but we were the *end users* of their services. As was common practice, security contractors and the people they were employed to protect lived and worked in the same compounds. They often shared the same kitchens/diners, gyms and the same social places. In my case, during my first visit I lived in a compound that was leased by a security company and on my second visit I lived and worked in a compound leased by a construction company, where my neighbors were all security contractors and where their in-house

security manager was in charge of our safety.

This meant that in my everyday life of running on the treadmill, preparing my meals, commuting back and forth from cafes and restaurants or the local market I was surrounded by security contractors. These were men with, in my experience, British military training and had substantive commercial security experience working in Iraq and now Afghanistan. They were labeled by the industry and through self-identification as western security contractors. They continue to be the archetype contractor in popular culture, mainstream academia and gendered accounts of security (Chisholm, 2016). They are described in contradictory ways as professional and highly skilled but also as gun obsessed and hyper masculine profiteers.

My own understandings of these contractors are ambivalent and rooted in a negotiation between what the industry and broader policy tells me about these men's ability to protect me and through everyday encounters with them as men. The industry tells us that their professionalism, rooted in their whiteness (Chisholm, 2016) and their acquired military skills makes them ideal security contractors. Yet everyday encounters, at times and as this article illustrates, can tell a different narrative. I knew them beyond their contracted security role and saw them as men who had families back home, who were often on their second or third marriages, who were cheating on their wives. I watched some stumble home drunk from a local bar, some visiting local brothels. I listened to them talk about how much they missed their families, how Afghanistan was a messed up place, was irredeemable and filled with "oxygen stealing corrupt men." At the same time I saw these men confidently describe where the potential threats within the city lie, the drills that would need to be followed to mitigate the threats and navigate the perils of the city with ease.

The white men were not the only men who I encountered in my everyday life researching and being protected by security. Gurkhas—Nepalese men with over 200 years of military history with the British also protected me. However, I, like the other people detailed in this article, never knew what a Gurkha was until I went to Afghanistan. I first came across a Gurkha when I was invited to a security company Gurkha curry night. I walked into the security compound, which was a mansion, and saw the walls adorned with paintings depicting various military settings with men later confirmed to me as Gurkhas and white British officers. The paintings displayed the Gurkhas as actively engaged in various one on one combat positions. They were physically smaller than their white colleagues and wearing different uniforms.

I was led into a room where the curry was served and where I met many white western men working in security. Curiously, no Gurkhas were to be found. When I asked who these men were, I was regaled with numerous military anecdotes and vignettes detailing these men's fierceness and yet gentlemanliness and their childlike nature in the face of violence. Overall, I was told, a Gurkhas value comes through the management of white westerners who can harness their natural martial attributes.

Evaluating security in the Professional White Men and the Martial Gurkha

Gurkhas were abundant in the security industry in Afghanistan. They worked as security guards on behalf of the United Nations, government embassies in the city and various international commercial companies. These men were preferred security providers because the security industry leaders could draw upon racial mythologies of Gurkha martiality to naturalise their labour in order to sell it on cheaply (Chisholm, 2014a)—practices that are all too common in global political economies of domestic and sex industries (Huang and Yeoh 1998; Agathangleou, 2003) and within the broader markets globally (Peterson, 2005; Nevins and Peluso, 2008). Where “the industry” was assured of their security value, established through years of colonial military service to the British Empire, the clients came to know about Gurkhas, and assured about their value in different ways.

Beth, a female working with a commercial construction company in Kabul found out about their reputations through online research and talking to managers of Gurkhas. Her comfort with Gurkha security labour came through what has been called “the Gurkha security package” (Chisholm, 2014a), a package including Gurkha security protection under the supervision of white western contractors. Beth stated that.

I did not have any issues with this security. Ian [the white director] was very good. Steve [the white country manager] was also very good.

For Beth the assurance of their value was in the fact that white western security contractors managed Gurkhas. These white contractors’ military training was familiar to her. She felt she could trust that their experiences and military drills would keep her safe. Like Beth, the others I conversed with also felt the value of security came through what you knew and what was familiar to you. For both Linda and Mike (two US nationals) the US Special Forces contractors were the most desired security contractors because both knew the training they undergone and were familiar with these men’s cultural behavior as soldiers and as contractors. Linda for example details,

I knew there were a lot of Americans, ex Special Forces, who were on the Green Village who were coming from a military training that I was familiar and comfortable with.

Mike also felt Gurkhas could be trusted when he realised their training was closely affiliated with British military training.

I never knew the name Gurkha. I actually Wikipedia them to find out what they are all about. I got the understanding that they were highly trained, hand picked, British trained, there was a rigorous process in selecting Gurkhas. That made me feel secure.

Leeann only became interested in Gurkhas when she found out she was going to be protected by them when she deployed to Kabul. She stated,

I heard about Gurkhas, I was familiar with the thought process that goes behind them and their reputation. That they don't run away from bullets, that they run into bullets, which from my own experience I found to be true.

In all three cases, these clients initially preferred the security of white contractors. They were reassured of Gurkhas's security labour because of these men's colonial relations with the British (or other western forces). Such reassurance was made intelligible in the larger industry narrative that values and projects white masculine security contractors and performativities as the most professional and ideal (Joachim and Schneiker, 2012; Chisholm, 2014a). Yet for some I conversed with, the association of Gurkhas to white contractors was not enough to assure them of their own safety. Linda in particular expressed concern.

In talking with my husband and deciding where to live because I had a choice at that point. One of the driving forces was actually the fact that there were more international security people at the Green Village. I wasn't comfortable by the fact that I was going to be guarded by Gurkhas, mine was more of an idea that. I really wanted to know that we would have as many weapons around as possible should anything happen.

Linda's deciding factor of picking the place to live in Kabul was based not upon Gurkhas, but the amount of US contractors who lived and worked there. Where all the people mentioned, including myself, came to know about Gurkhas first through popular books and vignettes about these men (they never run from bullets, they are fierce and brave), we remained skeptical about their security potential.

I personally felt security came through fortified spaces, armored equipment and personal military competency of weapons handling and hostile environment training. Linda shared my feelings of security through equipment and professional (read western) military training. Here, Linda explained it through race and Gurkhas (and other global South labour) inability to achieve the same equipment and training standards as white westerners.

Linda: of course race matters. It is what I'm familiar with and what I feel comfortable with. When I think of developing nations militaries, I'm not necessarily thinking of the most capable individuals. It's through no fault of their own. Maybe they don't have the funding, the equipment. It has nothing to do with them as individuals.

For Linda, racial embodiments of contractors and their relational value in the security market mapped onto geopolitical and military inequalities. White security (observed in

western military training) was seen as the ideal because it was the best funded and could spend money on training. Other races/nationalities were held suspect due to her unfamiliarity of their training—and assumptions that it was of poorer standard because of the global South state's lower socio-economic international indicators. In this way, Gurkhas had to prove their worth to the client as men able to protect them. This largely occurred through everyday encounters with the clients as opposed to popular cultural writings about their martial worth.

Racialising (in)security through the everyday

Security contractors were in charge of the protection and safety of clients throughout the day and night. This required contractors to be made available for both official and personal trips the client would make outside the compound as well as ensuring perimeter security of the compound in which both contractors and clients often shared. In this case, the separation of work and personal life was blurred. During the official work times/spaces that required protection in vehicles or in risk assessments and mitigation strategies, white westerners were valued for their military professional background—backgrounds familiar to those interviewed and myself. However, this was not necessarily the case during personal times and spaces involving shopping, going to the gym and socialising. Throughout my conversations with women in particular, western contractors were often seen as a source of insecurity—one where their flirty, misogynistic jokes and male gaze made women feel uncomfortable. Alternatively then, many women appeared to prefer the caring and distant security Gurkhas provided. Beth commented:

We all live together in the same house and we get to know them personally whereas the Gurkhas you don't get to know them in the same way. The circumstances are different. The access I have to these "risk managers" is different. They live in the house, they control a lot of the things we do. We eat with them, we travel with them but they refer to us as client. So I guess we see them as people like us. Maybe there is something more exotic about the Gurkhas surrounding them that we want to keep them, you see this sort of aura this person has and don't want to put a chink in that armour.

You want that illusion or aura to be strong. You don't want to know that they are just as human as we are. I quite liked that differentiation between the Gurkha and myself because it allowed me to have this presentation in my mind of who was providing my security. Where as now, the guys who are providing my security are just ordinary people. They make mistakes, they get scared, they get angry. But there was an aura about the Gurkhas and there is just a magic about them and maybe that's why I felt safe. They knew nothing about me but that they were contracted to protect me. It was quite special really but I don't know how much of that was in my mind...I put my faith in these guys and hope that it never gets tested.

Amanda: yes security is based upon a lot of faith.

Beth: the other thing is too you can tell who is protecting the Americans and British and ...just from how they acted, what they were wearing...whether it is the tight t-shirts, the muscles showing. You know I never saw a Gurkha go to the gym. You know there is this thing about the younger ones.

Amanda: vanity?

Beth: vanity and arrogance and if you are not their client they don't want anything to do with you. You don't exist. We have two projects here and one time I was in the car with the security contractor for another project and from a security point of view it was as if I didn't exist because I wasn't his client. I'm sure if something would have happened they would look after both of us but it was subtle that I didn't really matter.

Beth: It's like two extremes. During off duty they are very friendly and on duty there is a lack of compassion. That would be a worry for me to have someone who could be two extremes. In the case of an emergency what are you going to get.

Beth's experiences resonated with me. There was something about intimacy being articulated differently depending on whom you were encountering. Encountering these white contractors in my everyday living, eating with them, drinking with them, going to the gym with them and then being protected by them I saw them as more than just security contractors. They were more than just men who were contractually obligated to keep me safe—they were men who cheated on their wives, who drank too much, who obsessed over their own body image. These were men who flirted with me in their "off time", who made misogynist comments about UN and NGO women in the city, who lamented the security jobs they had to do and expressed frustration over clients not taking their expert advice seriously. Seeing these security contractors as flawed men who make mistakes, who contradict themselves and who express their feelings openly creating feelings of insecurity and opened up questions as to whether they would protect us when/if needed.

The dialogue between Beth and I highlights how familiarity, intimacy and security collate differently between western and Gurkha encounters with white female clients. There is a geography that is important here. For Beth, Gurkhas' security value was reassured because she never had the opportunity to see these men in as other than security providers. As white women, both Beth and myself were unable to overcome the colonial decorum that mediated our relations with Gurkhas. With the exception of a few Gurkhas, we only ever encountered them in their roles as security providers and ours as clients. Gurkhas were spatially segregated from our social lives. They ate and slept and socialized amongst each other. The times we encountered them in more intimate

ways in when they drove us to various appointments, waited patiently for us to finish so they could drive us home. There was a constant polite professionalism about them. They brought Beth cups of tea in the morning. They said good night and wished me happy dreams before I went to bed at night. These different geographies and uses of space allowed the perpetuation of a Gurkha myth—the idea that this is how these men always act/interact.

Such relations of intimacy mediated through re-imagined colonial encounters are also documented in feminist political economy literature on the global nannies and sex work for example—whose labour we understand to be more valuable than others rests upon particular mythologies of race and gender (Agathangleou 2003). The relationship also says a lot about how we as clients define our own security and worth. This everyday security encounter was counter posed to our interactions with western contractors who fostered a paternal relationship whereby they used discourses of security to control our everyday.

Beth's and my experiences also highlight how mythologies of race and gender, of which bodies are more valuable than others, matter. Western security contractors' abilities to provide us with a safe and security environment were immediately given. We knew we could trust them because broader industry practices tell us this. These men are understood as professional. In everyday situations in Kabul they act confidently. This confidence, they tell us in various conversations, comes from military and police training in their respective western countries. However, it was through these same everyday encounters with them that their professionalism was held into question. For Gurkhas the assurance in their security value was the opposite. I and the other clients I conversed with did not initially know about their abilities. It was through our encounters with them that our belief in their ability to keep us safe was solidified.

For Mike, Gurkha security value was seen in everyday ritualized security performances.

Just watching the way in which [Gurkhas] handle themselves, I could tell they were doing their job in making sure the car was checked thoroughly before granted access into the parking lot. So knowing about their background but also having that interaction with them and observing their shift change...I could tell they were in sync with each other so that if something went down they were well trained enough to have a coordinated response.

Beth's feelings of security with Gurkha contractors came through their ability to be respectful to the client, keep a friendly distance from the client and to blend into the immediate environments. She explains,

I went on this trip around the country where we looked at UN programmes. Travelling up with them, I just found [Gurkhas] extremely respectful. They fitted in with Afghans. They didn't stand out and somehow they just seemed to meld in

so I never felt we were conspicuous. They could have been taken for Tajiks or Uzbeks. It was just another layer of protection that was positive.

Amanda: Like layer of protection because they blend in?

Beth: Yes, they always carried weapons with them but they did blend in. We had these two, Tiger and Puna. They looked after Linda and I and when we came up to this trip they ended up providing hot water bottles for us. They would deliver a cup of tea in the morning. Those are the things I remember and it just made it so much personable. They were very real people and I felt they really cared. I never felt uncomfortable. I felt very well looked after.

In Mike's case, Gurkhas' value was proven in their everyday security rituals of checking vehicles and performing various security drills. Beth saw their value in their racialised bodies. For her, Gurkhas value was not necessarily professional skillsets, or at least not entirely. Their worth came from their physical bodies, which allowed them to more easily blend in to local populations. Such a logic was also highlighted by security directors I spoke to about the merits of Gurkhas labour—that these men, given their bodies and their ability to speak similar languages, can integrate easier than white people and can gather more immediate intelligence about the local area (**AUTHOR X**).

In these two cases, contractors are gendered and racialised through different mechanisms. Western men are seen as professional during work hours but a source of potential insecurity during social times. Their male gaze upon female clients, their flirtations towards the client during “off hours” alongside their expressed attitude towards women in general tore away at their professionalism. Where western contractors worth was immediately given, and then perhaps diluted through everyday social encounters, Gurkhas' worth comes in their biology (naturally blending in) and their caring abilities (bringing cups of tea). Such valuations of Gurkhas (re)produce an oriental imagining of these men that naturally separate them from their western contractor counterparts. As in the case of global South maids and nannies (Huang and Yeoh, 1998; Agathangelou, 2003), Gurkhas worth is only understood through broader cultural reproductions and myths about Gurkhas, and other global South security labourers—myths that reinforce the labour divide between global South feminised natural security abilities and western security contractors whose worth is through *professional* acquired skill sets. Yet professionalism of white contractors is also not a given, but disrupted through their everyday gendered encounters, in particular with their female clients.

Leeann commented that she immediately trusted US contractors in particular because she knew their training through her own experiences of having family members in the US military. Alternatively, her belief in the value of Gurkha labour only came through actual violent encounter in Kabul where her vehicle was only meters away from a detonated improvised explosive device (IED). She explains,

I was in a vehicle 100 feet from another vehicle that Taliban exploded. What I saw during that time was just incredible. There is debris and falling body parts falling all over the place but there wasn't a moment where I saw anyone turn away and run. The Gurkhas were running right to the incident. Our vehicle was used as a shield during that time. I saw Gurkhas dragging other Gurkhas into the compound. They took care of their people and not only that they ran toward everything that happened. There wasn't a moment that they shied away.

In Leeann's account, Gurkhas value was only achieved in their response to a violent encounter. They proved their worth when they ran towards to IED attack and not away. She went on to explain how Gurkhas rescued her colleagues from direct attack.

These little tiny Gurkhas came and tackled [my very large and injured colleague] and dragged him inside for safety. These little guys stood in front of us and ran with us from the vehicle to the compound. I'll never ever forget that and I'll never question again the role that they play and when shit hits the fan, the guys are there and they are not going to run away from it.

Racialisation of Gurkhas bodies in Leeann's case then were also rooted in the long-standing cultural reproduction of martial raced men. The comment "little tiny" here works to infantilize Gurkhas as much as it was to produce a curious juxtaposition between harmless childlike on the one hand and fierce warriors on the other. This racial logic is also the very foundation that culturally re-produces Gurkhas as the beloved warrior gentlemen (Caplan, 1995; Streets 2004)—men who are almost but not white contractors and whose value comes through association with white security or through actual demonstration of security (Chisholm, 2014).

The aforementioned cases demonstrate how none of the clients were immediately convinced of Gurkhas' merits and their ability to provide good security. This all came through personal interactions whereby Gurkhas consistency, friendliness, diligence and, in extreme cases, ability to react quickly and efficiently, shone through. Gurkhas, unlike their western counterparts, had to prove their value to the western client and yet their value continue to be understood through broader racial logics about these men—logics reproduced through popular cultural representations of them that perpetuation as almost but not white imagining. For Beth, and myself Gurkhas' close association with other white men who managed them gave us reassurance of our own security. This was then reinforced through kindness and hospitality we received from them in our everyday interactions with them. For Mike, Gurkhas worth was observed through regular and ritualized security performances. In Leeann's case, Gurkha masculine labour was proved through an actual violent encounter.

Where Gurkhas obtain their value through initially the martial myth about their military prowess, western men's value is already given—their position already secure as

professional and valued contractors already secure in an industry that rests upon the assumption that whiteness is the ideal (Chisholm, 2016). Their privileged status is a product of the broader market that sustains western whiteness and western security training as the necessary “skills” one must have to perform security (Chisholm, 2016; Joachim and Schneiker, 2015). Yet it is through everyday encounters of intimacy whereby such assumptions about the ideal white security is called into question.

These men’s security reputations were only understood in relation to one another. We could trust Gurkhas because their natural martial masculinities have been refined and professionalized through years of service with the British military. Yet for some, this was not enough to feel safe. Gurkhas had to initially be proven through demonstration of security performances through regular and ritualized perimeter/vehicle checks and various other drills. Western men were almost immediately trusted but then trust was lost if they were seen to be acting in contradiction to the professional security image they were known for.

Gurkha and Western contractors’ value are also articulated through temporal and spatially constitutions. No one interviewed every socialized with Gurkhas the same way they did with western contractors. With the exception of a few through my own fieldwork, Gurkha men were only known through their contractual obligations to protect their clients. Consequently, because the security professional relationship was never challenged by seeing these men in any other way other than the security protection. Consequently, the myth about their unfettered loyalty and professionalism was never challenged.

These types of security contractors of course are not universalized and heavily dependent on context. In my own experiences and through interviews, the hyper masculine contractor was one who relied upon overt security props, tight tops, dark wrap around sunglasses and an overt showing of weaponry. Such performativities of security were detailed by Scahill (2007), embodied in the Blackwater US contractor who was concerned more about how he looked than the security he was tasked to perform. Higate (2012) also mentions the hypermasculine US contractor—referred to as the billy bollocks” in security training programmes.

However, for the US national clients I spoke with, they felt reassurance in these same props. James commented:

The Americans were contractors who were PSD guys for people around. Those were the same guys that would be in my same social circle and there were a difference between the Special Forces guys who were intelligent a more interesting than the 19-year-old American soldier. These guys were much more worldly. If something went down I would totally trust these American Special Forces guys. I saw them as intelligent competent people—not guys getting drunk at the bar.

For both James and Linda the US contractor is not inherently dangerous. They see these contractors as continuing on with the ethics and professionalism they learned in the military and taking it with them into the market. Their own understandings of these men and in turn their own security works to highlight the ambiguities in these tensions between state and market. It also demonstrates how racial logics about security value and who embodies the “right” security contractor also inform perceptions of insecurity. By implicitly trusting US contractors but having to have Gurkhas prove their worth as security providers demonstrates this point.

Linda and James’s understanding of the US Special Forces contractor offers an alternative to Higate’s (2012) empirical work of hypermasculine depictions of US contractors in training programs. Such contradictions highlight how the nationality (and therefore familiarity) with particular military practices and appropriate masculine performativities matter in how the individual sees and reinforce gender hierarchies. For James and Leeann, because of their personal knowledge of US military training, the US Special Forces now security contractor represented the highest level of feelings of security because of his former training and his individual intelligence that originated from the professional military training he received.

Alternatively, where assurance of western value was embedded in broader understandings of the political economies of western militaries, which afforded them high level of military training, the value of Gurkhas was rooted in their racial bodies—the naturalising myths of who they were as men. Like Agathangelou’s (2003) research on the global sex industry, it was the broader mythologies of race and gender that mapped onto the bodies of western men as highly skilled and professional and Gurkhas as natural warriors which provided a rationale as to why one labour force was to be instantly trusted over the other.

Gurkhas’ raced bodies were rendered exotic through popular culture and vignettes that sought to naturalise them as mythical warriors. The reimagined colonial relationship that informed the everyday interactions between the clients and these men only reinforced the exotic polite gentlemen and fierce warrior mythology recounted in numerous oral and written stories about Gurkhas (Caplan, 1995; Streets, 2004). While their ability to keep us safe in our professional capacity, travelling to and from work for example, had to be demonstrated, For myself, Linda and Beth, Gurkhas were less likely to be a source of insecurity, through flirting and male gazes, within our personal and everyday spaces of eating, working out and socializing.

Bringing the Researcher into the Gendered Critique

My own trust in Gurkhas as security providers came through both me being protected by them and through interviews with them. In both cases, I developed deep compassion for

them. I watched them perform their perimeter checks of the compound I was staying, of vehicle checks when visitors came into the compound. They stood to attention and walked with confidence. Similar to Beth's experiences, they expressed compassion towards me in their everyday mannerisms of asking about my day and being polite, but distant. They did not complain about the long hours they had to work in order to drive me to and from meetings. These men always treated me with kindness. I never felt like I was being flirted with, that I was an inconvenience in the different errands they had to escort me on.

Through interviews I understood them as men who were deeply committed to their families, who were frustrated at times with their work conditions but never took those frustrations out on me. My encounters with Gurkhas were always underpinned through a professional protector/protected relationship founded through more of a compassion and empathy. Their everyday encounters of asking me how I was, smiling politely, opening vehicle doors and waving goodbye and hello as I came and went from the compound made me feel like I was not an object to be gazed upon. For me, I saw these men with empathy as well as acknowledgment of my own privilege. Being in their presence and constantly being referred to as ma'am, while they smiled I realized that for most, I would never form a friendship bond beyond the contractual/racialised relationship we had. They reminded me of my own privilege as a white female filled with many entitlements they could only wish to achieve. Many men, during interviews with me, reminded me of my whiteness not only in the title they gave me, but the polite distance they showed—in their gestures of calling me Joanna Lumley, a white female actress known for her "saving" Gurkhas rights to settle in the UK.

By bringing the client as a gendered (feminized) subject into the analysis, and drawing upon autoethnography methodologies this article furthers the existing analysis on how the micropractices shape gendered relations in the industry by turning the gaze to the gendered researchers. While it is no longer controversial to state our gendered bodies and performances are in part shaped by the encounters we have with those we research, spend time with, ask questions of, this claim is rarely carried into analysis by those who research gender and war from the field. Such an epistemological standpoint opens up important analytical questions for us as researchers that include: do the masculinities for which these contractors project make us feel safe? How do we negotiate control over our own bodies and space in a gendered contractual relationship where we are relegated to the protected? How do we account for these everyday encounters into our broader analysis?

Beyond the need to position the researcher in the research process, locating everyday understandings of what and who constitutes good security demonstrates how broader articulations of security and the cultural capital invested in who and what constitutes security; which men and masculinities we deem important. At times the hegemonic conceptualization of masculinities was deemed as a source of insecurity for those being protected, at times the marginal martial masculinities were more valued.

While my regular encounters with these men gave me important access to observe and engage in the everyday gendered security performances, and how they impacted upon me, it also was a dangerous intellectual project. How did I maintain the ability to be critical about my own complicities in my interviewee's responses in order to maintain my feminist curiosity, in order to ask the important questions about militarisation and how it shapes the ways in which we evaluate security, what constitutes good and bad security and how we learn to know this. The answer is, I did not navigate this well. In many ways I was seduced by the militarisation of security and in fact relied upon the myth of good security that was wrapped up in racial and gendered language and performances. It was not until I left this environment, after many months, that I was able to reflect upon my own complicity in the broader racial and gender processes of masculinities, security and the private market.

For me, autoethnography is an ideal method to reflect upon my time in the field. It showcases the ways in which my emotional investment in needing to feel safe mapped onto gendered and racial embodiments of private security contractors. It demonstrated how everyday encounters with various contractors bring to the fore a multitude of masculinities that remain situated, relational and fluid—they at times extend beyond the immediate body of the contractor. It also shows how over time and in different contexts, perceptions of “good” and “bad” security contracting changes. While it is impossible for me to change how I behaved in the field and the logics that I relied upon for my own physical and mental wellbeing, this method allows me to uncover and articulate why I performed the way I did and how militarization seduced me. Such a method also calls into question the importance of all feminists researching military and security industry reflect upon the ways their own emotional and intellectual investments might also reinforce intellectual divisions that sustain privileging particular men and masculine performativities.

That is, through capturing one's own intellectual and emotional investment in the topics one researches, and the questions they find interesting, the audience is also able to understand the processes that got the researcher to her conclusions. Such a method then potentially increases the transparency in research. It also has the ability to reveal the ways in which feminists can (and often are) seduced by, and complicit in, reproducing the militarisation logics and language of militaries and militarised masculinities.

I was seduced by the security language of the men I was being protected by; I felt like they were my friends, I empathized with their logics, their understandings of how the world worked and what it meant to be secure. Whilst in the field, I bought into the security logics that framed my own (in)security because for the most part, I felt safe doing so. This was made more apparent to me once I left Afghanistan and at times cringed upon reflection of my own field notes. Reflecting upon my own journal entries and conversations with other clients being protected enabled me to reflect upon how

the protected, of which I include myself, are a part of reproducing value associated to white racialised masculinities. Like others I interviewed, my perspectives of *white as best* security changed over time in the field.

By focusing on the everyday encounters between clients and contractors we begin to see how masculinities and (in)security are intimately entangled, fluid and ambiguous. We also see how these clients, myself included, are actively reproducing imaginings of whiteness and feminization of global South labour. Western professionalism in almost all cases was assumed as the ideal security. This was only questioned during everyday encounters of misogyny or other unbecoming behavior of contractors during “off time”. Gurkhas alternatively had to prove their value to us. This was done either by their association with white managers, through their feminized labour of monotonous hours and care work (my own and Beth’s case), or through actual violent encounters (in Leeann’s case). We judged their value differently. We rationalized that because their military training was not the same standard as western contractors that they were incapable of providing the same security. We understood Gurkhas as oriental martial men whose value came through their physical bodies and their natural skills as carers and as martial warriors (when given the circumstances). Given the socio-political parameters that enabled a polite but distant everyday encounters with Gurkhas, this myth of their racialised bodies was never brought into question. We did not social with them the same way we did western men. Overall these encounters suggest that imaginings of white and Gurkhas security labour as seemingly naturally separated are conditioned through broader political economies of security and empire whereby we are informed what security contractors we need to value and what skills we need to look for.

Throughout my time in the field I learned valuable lessons about the ambiguities of race and how they continue to matter in shaping the ideal security provider. These ambiguities and contradictions are not only reproduced through PMSCs websites, marketing campaigns and from contractors themselves, but the clients who consume such practices. As the different interview excerpts and my own reflections highlight, these gendered performativities are contested and negotiated. They suggest that race and gender are continually being remade and how the marginal men and masculinities in market evaluation can often be the preferred masculine performances with the clients.

Conclusion

This article begins with the everyday as a theoretical site in order to account for how we theorise about militarism, masculinities and war. Drawing upon the client/contractor security relationship through autoethnography, this article considers the emotional and intellectual investments that go into evaluating our own security and how racial and gendered logics filter through such evaluations. By showing the ways in which security value comes through the racial and gendered encounters between the client and

contractor, this article brings to the fore the ways in which the everyday is constitutive of security value in the broader private security industry. It shows us how military masculinities are re-shaped in a market driven military economies whereby white men are not always the ideal source of security, but can also be a source of insecurity—that security value is very much contextual and geographical. In particular conversations with those protected have highlighted how the everyday encounters with security contractors within private and public spaces and temporalities matter in how contractors can be both a source of security and insecurity. Beth and my own experiences in particular highlight how the white western male gazes and flirty during private social time produced discomfort and anxiety for us. Consequently, hegemonic masculinities as articulated within traditional military spaces, when brought to the market, do not always maintain the same privileged space as the archetype for security.

By focusing on the security encounters between clients and contractors and highlighting the experiences of the client we can better understand how the industry knowledge production of whose voice counts, who are legitimate companies/security providers extends beyond the state-market assemblages to the client on the ground. We can also begin to understand how gender embodiments of the researcher do matter knowledge production. Using autoethnographic methods also shows that my own understandings of the industry cannot be divorced from my intimate encounters with these contractors I researched. Here theories of security and gender are always embodied. As such, we need to account for the ways the ground truths of the field, of the hyper and hegemonic masculinities are made sense and shaped through our experiences in the field as researchers and otherwise. Such inquiries allow us to continue to conduct audits on ourselves as feminist researchers and the ways in which our work can coopt and further advance militarism and masculinities within global politics.

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