

Embodiments of Masculinities in Private Security: A Case Study of Race and Gender in Security Contractors in Afghanistan

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Amanda Chisholm

poamc@bristol.ac.uk

University of Bristol

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This paper applies the concept of militarized masculinities to map out through my ethnographic accounts and personal interviews, the dynamic and contingent nature of power relations amongst private security contractors in Kabul Afghanistan. I examine these relations based on notions of race and gender to understand how masculinities are performed, embodied and choreographed in everyday living experiences of the various contractors from Western nations, Nepal and Afghanistan. I explore how a hegemonic white masculinity within private security contractors is contingent on the continual performance of the racialized “other” embodied in the Afghan and Gurkha contractors. I then explore some material implications of these contingent and dynamic identities.

Private Security Companies (PSCs) are playing an increasing role in global governance. International businesses, government and non-government organizations are using their services in conflict and post conflict zones (Schaihl 2007, Razor and Bauman 2007, Avant 2005, Pelton 2006, Leander 2005, and Singer 2001). Operating throughout the world in various security related positions including guarding oil and mineral sites, close protection in conflict and post conflict zones, marine terrorism monitoring and security consultancy services, these companies are playing a large role in defining both problems in international security and the various solutions (Leander 2005). Razor and Bauman argue that it is a rapid growth industry embedded in US neo-liberal governmentality (Razor and Bauman 2007). Currently in Afghanistan alone, there are 58 registered private security companies operating.

There is nothing particularly new about private security and they have operated along side public militaries since the conception of the nation-state (Avant 2005, Carafano 2009). Tracing their more contemporary roots back to operations through companies such as Sandline International and Executive Outcomes in Africa (Howe 1998, Locke 1999), private security have appeared to shed their dogs of war status and according to some scholars such as Leander (2005), are now openly operating and marketing their services in conflict zones and post conflict reconstruction environments. Iraq provided one of the biggest openings for private security to test their skills and market their services (Schaihl 2007). Since then, they have garnered many lucrative contracts in post conflict reconstruction in countries such as Afghanistan, Uganda and Sudan. Carafano also argues there employment is working to change the nature of warfare and who are deemed legitimate actors. He connects this to a greater movement of neo-liberal governance that is beyond the agency of individual governments (2009: 12).

Interestingly, most scholastic debate over PSCs employment are on issues of regulations and concerns over private businesses working along side public forces in combat. This debate understands the services PSCs provide in direct contest against state services (Razor and Bauman 2007, Schaihl 2007) and are often understood as problematic. However, this argument that places government against private security seems to be too simplistic and does not highlight the interconnection between government, private industry and governance. Leander (2005) offers a much more sophisticated explanation for their rise and continual employment of PSCs when she describes their operations through a Foucaultian concept of governmentality. She highlights how private security can now enjoy a high level of at least in practice legitimacy and employment through neo-liberal governmentality that does not pit the state against private business but treats their working relationship as a part of the larger neo liberal governance occurring internationally. Carafano also touches on this idea when he claims their employment is beyond the control of any one nation-state’s government (2009). So while we see a role back of the state in

terms of the type of security it provides, we see an increase in the role private industry plays but both actors are participating in the overall governance in these environments. Seeing them in this light, one can concentrate on how both actors are implicit in a particular neo-liberal governance agenda. That said, it is beyond the scope of this paper to delve further into this analysis but it is important to note that my particular framework in which I place PSCs in international relations is rooted in this idea of neo-liberal governmentality.

Owing to their prevalent role in security, PSCs are playing a major role in how security threats are defined and in turn where the solutions to these threats come from. Leander (2005) discusses how PSCs, by marketing their skills in a way that creates a perception that private industry responds better than the public service to security challenges, have created a narrative where PSCs have increasing control on setting the security agenda. They also have a stake in placing certain insecurities ahead of others; more often, these insecurities are ones that PSCs can best address. Because these companies are at the center of defining security problems and solutions, they are in positions to employ considerable power in informing others security as they assume the role of expert (Leander 2005).

In addition to focusing on the amount of power facilitated by security companies in defining security problems and solutions, many scholars and journalists have attempted to define the security contractor through the masculine images embedded in their performances on deployments (Pelton 2006, Schaihl 2007). These performances have then been used to explain certain benefits and consequences of privatizing security operations (Pelton 2006, and Schaihl 2007). Security contractors, specifically Blackwater (now known as Xi) employees, have gained notoriety through their operations in the war in Iraq and the particular masculine performance they conduct (Schaihl 2007). DynCorp has gained fame for their less than positive conduct in Bosnia and Afghanistan (Pugliese 2003).

Their roles are heavily contested because security contractors are the closest civilian employees to actual combat (Singer 2004). What appears to separate them from the actual combat soldiers is based in legal and normative practices where a military soldier fighting under her/his nation's flag is protected under international law to perform a combat role during war that might otherwise be constituted as murderous activity. A security contractor lacks this immediate social justification (Shadow Company 2006).

Interestingly, scholarship in both race and gender studies remains silent to security contractors' roles in international security and the gendered and racial implications of their operations. This lack in literature further silences subordinate masculinities and gives the impression that all private security companies operate in similar "cowboy" manners. This silence in understandings of private security is an illustration of how powerful the hegemonic and ideal image of the contractor is. The fairly superficial notion of private security contractor's gendering practices provides a simplistic description of these contractors' performances and tells us nothing about race or militarized masculinities of their operations.

Militarized masculinities as a concept provides a great analytical tool to map out the gender and racial implications and how they inform and are informed by the privatization of security. Militarized masculinities is a well-developed concept used by Morgan (1994), Enloe (1989, 1993, 2007), Tickner (1992, 2001), Higate (2003), and Whitworth (2003, 2005) to highlight the embedded social construction of masculinity in the military that produces and defines the 'ideal' soldier. The term draws its origins from socialization of soldiers that occur in the military and how the key symbol of masculinity continues to be rooted in notions of the warrior, however this too is changing given the increasing technological innovations separating men from war and blurring civilian/soldier binaries (Morgan 1994: 165, 172). The concept continues to be rooted in ideas of gender and war (Goldstein 2001).

Choreography and embodiment of masculinities within these military settings also appear to be less about women and men (since most women are denied opportunities to train and socialize with these men) and more about the power relationships between men and other men (Morgan 1994: 166). In the military,

masculine productions can be seen as more about men disciplining other men. Spike Peterson highlights this in her analysis of feminization as a discursive tool to *other* other men and women.

Military institutions tend to separate women from men as well as they separates men from civilian men within the greater community. Harrison (2003) and Woodward (2003) discuss the particular geographical spaces in which socialization of the soldier occurs and how these spaces are an important component in the training. The fact that these soldiers are further isolated from their civilian counterparts creates a sense of exceptionalism and difference designed to produce a person with the capability to go to war at any moment (Harrison 2003: 73). This isolation increases the male bonding that occurs within this institution. Morgan argues this geography is represented in spatial sense through the guarded military camps where there is a protection of the soldier from the *outside*. These spatial separations, coupled with socialization activities of being a soldier, produce a well bonded soldier with other soldiers and an “estrangement from civilian society” (Morgan 1994: 169)

Militarized masculinity as a discourse is reinforced by valorizing traditionally-ascribed “masculine” tropes, such as rationality, activeness, and aggressiveness, while discouraging characteristics that could be considered feminine (Hooper 1998: 31). The masculine socialization embeds a discourse that enforces a gender binary and informs participation based on polarized feminine and masculine attributes. Moreover, this discourse treats masculinity as the ideal. Spike V Peterson further argues that during times of war, masculinity is always associated to femininity as feminization is used as a tool to subordinate particular masculinities based on notions of race and class, further privileging white heterosexual male access to power (Peterson 2007).

Stemming from these studies of men in the military and their particular masculinities embodied, more recent scholarship has moved beyond this and now militarized masculinities are examined in a variety of militarized contexts including war, post conflict reconstruction and militarized communities. Whilst this masculinity draws its origins from socialization occurring in formal military settings, Goldstein (2001), Enloe (2007) and Cockburn (2004) all discuss how during times of war and post conflict situations women are called to service in their patriotism and support of men going to war. Higate (2000) also discusses how militarized masculinities tend to stay with the individual once they leave the military. He highlights how entrenched this socialization process is when in his study of former male soldiers who are homeless in the UK (Higate 2000). Because of the entrenchment of this particular masculinity, private security contractors, with their direct ties to training in western militaries also embody a particular militarized masculinity.

Importantly, the interplay of gender and race has important contributions to make to the study of private security in conflict zones. Generally speaking, scholars in the fields of masculinities and in geographical space have highlighted power relations in a global context in two ways; one is through the mapping of race and masculinities in discourse and performance and the other, through exploring architectures of space constructed on racialized lines. Whitworth (2004) draws specifically on militarized masculinities in her discussion of the Canadian Airborne regiment and how this construction of masculinities can be dangerous during overseas operations where the white western meets the underdeveloped racialized “other”. Razack (2004) highlights this further with her analysis of Canadian military operations in Somalia and the racialized “white knight” meeting the wretched underdeveloped. Further, Gregory (2004) discusses the western promoted military and political projects in post conflict zones that spatially divide cities based on racial lines. Further, this political strategy leads to dominant understandings in post conflict zones that the only map to peace is through apartheid architecture.

Enloe (2007) discusses globalization and masculinities by touching briefly on the role of private security firms and Connell (2006) discusses the idea of the market meeting masculinities in the globalization of masculinities. Both authors highlight how hegemonic western masculinities are continuing to play an important role in shaping and reshaping understandings of manhood and privileging certain white “men” over racialized others.

Hegemonic conceptions of militarized masculinities (taken here to mean particular white heterosexual men) (Whitworth 2004, Kimmel 2005, Connell 2005), are seen outside military settings as well. In fact, militarization itself involved just as much socialization within the military as it does within the greater community (Enloe 1989, Higate 2004). The processes of reproduction and construction of militarized masculinities outside military contexts also allows for scholars to further understand how this takes place and for what particular political purposes. This intellectual militarized masculinity mapping exercise has been taken up by various scholars. Higate (2004) addresses how these military masculinities can be seen outside of military settings in both sport and academia. His example explains the overall militarization of communities beyond just the military and how acts of these militarized masculinities are acts of power.

More recent literature, such as Eisenstein (2008), has discussed how militarized masculinities within militaries create a type of soldier where both women and men are socialized to perform in a particular and often violent ways. Duffield (2007) critiques how this understanding of militarization of space beyond the military and in turn moving into private security has led development to an overall reliance on “security experts”. For Duffield, the discourse of security before development is an important one in understanding this militarization of space (2007). This can be seen through the increasing of globalizing masculinities (Connell 2005) and the internationalizing of western conceived militarized masculinities through PSCs.

While a lot of literature on geographic apartheid, militaries and the particular type of masculinities created in these settings are highlighted and problematized, very little attention is paid to PSCs, the types of masculinities that are created in these settings and the subsequent implications of these creations. A gendered analysis of these companies and their operations would highlight how the continual reliance on the market to meet global security demands has led to an increasing globalization of militarized masculinities (Whitworth 2004, Enloe 2007, Connell 2006) as well as an overall militarization of space in post conflict zones (Duffield 2007). Additionally, and in particular to Afghanistan, racialization of particular Gurkha (Streets 2004) and local Afghan security contractors has led to an overall justification of “cheap labour” in these conflict zones by security companies. Drawing for the militarized masculinities’ scholarship, this paper examines the role of race in the construction of globalizing militarized masculinities in Afghanistan.

How do Race and Gender and Private Security inform each other?

Race and gender theory, as a tenant, believes that oppression is not solely found in one identifier such as race or gender but it an inter-sectionality of a multiple of non-fixed identities. Spike V Peterson (2007) explores this triad analysis of class, race, and gender in her article *Thinking through Inter-sectionality and War*. A key understanding when using this triad analysis is to understand the masculinities always have binary counterpart that is femininity (2007:15). These femininities assume everything the masculine is not and in creating a hierarchy of masculinities within private security, tools that effeminate the competing masculinities are always employed. Further, there has been extensive literature written about the role masculinities play in constructing and embedding particular power relations. In particular, the concept militarized masculinities has been applied to various case studies in spaces where militarization is occurring.

Militarized masculinity, whilst being applied to a myriad of cases highlighting its relationship with non-military persons and organizations has a special link to war. War itself is gendered and has always had a direct link to military masculinities (Goldstein 2001). He furthers this by stating that the link between men and war is a discourse centering around appropriate gender roles and war. He claims there is nothing natural (or biological) about men wanting to kill. They are socialized to do so. Further, whilst women are called to perform in the war systems, men test their manhood and become *harder* men through their participation in war (Goldstein 2001: 264). War for men, is a right of passage into manhood (265). In this sense gendering discourses around military service determine the male status as men. Because of this close association through gendering practices, war demands masculinity and particular masculine

understandings (Enloe 2007) and within these understanding, there is little room for subordinate masculinities or any femininity. It appears that anyone with formal or informal associations to western military training could market themselves as experts and authorities on security in Afghanistan.

As such, embodying these masculinities means privilege access to power. In war, both the military and private security are dominating the security discourse and further embedding notions that they are the legitimate authorities on security and insecurity. Understanding masculinities through feminization is a great tool that offers insight into how masculinities based on ideas of race, class and gender are naturalized and how some obtain power over others (Peterson 2007:15). Having this power gives a person or organization privilege in determining security and insecurity and in the case of the private security sector, garnering lucrative contracts.

Race too, is an important analytical tool because it allows for a more detailed account of the complex working realities of contractors or their companies in conflict zones. It assists in scholarly understandings of the role the global market plays in individual lives and how political, economic, and social and geographical discourses help promote exploitation of a certain group or groups to the benefit of another. Geographical analysis of separation in living and working environments based on racial lines highlights the hierarchy of constructed masculinities in security contractors and works to determine appropriate positions for these persons based on their constructed race and nationhood.

During the time of decolonization, race began to take on a different discourse. Both Balibar (1992) and Duffield (2004) discuss how race moved from an understanding rooted in biology and science to a sociological conception of race. Currently, race can also be understood as culture. Culture turns into race through various processes embedded in development, political and military projects. Currently, through Human Terrain Mapping (HTM), the US military is “fixing” the Afghan culture through anthropologists knowledge of Afghanistan and Afghan culture and thereby turning them into a race as well (McFate 2005).

This HTM is a part of a greater counter insurgency strategy that focuses on winning hearts and minds because traditional military strategies were not effective (McFate 2005). It is biopolitical project as it seeks to know, to categorize and to manage people in environments deemed insecure. This is important because masculinities of contractors link with this political project of constructing “culture as race” in that they create a hierarchy from the ideal contractor (understood to be white English speaking western male) to more of a “developmental life” (Duffield 2007: 16) radicalized contractor (understood as both Gurkha and Afghan contractor). These racialized others are in part constructed through both martial race project (used during the British colonial experience with the Nepalese) and now the HTM project to *classify* and *know* the Afghan.

Race is a central component to the construction of a hegemonic militarized masculinity within PSC operations. Hegemonic militarized masculinities in PSCs are, as all masculinities, unstable and are contingent on subordinate masculinities. As such, a part of stabilizing the particular white hegemonic masculinities in these private security operations, an essentializing project of “race as culture” is necessary. This project divides up and essentializes contractors based on their “race”. Further, it hides the privilege white male by understanding his legitimate role in security through his individual merits, whilst understanding the racialized “other” contractor through crude interpretations of their particular culture (Balibar 1992).

Race tends to interlink with economic relations and colonial legacies. In particular, the British colonizers constructed the Gurkha’s history and identity (Streets 2004, Golay 2006). Further, the British tended to be particularly interested in constructing the Gurkha masculinity around uneducated rural and poor Northern Indians and Nepalese (Golay 2006). Street (2004) also argues that political project of martial race created a discourse that allowed the British military to recruit lower classes of Nepalese into their colonial wars. The British did this by creating a natural bravery and loyalty in the Gurkha and constructing a masculinity that was naturally aggressive and courageous but needed the direction of the British officer

to be effective and harnessed. In this political and military project, the particular Gurkha masculinity was created and then somewhat effeminate in comparison to the dominant white developed male, as the British Officer needed to harness and control these “natural warriors” who on their own would be too dangerous for themselves and for others.

Today this conception continues to persist in both the Western culture (Streets 2004) and informs a colonial managerial relationship between the Gurkha and his white western security contractor counterpart in Afghanistan. The western contractor—with formal training in western militaries-- appears to be the ideal image of security provider and the legitimate source of knowledge on security issues. He is then responsible for the management and training of the Local Nation (LN) and the Third Country National (TCN).

In extension, Connell discusses how through the market and the international business man, masculinities are becoming globalized. This process is not only seen in international business but in international security whereby a hegemonic white masculinity is deemed necessary for security contracting in conflict zones. This is in part perpetuated by various popular consumption books on the topic of private security contractors that perpetuate a particular image of the contractor. While they are depicted as autonomous, highly patriotic, rational and self reliant, these contractors and their images are never problematized on areas of racial identity (creating a culture of whiteness). This silence of the contractor founded on racial lines, race taken here to mean culture (see Balibar 1992), perpetuates a continual subordination and silencing of any other masculinity or contractor in private security that is not from the West and is not white.

Performing the Hegemonic Masculine Security Contractor

A lot of journalists and scholars have written on Blackwater (now know as Xi) and their security operations. They were one of the US military’s main security contracting companies in Iraq and they have operations in Afghanistan as well. The company gained notoriety through both these missions and through the at times *over the top* aggressive performances on their deployments.

In particular, Schaill’s 2007 publication *Blackwater: the Rise of the Modern Mercenary*, discusses in great detail these contractors’ particular image and motivations for becoming private security contractors. They dress and conduct themselves in a manner that has been described as “chiseled like body builders”. Blackwater security contractors in particular wear “wraparound sunglasses [and] Blackwater T-shirts with the trademark bear claw in the cross-hairs, sleeves rolled up. Some of them look like caricatures, real-life action figures, or professional wrestlers” (Schaill 2007: 71).

Motivations to join PSCs go beyond money and can play into the masculine imagery of the security contractor. Many former soldiers have felt robbed of their glory during the 1990s peacetime armies. They feel that PSCs offer a chance to “return to their glory days on the battlefield” (Scahill 2007: 82-83). Furthermore, there is also an added bonus of the *cool-guy factor*. As one of the founders of Blackwater claims: “Chicks dig it” (Scahill 2007). The projected image leaves little room for women, let alone values of community, holistic understandings, and diverse approaches to security.

Their highly autonomous and masculine images are described as coming from chaotic and dangerous environments in which they operate. Specifically, PSCs often fall between legal frameworks and mostly only have informal working relations with militaries; their environment lends itself to a high degree of autonomy on operations. Avant (2005: 127) claims that their lack of protection under international law has created an environment where they cannot rely on support from conventional military forces. Pelton (2007) describes their operations as persons in a chaotic environment. These contractors see themselves as pitted against the unknown and elusive enemy (Schumacher 2006). They are compelled to rely on themselves, void of community support, and without international law (Avant 2005). Their main goal is to stay alive so they can complete their objective (Shadow Company 2006). The image that continues to be projected about security contractors through these authors’ writings suggests those security contract

operations as the epitome of masculinity—autonomous, aggressive, and rationally operating in a complete chaotic environment.

The descriptions are somewhat underpinned by how Morgenthau (1993: 3) and other IR classical realists scholars understanding of war and a Hobbesian interpretation of human nature. While these descriptions and the role of PSC contractors may be accurate, they remain partial and are perhaps reflective of only one type of interpretation. This masculine narrative as a mission imperative in order to survive privileges male understandings of war, the enemy, and conflict and reinforces a masculine identity as a necessary component of being a security contractor. These understandings are deep seated in former military training which sees war and the enemy in a particular way.

This white western male image of PSC contractors is further romanticized in video games such as *Soldiers of Fortune* where one person has to fight off 40 enemies in order to achieve his objective (Shadow Company 2006). Hollywood has glamorized the trade through imagery found in movies such as Rambo, or television shows like A-Team (Shadow Company 2006). Schumacher's book cover of *A Bloody Business America's War Zone Contractors and The Occupation of Iraq* has men standing in a semi-formation on sand colored steps. All the men have Kevlar vests, and displaying various guns at ease in front of them. On the back cover, there is a hard looking white man with dried blood on his face. In his book, Schumacher details an image of men fighting against all odds and keeping calm under intense combat (2007:171). Schumacher (2006) describes how tough and levelheaded a contractor has to be in order to succeed. The pictures of security contractors in the middle of the book show them calm, even smiling, with explosions behind them or their vehicles riddled with bullets. All of these images depict the security contractor in an overtly masculine way. According to authors like Pelton, a certain level of machismo should be afforded to security contractors because they are operating in an environment where they could be killed at any moment (Shadow Company 2006).

Pelton's (2007) book entitled *Licensed to Kill Hired Guns in the War on Terror* describes how the kind of image contractors perform and embody is directly linked to their heterosexuality and masculinity in that they perform in such a way to attract women. The security contractor will take on two types of images while on deployment. One is a low profile image where they dress in accordance with the local population and attempt to blend in as much as possible. The low profile security contractor will work directly with the locals and often employ some of them (Schumacher 2006). The problem with this profile is that they often are mistaken for "enemies" to the US military (Schumacher 2006). One security contractor operating in Iraq contends one of his biggest threats is the US military (Shadow Company 2006).

The other image assumed is high profile where the security contractor "looks bad and acts bad" in the hopes that people will take him for an aggressive person and will be deterred from "messing with him" (Shadow Company 2006). Many contractors assume this type of profile. Schumacher (2006: 170) states that these contractors drive in black SUVs, with the "windows down and the guns are pointed in every direction". They wear black body armour with pistols attached to their thighs. They have an assortment of rifles, have military style haircuts, and carry "enough ammunition to wage a five-hour battle". They look like "they would shoot to kill in the blink of an eye". One contractor claimed he saw a colleague shave his eyebrows in such a way as he looked like he was perpetually frowning (Shadow Companies 2006). This contractor further describes high profile contractors as "troopers and ZZ Top brigades" who have a high level of vanity. These contractors look and act with overt aggression. Blackwater's image appears to be directly tied to their mission. During my stay in Kabul it was fairly easy to pick out the high profile masculine contractors as they appeared to be wearing designer wrap around sunglasses and had pistols in plain view attached to their belts. They also drove in SUVs in aggressive manners traveling at higher speeds than the rest of the traffic.

The image, coupled with the understood hostile operating environment, leads into a particular type of masculine performance on operations as well. Blackwater assumes US military standard operating procedures during operations in Iraq (Shadow Company 2006) and it appears to be the case in

Afghanistan as well. In convoys, they keep civilians 100 meters back (which during rush hour can be difficult). If a civilian driver comes too close Blackwater security contractors will fire a round in the air first to warn the civilian to back off, the second round will be in the engine of the vehicle, and the third will go into the driver (Shadow Company 2006). Their aggressive driving (sometimes coming in contact with other vehicles) and aggressive behavior, while does not win the hearts and minds of the locals, but it keeps the contractors alive (Schumacher 2006: 171). This sense of aggressive driving in Afghanistan tended to be frowned upon and looked at as over the top by low profile contractors. It was also often assumed in Afghanistan that the high profile image was directly attached to the US based contractor.

The training of security contractors includes videos and personal stories that introduce the contractor to the war zone realities (Schumacher 2006: 65). According to Schumacher (2006), these stories are violent and graphic and are a way of weeding out the people who cannot handle these realities of war. These realities depict a war of chaos that appears to be almost exclusive male in participation and masculine in understanding. They depict violent engagements between white men and other men. These training videos further embed a particular discourse around who is the appropriate security contractor.

During operations, white security contractors are also divided up along nationalities and types of standard operating procedures their companies would abide by. In Afghanistan it appeared as though companies and contractors from the United States would operate in a high profile manner depicted above. Other western based companies and contractors would attempt to operate with a low profile procedure. This involved an attempt to blend in with their surroundings and have a less overt masculine image (Interview PSC contractor: May 2008). These low profile men from other western countries still performed a particular masculinity that embedded ideas of autonomy and rationality that came from cultural competencies and their experience in their professional nation's armies (Interview PSC contractor: May 2008).

Private Security: Setting the Racial Scene

The hegemonic white masculinity within private security currently professes a sense of rationality, autonomy, propensity for violence (Whitworth 2004) and former military professional training from western forces. This masculinity, as all masculinities, is unstable and contingent on other subordinate masculinities. The instability of this hegemonic masculinity creates an essentializing racialized project of the "othered" security contractors. A part of the essentializing mission is to 1) hide the embedded whiteness of the hegemonic masculinity and 2) create a "culture as race" for the othered contractors that relies on collective and essentialized, often crude, understandings of both the Gurkhas and the Afghan. Whereas a white contractor is recruited and employed largely based on his individual merit, his personal experience and background in military operations, and his personal connections within the private security world (Schumacher 2006), the Gurkha and Afghan contractor are recruited and employed largely based on essentialized "culture as race" criteria.

Race is an important component is determining and categorizing the varied and hierarchical masculinities in security contracting. Western men often get the managerial and well paying jobs. They have the networking ability and opportunities to maintain high standard employment and labor laws of their own countries are applied. TNCs in contrast get paid a considerably lower wage, have fewer benefits in terms of life insurance and time off and have less access to social networks as well as the flexibility to move between developed (western compounds) and underdeveloped spaces in these conflict zones.

Race acts as a category to determine material and non-material realities for contractors. It justifies the disproportionate pay and quality of life material relations between the white western and his racialized other security counterparts. Western white men continue to dominant managerial roles and close protection services of their primarily white clients. Gurkhas and Afghan security contractors will perform what is considered more demeaning or dangerous roles of gate or static guard and vehicle convoy or security on road construction in the south and east of the country. These roles are in part formed by

racial projects such as martial race and human terrain mapping. Both projects constructed “culture” as a race for the Gurkhas and Afghans (Streets 2004). Further, the types of masculinities constructed within the subordinate racialized contractors determine the type of relationship they have with their white counterparts and the contracts they are employed to do.

Some white contractors interviewed claimed, that while Gurkhas were “good”, they were not as professionally trained and equipped to perform all the roles of the white contractor. This was in part because of their military training, their country of origin being developing, as well as their ability to speak English fluently (Interviews with PSC contractors: May 2008). The Afghan contractors were subordinated through their lack of speaking English, their lack of formal western military training and their “tribal and family” ties that made them untrustworthy as employers.

Third Country National Security Contractor: The embodiment of the other

TCNs are recruited from their home countries as well but since their national and personal economic situations are often more acute there is often less bargaining done and these contractors will have to put up with the decreasing labor and economic standards when compared to their western male counterparts.

The Gurkhas in Afghanistan are a group of private soldier that is particularly desired by many international companies. This in part is due to their colonial links with the British military and their continual service with British Forces. They are men from a developing part of the world that have proven through the colonial experience to be trusted (Streets 2004). Gurkhas within private security appear to continue to be subjugated to the “Orientalist gaze of colonial anthropology” (Golay 2006: 26). This gaze continues to construct an identity that can be trusted and sought after because of the Gurkha’s high level of professionalism, their dependability, their loyalty, and mostly because they can be hired to do the same job as an ex pat security contractor for the fraction of the cost (Interview PSC contractor: May 2008).

Gurkhas were described by many ex pat contractors as being very reliable and had an ability to persevere through very adverse living conditions that many ex pats would not tolerate. They were described in terms of being tough, brave and having an aptitude to relate more with Afghans because of similar cultures and customs. Golay (2006) argues that the image of the Gurkha that appears to be dominant within private security is one that has colonial legacies embedded in it (28). He claims that Gurkha identity that we come to understand today lay in colonial martial race. This martial race is similar to the HTM project in that sought to move from “brutal modes of conquest (found in traditional military methods) to cultural technologies” (28). The project moved from conquering to managing people. This *discovery* of the Gurkha was an exercise in ethnographical study backed by science that saw certain biological attributes in the Gurkha. These *attributes* appear to persist in understandings and in turn demands for Gurkhas in private security.

Materially, Gurkhas in Afghanistan are predominantly found in lower status jobs. Very few are employed in or take on managerial roles unless it is to manage over other Nepalese or Indian Gurkhas. This appears to be a part of the persisting colonial legacy nurturing the relationship between the Gurkha and the white male security contractor. During colonialism, Gurkhas “could [only] realize their enormous potential...under the tutelage, supervision and leadership of British Officers” (Golay 2006: 31). These officers being white and male.

They will often be deployed to more dangerous parts of Afghanistan and have to maintain an existence on very little “creature comforts”. Their time off is generally one month a year and there is always worry that they will not return for logistical reasons. Because of this, these men attempt to maintain this full time employment for as long as possible. Most of the money made on deployments is sent home to their families. It appears as though their loyalty and dependability comes in part because of their individual and national economic situation. Similar to colonial reasoning behind employing “natives” during British conquests, it appears as private security moves to employing more TCNs they repeat colonial thinking that

“it would be better and cheaper to dominate the world if the natives could be induced to shoulder much of the Whiteman’s military burden” (Golay 2006: 29). In this sense, White men because of the Nepalese and Indian economic inequality use Gurkhas. It appears as though, through private security, developing nation’s poor and being used to fight white men’s wars on other developing poor (Eisenstein 2008).

Geographically these men appear segregated from the rest of the contractors within compounds. Where I was staying in Kabul, the Gurkhas primarily lived in the basement of the compound in large shared rooms. The lifestyle reminded me of military barracks where as the officer class of Gurkhas and western-based contractors and civilians would have their own rooms often with en-suites.

Race generally has ties to development as well. Smirl uses critical geography to discuss the geographical space that divides the underdeveloped from the developed, the west from the othered (YEAR). These geographical divides are seen during development and security operations in Afghanistan where Gurkhas keep to their own quarters within security compounds and are often deployed to more dangerous spaces in Afghanistan. It is a manifestation of those who belong to the developed world and those who are denied access. Where the western contractors can with ease travel between the two worlds, the developing contractor is denied these same opportunities.

TNCs are often in a place of disadvantage coming for a nation where their social and economic infrastructure is poor. Working in private security gives them the opportunity to engage with the global market and provide for their families and themselves. While they are doing similar work as the ex pat western contractor, they are not paid a similar wage. Their wages are determined by the cost of living in their country of origin. Other reasons are their inability to have an excellent command over the English language (this is seen as a requirement for working with clients). While some TCNs are offered a life insurance policy, most are not given the same level of benefits as western contractors, nor do they have access to the same social networks or state benefits offered by western states to western citizens. The different treatment of these TCNs in terms of pay, leave, and benefits works to perpetuate a system of exploitation and create a zone of exclusion in that TCNs by being born in a non-western state, are denied the opportunities and benefits of a western contractor.

Hiring of TNCs continues to increase in areas of conflict. In Afghanistan, many contractors were being hired from Nepal under the auspice of being Gurkha and from Fiji. Locals were also hired to do more menial tasks such as unarmed gate guards and performing domestic duties. There was no mention of basic arms and human rights training of new local recruits. The most important thing was that they knew how to fire a rifle (Interview with Security Contractor, May 2008). Gurkhas were one step above local contractors and were revered for their soldiering and warrior skills. They would often be spoken about in the plural form and when probed, many persons hiring them would not know anything about the individual contractor’s personal life. In turn, both local and third country nations are often deployed in more dangerous or menial positions. They can either be static guards (in front of compounds) or convoy protection guards. Convoy protection guards are placed in increasingly dangerous spaces in more *front line* roles.

The Local Afghan Security Contractor: embodying another other

It was difficult to obtain access to many local security contractors as I did not speak local languages and none of these contractors were hired to protect the compound I was living and working at. Most of my understanding of them were based on my observations of them as well as informed by western contractors who managed them.

Locals are hired in country and are afforded even less opportunities and pay than all the other contractors. Their jobs tend to be more menial work such as unarmed guards of building and home sites or more dangerous jobs such as in Afghanistan as security for road construction crews in Taliban territory. There appears to no labor standards, and even if the conflict country has some, they have no enforcing mechanism. Lack of labor standards places these employees in even more precarious situations with their white westerner employer. There were issues around leave during times of weddings and other important

cultural and religious dates for local contractors, including Ramadan. These issues arose because of cultural differences between locals and their western employers over was considered culturally appropriate time off. Some comments were expressed by western managers as to tolerating issues around prayer time and at the same time concerning themselves with being efficient in operations (Interview with PSC contractor: May 2008).

Where western contractors are generally hired through word of mouth and a network of contractors stemming from time served together in Special Forces or other military branches, locals are recruited through local networks and often tribal lines. Western firms approach the governors of particular areas for the recruitment of armed guards (Interview with PSC contractor: May 2008). At times, the Ministry of Interior (MOI) is used to assist private security firms; although this is being regulated and restricted in Afghanistan.

Their uniforms are often substandard and they are made to stand in the heat for long periods. Little consideration is given to both cultural and religious practices that require less work hours or more time off. This is particularly the case when the employer is not from Afghanistan. The contractors have a precarious employment contract with their employers and there is little job security. Their pay is also very low but in comparison to the public police force, these security contractors often make a considerable amount more. Disability and death benefits appear to be at the discretion of the employer but the Government of Afghanistan continues to be in negotiation with PSCs on this point (Meetings with the Ministry of Interior and PSCs regarding regulations). Overall, like their TCNs counterparts, local contractors have few avenues to express grievances in terms of pay or working conditions. Many are afraid of termination if they say anything.

Conclusion

While much focus continues to be on the normative and regulatory practices of these security companies and how they are changing our understanding of international security, little mention is dedicated to the racial and gender implications of their operations. Further, what is stated on masculinity in private security tends to glorify and normalize the particular type of masculinity at work. Little to no scholarship is committed to addressing masculinities outside the western context. This helps perpetuate the hegemonic masculinity project within private security by further subordinating men and masculinities outside the west.

Through private security operations, contractors are identified based on their masculinities that directly link to essentialized *culture as race*. These masculinities work to construct as space that further divides the developed contractor from the underdeveloped contractor along racial lines. This essentializing project is seen in contract deployments as well as daily living spaces and the ability to move between the worlds of developed and developing. Whereas white westerners can move with relative ease, the underdeveloped contractor is denied this opportunity. He is relegated to particular spaces within guarded compounds, if allowed in at all, and deployed to more risky areas of conflict zones, at times with inadequate resources and support. Militarized hegemonic masculinities within private security continue to be unstable. Their production relies the creation of *race as culture* as a necessary project in order to stability. Exploring the history of this process allows one to problematize the privilege and hidden whiteness embedded shaping and reshaping globalizing militarized masculinities.

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Appendix:

- 6 months working and living with PSC contractors in Kabul Afghanistan
- 4 Interviews with PSC managers from various western based PSCs in May 2008
- 2 Meetings between PSCs and the representative for the High Coordination Board on the regulation of PSCs in Afghanistan