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## 6. HUMAN SECURITY AND GLOBAL ETHICS: CAN INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS BE MORAL AGENTS?

**Abstract:** The paper examines how moral agency of an international organisation affects implementation of the human security policy on the global level. The author hypothesizes that an organisation of any kind is capable of acting with reference to right and wrong—making ethical decisions and putting them into action. The source of an international organisation's moral agency is its collective power to act and affect the world by its decision-making and performance. This is particularly true with a view to the United Nations' array of different activities regarding the promotion of human security worldwide. The author argues that the UN's responsibility to make ethical decisions has to be grounded on the theoretical positions of both moral cosmopolitanism and deontological global ethics, because much of contemporary moral philosophy insists on the duty to aid foreigners who are suffering. The concept of human security itself is profoundly connected to the notion of empathy, which lies at the very centre of the psychological basis of morality supporting the standpoint of universal moral commitments. The author concludes that the ethical perspective has to be embedded into the process of making and implementation of the UN's human security policy—if the policy is to be legitimate on the ground of global values promoted by the UN as well as effective for those in need.

**Keywords:** *international organisations, United Nations, human security, global ethics, moral agency, moral cosmopolitanism*

### 1. THE UNITED NATIONS “OUT ON A LIMB”: A DYSFUNCTIONAL COSMOPOLITANISM?

The departing point for this analysis of the global human security policy in practice is the assumption that international organisations bring benefit that nation-states alone cannot provide in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Globalization is associated with numerous heightened insecurities, but negative outcomes have not flowed from globalization as such, but either from poor policy choices and inconsistent/ineffective policy implementation (Scholte, 2005). International organisations are in turmoil over new planetary challenges as well. As a substantially state-centric system, the UN faces the same legitimacy problem as nation-states do. This problem is partly caused by the unsound performance of bureaucrats who, like in any national government, provide policy advices and services in pursuing the

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UN objectives. The power of international civil servants stems from the office they hold, their technical expertise, their control of information and other organisational resources, and their often lengthy experience as career officials (Kellow & Carroll, 2013). The great administrative discretions combined with diplomatic immunity are not followed by strong scrutiny mechanisms, because international organisations often escape the sort of transparency, political accountability, and auditing that national public administrations have to face routinely. A shady culture of unethical performance seems to blossom.

The UN's credibility and legitimacy has been gradually corroding for years due to a series of mismanagement and corruption cases that show only a tip of an iceberg of the mounting problems with integrity of its bureaucrats.<sup>23</sup> The unethical performance widens the gap between the ideas and principles upon which the legitimacy of the UN is meant to be based and reality of the unfulfilled expectations. The legitimacy of modern political arrangements depends on how far they are answerable to everyone who is affected by them (Linklater 2007). An international organisation is not only legitimate in the normative sense—that it has the right to rule—but also in the sociological sense, that it is widely believed to have the right to rule (Buchanan & Keohane, 2009:155–6).

This distinction shows the intrinsic value of the public trust in what international civil servants are doing when carrying out the UN's functions—i.e. they have to pursue the policy and programmes objectives, abide by rules and regulations, follow procedures, and comply with a code of conduct. Moreover, the international servants ought to act in the way that supports the universal values and principles best summarised in the cosmopolitan view that human well-being today cannot be defined by geographical or cultural locations, because all humans require equal moral respect and priority of their vital needs (Held, 2011: 164). In their study of cosmopolitan identity of the UN officials, Nowicka and Kaweh (2009) find that cosmopolitanism plays a complex role in their lives as a way of coping with unfamiliar environment and as strategy for manoeuvring between various pressures they face in field missions on daily basis.<sup>24</sup> Far beyond this narrow interpretation, cosmopolitanism reaffirms the standpoint that every administrative decision, beside the expertise, has its ethical perspective which has to be included into decision-making and implementation process on the global level. I argue that the UN's responsibility to ethical decision-making has to be grounded on the theoretical positions of both moral cosmopolitanism and deontological ethics, because much of contemporary moral philosophy insists on the duty to aid foreigners who are suffering or, at least, on the duty to respect and promote basic human rights and justice (Kleingeld & Brown 2014).

During several last decades, Kant's idea that moral worth belongs equally to all people across

23 Systemic corruption first emerged within the Oil-for-Food Programme, the UN's biggest-ever humanitarian undertaking, whose director profited from and covered up billions in Saddam Hussein regime's kickbacks (McMahon, 2006). Since then, the media have revealed scandals such as the "Cash for Kim" (the UN poured over USD 2 billion worth of resources into North Korea with no oversight of how Kim Jong Il's regime distributed goods), the diversion of aid for the Palestinians, and smuggling of diamonds by UN peacekeepers in Sierra Leone. Despite internal reforms being undertaken with the aim to strengthen transparency and control, the organisation's 70th anniversary was marked by criminal prosecution of former UN General Assembly President John Ashe, who accepted USD 1.3 million in bribes from a Chinese mogul to help him try to build a multibillion-dollar, UN-sponsored conference centre in Macau (New York Post, 2015).

24 The position that there are universal moral commitments seems to be counter-intuitive to the psychological fact that we all have stronger attachments toward our families and fellow-citizens: those particular others are perceived to have a similar identity (Tétreault & Lipschutz 2009: 153–6).

the planet has been embodied via the doctrine and practice of international protection of human rights that enable individuals to circumvent subversively the traditional prerogatives of state sovereignty (Wolin, 2010: 146). From the perspectives of moral cosmopolitanism and deontological global ethics, international bureaucrats by pledging allegiance to the UN goals and principles are clearly obligated far more than it is Kantian hospitality to a stranger; they must be morally disposed to desire to help “distant strangers” who are in need or suffering. This means that, when considering the course of action, an international official has to ignore particularistic national, corporate or private interests, and to uphold proper ethical decision-making in order to support public policies designed to address global concerns. The marginalisation of cosmopolitan principles as the fundamental part of the UN working creed leaves civil servants in a moral vacuum.

## 2. IS THERE SUCH A THING AS A MORAL AGENCY ON THE GLOBAL LEVEL?

I hold that the notion of moral agency is important in how the UN implements the human security policy on the global level, because it is important for public trust in the organisation’s mission to achieve good outcome in the ethically sound way. The idea of serving the common good, either on a national or global level, emphasises that it is not important what is done at the end of the day, but how it is done—is it done in the morally right way (Wildavsky, 1989). The source of an international organisation’s moral agency is its collective power to act globally, because all of its decisions, whether ethical or not, affect the world. Any policy goal attained in ways that override moral concerns can undermine the UN global authority in the long run, even if the outcome benefits the majority of the targeted group.

A moral agent acts in a manner that expresses concern for moral values as final ends; to be a moral agent means to be capable of acting with reference to right and wrong—making ethical decisions and putting them into action (Garofalo & Geuras, 2006: 1–5). Although moral agency is in the metaphysical sense primarily attributed to human individuals, an organisation as the collective of individuals can also be the proper subject of moral responsibility attributions, and, thus, held responsible for the predictable results of its actions.<sup>25</sup>

Decision-making on the course of an action in the complex context of international organisations like the UN is usually associated with the many-hands problem, which describes difficulties in determining the individual contributions to the bad outcome caused by a series of particular actions in the policy implementation process (Svara, 2007: 37). However, a series of individual decisions on the courses of actions pursued along the organisational hierarchy jointly contributes to the far-reaching effects. It means that the overwhelming or repeated morally wrong courses of actions along the chain of policy implementation are not contingent, but they are rather induced to some extent by the organisational environment in which civil servants work. This situation can be explained

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<sup>25</sup> Here I do not intend to involve myself in the long debate whether organisation moral responsibility attributions are legitimate or not. I assume that the ability to intend an action, the ability to carry out an intentional action, and the ability to choose an intentional action autonomously are necessary conditions for moral agency. An organisation possesses certain necessary characteristics for moral agency in a manner that is distinct from its human members. This does not mean that the organisation can perform any actions without its members, but it does mean that the organisation can be morally responsible as a unit that is considered distinct from its members.

by the concept of responsibility environment, authored by Kevin Kearns (1996), which depicts how the constellation of political, legal, social, cultural and economic forces can put pressure on people employed by organisations to participate in one activity and to refrain from participation in other. The environment of responsibility reflects the values and the relationship between public servants, leaders and citizens, while internalised norms, attitudes of employees and the general public together affect the quality of the performance of both individuals and the organisation. In other words, the moral agency of an international organisation is distinct from individual agencies of its civil servants in the sense that the organisation as a whole is responsible to create the working environment favourable to ethical decision-making through its policies, documents, and procedures. In addition, the ability of managers to use control mechanisms effectively and to steer the organisation towards ethical climate is the realm of distinct organisational moral agency as well.

### 3. UN PEACE OPERATIONS: A TRAGEDY OF MORAL AGENCY?

The turning point for the seven decades long UN global policy agenda came in the mid-1990s, when humanitarian problems began to be viewed as security issues, leading the UN to become one of the major international proponents of the human security policy (MacFarlane & Khong, 2006). In post-modern conflicts, civilians are explicitly targeted and have become the main victims in traditional combat operations, organised crime activities, and large-scale violations of human rights by state institutions and political organisations (Faber, 2008: 150). The genesis of the concept of human security as a conceptual framework for international actions concerned with vulnerabilities of individuals and communities was expected to alleviate human suffering primarily by the UN peacekeeping operations. If human security can be seen as a global public good—as an inclusive good that benefits everyone—as Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy (2007: 185–207) believe, then, there is a clear ethical responsibility of the UN towards the well-being of individuals whose rights have been systematically violated.

Two decades since the inception of its human security policy, it seems that the UN has failed to fulfil the global duty to protect individuals in societies torn apart by armed conflicts. The effectiveness of peace operations in securing the victimised local population has been under harsh criticism, and the UN has become “notorious for dodging the question of responsibility for the actions of their troops” (Cooper & Patterson, 2012: 154). In June 2016, Andreas Kompass resigned from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, where he ended a 17-year career as the director of field operations. His resignation and open letter to the public (Kompass, 2016) uncovered that many UN civil servants had been the victims of retaliation for reporting on internal unethical conducts. Kompass himself was irregularly suspended from his job and was under investigation after he had reported and had provided evidence of a child sexual abuse in the Central African Republic. The Secretary-General and the UN body responsible for investigations ignored the horrific reports of child sexual abuse until the leaks to NGOs and the media forced them to stop punishing those who tried to hold an ethical stance. The “dark side” of the UN peacekeeping dates back to the early 1990s.<sup>26</sup> The most common types of exploitation and abuse are sex with minors, employment for sex, sex

26 The first allegations of massive sexual misconduct emerged in Cambodia (1992–3) and Somalia (1992), and were followed by reports from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Haiti, the Democratic Republic of Congo, East Timor, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire, Burundi, Haiti, and Kosovo. However, it was not until 2006 that the UN started collecting data on the allegations.

with prostitutes, sexual assault, rape, sex in exchange for food or assistance in kind, as well as organised crime industries such as: trafficking for forced prostitution, and production of child pornography (Grady, 2010). Despite the UN's zero tolerance policy announced by the UN Secretary-General in 2003 forbidding peacekeepers from transactional sex (Special measures, ST/SGB/2003/13, 2003), sexual exploitation and abuse are still undermining the implementation of peacekeeping mandates.<sup>27</sup> The UN's Office of Internal Oversight Services stresses that the effectiveness of the zero tolerance policy is "hindered by a complex architecture, prolonged delays, unknown and varying outcomes and severely deficient victim assistance" (Evaluation Report, IED-15-001, 2015: 27). Allegations are often difficult to prove, and thus grossly undercounted with a view to actual offenses, which means that large portion of the unethical behaviour accordingly goes unsanctioned.<sup>28</sup> From the perspectives of both global ethics and human security, far more worrying is the UN's moral insensitivity displayed in its controversial claims that—since sexual abuse constitutes off-duty acts and reflects the behaviour of a handful of peacekeepers—it is not only a matter of individual responsibility but the UN cannot have any legal or financial liability for those acts (Kanetake, 2010). This perverse logic has gradually created a predatory sexual culture that goes hand in hand with the culture of silence (Nordås & Rustad, 2013).

If the UN's human security policy in post-conflict areas is aimed at eliminating the use or threat of violence from people's everyday lives—i.e. at ensuring their physical integrity and satisfaction of basic needs—then the predatory sexual culture ignites "fear of suffering". It causes physical and psychological trauma, gender inequality, and distrust of local population in the UN (Karim & Beardsley, 2016: 101). Unethical behaviour is rooted in poor personal moral judgement of peacekeepers distorted by the ethnocentric belief that we should value the lives and well-being of our compatriots more than the lives and well-being of foreigners. Inhuman treatment of sexually victimised women and children cannot be only contributed to the lack of cosmopolitan mindset in peacekeeping troops and administration. Nevertheless, it also demonstrates the lack of an adequate recognition of foreigners as human beings by avoiding to mirror the self through the other.

From time immemorial, sexual violence as part of ethnic (tribal) conflicts has always represented a sort of symbolic denial of the intrinsic value of foreign women as human beings. The denial is motivated by the intention to keep the other's personality devoid of everything that resembles human in order to transform the other symbolically into an object not worth of moral judgement. Martin Buber (1937) holds that human behaviour is determined by two contrasting types of relations: 1) *relation I-You* is established as a two-way relationship between humans as free and equal persons; 2) *I-It* experience rather depicts the attitude of a man as a sole self-consciousness subject to things. The behaviour patterns of sexual predators

27 According to the latest report of the UN Secretary-General on the issue, the number of new allegations totalled 99 in 2015, compared with 80 allegations in 2014 (Special measures, A/70/729, 2016: 2). The zero-tolerance policy—now a key principle of the UN Standards of Conduct—was introduced in Directives for Disciplinary Matters Involving Civilian Police Officers and Military Observers (2003). Yet, it was not until 2005 that the Department of Peacekeeping Operations established the Conduct and Discipline Team to train peacekeepers about the new policy, to enforce it, and to conduct investigations of violations of it (more details on: <https://cdu.unlb.org>).

28 For instance, the peacekeepers misuse their UN affiliation and privileges in order to cheat sex workers by refusing to pay the agreed price, and then calling in the UN security to kick them out when they protest (Jennings, 2014: 320).

remodels the relation I–You into the relation I–It, so the fragile groups of local community are now identified by some peace keepers as “things” thrown out of the realm of good and evil that can be easily targeted by a wide range of immoral actions—from indifference to manipulation. Treating people as they are mere objects—or means to achieve someone else’s goals—stems from the weak empathic connectedness.

The notion of empathy lies at the very centre of the psychological basis of morality, and is profoundly connected with the concept of human security. Human ability to act morally is grounded on the ability to identify and understand other people’s emotions. Recent psychological studies show that empathy is an element of a special type of general intelligence, the so-called social intelligence, which implies that we are “intelligent not just *about* our relationships but also *in* them” (Goleman, 2006: 11). A peacekeeper (civil servant, military or policeman) with no ability to empathise with others whom he is obliged to protect by his mandate, and who has no feelings of guilt as well, is a huge threat to credibility of the UN as the major international actor in upholding global human security policy.

From the perspective of moral cosmopolitanism and deontological global ethics, sexual abuse and exploitation are far more than simple breaches of the UN staff regulations, misdemeanours or criminal offenses. The moral worth of an action is determined by the human will, and the good will treats all human beings as free and equal members of a shared moral community, the planetary one. For Korsgaard (1992), to commit an evil action means to lose the ability to reflect upon ourselves under the description under which we find our life worth living and our actions worth undertaking. Beside the feelings of shame and embarrassment, guilt is another substantial emotion directed at the self-regulation of behaviour. For an individual with no internalised moral prescription applied to her/his own action, we cannot claim that she/he has moral sense. The pervasive predatory sexual culture, vested by sort of international bureaucratic *omerta*, desensitizes peacekeepers to feeling of guilt and makes them devoid of the capacity to distinguish between what is right and wrong conduct. The victimised women and children are coerced or deceived to be “tools” for peacekeepers satisfaction or “human resources” for lucrative illicit business; they are treated as if they were inanimate objects.

From a deontological point of view, the motivation behind an action must be based on obligation and well thought out before the action takes place. Yet, the working environment in which the feeling of guilt is regularly avoided and suppressed erodes the sense of duty to promote the global common good by achieving the UN goals through the effective implementation of a wide array of policies, programmes and projects on the ground.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

For more than two decades, many scandals have been feeding an image of the UN as if incapable of advancing its founding goals. The unethical behaviour of Blue Helmets, policemen and civil servants repeatedly produces insecurities for those who are supposed to be secured by peace operations. While there has been an increased pressure on the UN to rescue innocent people who are suffering worldwide, this analysis shows that the chief dilemma of international politics today has to be who is going to save people brutally victimised by their saviours. The assumption that the UN peace operations promote the effective implementation of the global human security policy on the ground seems to be a

fallacy, because the policy is hardly realised in practice when it comes to the issue of sexual abuse and exploitation due to “broken” moral agency of the UN itself.

If there are equal rights for all humans according to moral cosmopolitanism, there must be a duty for the UN officials and if there is a duty, there must be a chain of responsibility from the top to the bottom of the organisational hierarchy based on deontological prescriptions. By its organisational capacity to make decisions and put them into action, the UN not only can be a moral agent but it is supposed to express concerns for moral values as the ultimate ends. The persistent ignoring or white washing the responsibility of international troops and bureaucrats for sex crimes—followed by retaliation against the morally upright servants—cannot be regarded simply as a side effect of random dysfunctions in the organisational performance of the UN. It rather is the outcome of Kearns’ environment of responsibility perverted by the intention to put pressure on employees not to act with reference to right and wrong, but to internalise amorally neutral pragmatic stance towards day-to-day assignments. The UN will not become real moral agent unless its top management creates the working environment supportive of autonomous judgement about which action is morally right or wrong. Moral reasoning in the UN must include the perspective of global deontological ethics, if the UN’s human security policy is to be legitimated on the ground of global values promoted by the UN as well as effective in peace operations for those in need.

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