

Creating knowledge in and about conflicted contexts: How peacekeepers know what works. ⁽¹⁾

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Abstract

This paper discusses the knowledge creation processes of peacekeepers, based on research with former peacekeepers who served as military, police, civilians or unarmed civilian peacekeepers, as well as my own process as a peace researcher. Peacekeepers report knowing what is effective through their embodied and performed experiences which occur in relationship. Their ways of knowing are relational and impacted by the organisations and contexts in which they work and their own beliefs and orientations. This has implications for the processes of creating knowledge and the practice of interventions intended to prevent violence and protect people in conflict affected communities.

Keywords: peacekeeping, knowledge creation, violence prevention, peace and conflict studies.

Introduction

To be a peace researcher is to be engaged in the processes of learning and knowing, with the intent to create new knowledges⁽²⁾ for the normative purpose of a more peaceful and just world. For the last few years, I have been engaged in learning about and creating knowledges regarding how frontline peacekeepers understand effective peacekeeping. Their processes of knowing are themselves the focus of this paper, but also an example through which to discuss questions about learning, knowledge, knowing and power.

There is knowing that comes through doing which is different than that generated through other methods (Polanyi 1962; Cook 1999). As little research on effective peacekeeping includes the knowledges of frontline peacekeepers (Ryan 2000), listening to and adding their perspectives seems to me an important contribution to understanding how peacekeeping works (and doesn't

work). Just as the perspectives of those receiving peacekeeping in conflict affected communities have been mostly silenced and ignored (Pouligny 2006; Higate and Henry 2009a), the learning of frontline peacekeepers has been ignored in much of the literature on peacekeeping. They live the dilemmas and challenges which arise when their missions are perceived as imposing inappropriate or unwanted models and solutions, or when using force to achieve peace; a few of the concerns which are discussed in peace and conflict related literature.⁽³⁾ The learning gleaned from these experiences seems to me to be important contributions to peacekeeping which more effectively prevents violence, protects people, and supports local ownership.⁽⁴⁾

Simultaneously, as peace researchers, we must think about, discuss, be transparent, and analyse how we create knowledges (Jutila et al. 2008; Patomäki 2001). Whose voices do we include? How is their knowing created? What methods do we use? What criteria do we use to make claims about what is true? How do we understand our work in terms of whose interests might we serve, what currents of power shape our work? In this paper I do two things – both discuss the ways in which peacekeepers create knowing, as contrasted to other knowledges about peacekeeping, and why this matters and what it reveals, as well as to discuss more generally the processes of creating knowledges as a peace researcher.

I begin with a brief review of what it means to know and learn, postmodern perspectives on the intimate link between power and knowledge as well as some reflections on experiential knowing and adult learning, linked with how peacekeepers learn and know what is effective. This is followed by a brief discussion of my own process of producing knowledge. I then briefly examine how other knowledges about peacekeeping are produced. Having developed that background, I turn to the main point of this paper, how peacekeepers know, their processes of learning and knowing.⁽⁵⁾ This leads to a very brief review of what my research suggests are main themes in their knowledges. I conclude with some reflections on how peacekeepers' knowledges suggest a potential evolution of a more effective and emancipatory peacekeeping.

Knowledge, knowing, learning and power, social learning and experience

Turning to the internet for definitions of knowledge, knowing and learning, I find definitions (in the English language – other languages may be different) that link knowledge and knowing to gnosis, a spiritual process, as well as to sexual intimacy.⁽⁶⁾ This suggests that knowing is intimate, somewhat mysterious. Definitions state that knowledge is learned through experience, through seeing. One knows through action, practice. To learn is to study, to cultivate knowledge. These are definitions which suggest that we can learn a body of knowledge through studying, but also that we know through embodied experience, a process that can be at times somewhat

difficult to translate in to words, known through a participatory consciousness (Polanyi 1962; Heshusius 1994).

These conceptions of knowing point to the processes of knowledge creation. We know through some kind of activity, whether it be reading a book or patrolling a street in a conflict affected community. What we can know is affected by the processes of knowing. What I can learn about peacekeeping is different if based in analysing statistics on the absence of renewed fighting versus patrolling the street or talking to armed groups to convince them to disarm. We are our embodied selves, in these learning processes, learner and learning intertwined (Merriam 2008; Kilgore 2001; Merriam and Kim 2008; Heshusius 1994). This learning is subjective, influenced by a myriad of factors.

What can be known and how it can be known can also be understood as intricately intertwined with power (Hall 2001; Harding 1996; Merlingen 2005; Pietrykowski 1996; Nicholls 2011; Kilgore 2001; Smith 1997). The above authors point, in various contexts, to the ways in which power dynamics in any particular context impact what can be known, whose knowledge is valued, and how valid knowledge can be created. Our ability to even imagine other knowledges is constrained by what our societies, cultures and identity groups consider to be discussable, reasonable or possible (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002). Working as armed peacekeepers, embedded in systems enchanted with the potential of military power to create and sustain peace, some military peacekeepers cannot imagine that unarmed peacekeeping is possible. It seems ridiculous. What is considered as true fact changes over time, but while it is reified as fact, it appears nonsensical to suggest otherwise. Labelling knowledge as superstitious, naïve, irrational, or biased is often used to control what knowledges we take seriously and what we dismiss.

Recent work in the field of adult learning has focused on both the social and experiential, as well as the critical and post modern (Kilgore 2001; Pietrykowski 1996; Merriam 2001; Merriam and Kim 2008; Mezirow 2000). Peacekeeping can be thought of as social learning, created within relationships with other peacekeepers and the people they interact with from a variety of social sectors. It is experiential learning, involving the performance of specific acts within these relational fields and in specific places (Cook 1999; Higate and Henry 2009b). It is knowledges created within conflict affected communities, in often tense and confusing contexts. For most of those doing military peacekeeping (that is peacekeeping that relies on weapons as the ultimate power, though they themselves may be police or other civilians), their missions will likely be involved in supporting some or all components of the liberal peace agenda and they may be impacted by perceptions that this agenda serves western hegemony, or does not serve local needs (Cunliffe 2012; Richmond 2009b; Eriksen 2009; Mac Ginty 2011; Talentino 2007). And their

knowing is impacted by the power dynamics that define what is knowable in their backgrounds, their training, the organisations in which they work, and the conflict affected communities in which they carry out their peacekeeping. These strands of knowledge creation as subjective, social, embodied and the intertwining of knowledge and power, form the framework for my further analysis.

The research – my knowledge creation processes

At the core of my knowledge creation processes are my ethical commitments to nonviolence and a desire to contribute to a more agonistic political process that is nonviolent, a respectful conflict that avoids the hegemony of any particular version of truth within the bounds of non-harming others (Peterson 2012; Shinko 2008). More specifically, this paper is grounded in research interviews⁽⁷⁾ I conducted with 55 former peacekeepers from 19 different countries, who served in 20 different missions.⁽⁸⁾ Using constructed grounded theory (Charmaz 2009; Clarke 2005), and in line with an overarching constructivist framework (Guzzini 2000; Moses and Knutsen 2007), I constructed meaning influenced by these inter-subjective experiences and through an iterative process of interviewing, reflecting on the interview transcripts, coding and analysing the interviews, reflecting more on my own responses and thinking, leading to new interviews.⁽⁹⁾ When I refer to peacekeepers in this paper, please keep in mind that I am referring only to what these particular peacekeepers told me.

I learned in relationship with the people I interviewed. Our social processes were shaped by our understandings of what it means to be a researcher, or a participant in research. Some of those I interviewed expressed hopes that their participation in my research, and my research itself, would contribute to changes within UN peacekeeping, making it more responsive to the needs of local people, and better able to keep the peace through improved organizational processes. I responded with my view that I was just a PhD student (at that time), and my sense of uncertainty and concern that few would ever read my work.

My reflection and analysis are shaped by my worldview and standpoints (Docherty 2001; Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002). Being transparent in this regard, my worldview reflects in some part my Buddhist practice, a commitment to nonviolence, as well as having served as the Learning and Evaluation Officer for the Nonviolent Peaceforce in Sri Lanka.⁽¹⁰⁾ While standpoints are not simply a collection of facts, it seems efficient to simply list some relevant factors that influence my processes of knowing. I grew up in a global north super power; as a white person part of a dominant social group, with the additional privileges of being middle class; influenced by and active in progressive politics in the US; and gendered female. I recognize that all these aspects are present as I create knowing, whether conscious or unconscious. They influenced

my ability to network around the world to reach former peacekeepers, the language I used in my questions, my interest in unarmed civilian peacekeeping.

These aspects of my subjectivity also profoundly impacted my choice of research methods and analysis. Before starting the research, I held an assumption that I would demonstrate the superiority of unarmed civilian peacekeeping (UCP). But I felt it unethical to interview military peacekeepers, holding a hypothesis that their way of working, their perspectives even, were flawed. It felt unethical to interview people with a clear intent to somehow demonstrate their ineffectiveness, while purporting to be focused on what was effective. Once I articulated this discomfort, I cannot say my assumptions were banished, but they were both conscious and lessened. It also led to the choices I made to focus on the knowledges and strengths of military peacekeepers as equal to that of UCP peacekeepers. This is simply one demonstration of the power I have as a researcher. Although I wanted to serve the movements toward demilitarising peacekeeping, I did not want to do so at the cost of disrespecting those I interviewed.

Jarvis suggests that researchers tend to take one of three general stances in our work – the scientist, narrator, or critical analyst (Jarvis 2013). I see myself in the description of narrator, that is staying grounded in the particularities of the interviews, not trying to generalize too far nor create a grand theory, constructing meaning about effective peacekeeping rather than deconstructing the discourses.

This research process was also influenced by literature on peacekeeping and peacebuilding more broadly.⁽¹¹⁾ Socially constructed grounded theory understands the interviews as empirical data, as the spoken words get transcribed and are available for reflection and analysis (Charmaz 2006). This material is analysed in relationship with other data from the literature, the news, and other relevant sources. And finally, you as reader are an active participant in the processes of your own knowing, so I have shared quotes from interviews as a way to provide some material on which to reflect and form your own conclusions (Charmaz 2006).

Peacekeeping research: how knowledge is created and what is known

My research processes differ from much of the literature on peacekeeping in terms of the process of creating knowledge and therefore the knowledge created. The following discussion is not a review of peacekeeping literature, but a brief summary of some aspects of how knowledge in the field is created and what is known.

There is a body of work based on quantitative analysis of data on conflicts.⁽¹²⁾ Fortna and Howard (2008) celebrate this as an advance in the research on peacekeeping, moving away from historical accounts and general theorizing. It is hard to say whose voices are included in the raw data of reports and articles that go in to the databases, as all identifiable voices are removed by the reduction of this data to numbers. This research assumes objective truth which can be known through mathematical processes.⁽¹³⁾ This process attempts to eliminate the voice not only of those in the conflict, but also as a matter of principle, that of the researcher, assuming that distance between research and researcher is possible and contributes to the validity of the findings (Moses and Knutsen 2007; Heshusius 1994). This body of knowledges is affected by the lack of agreement on what peacekeeping is, how to define success, and the use of different databases with different criteria as the basis of knowledge production (Sambanis 2002). It doesn't interrogate itself on the implications of embedded assumptions. For instance in much of this work, success is considered the absence of war (1,000 or more battle related deaths) within a specified time frame (Doyle and Sambanis 2006; Fortna 2008), though others use more complex definitions. This research assumes that such measures are objective and non-political and does not engage with questions of whose standpoint is included, who it serves or diserves to define war and success in these ways. Generally this research is focused on questions of whether peacekeeping works and if so, when and how. In my view, this is a process of knowledge production which lacks self-reflection on a number of critical factors. There is no discussion of the researchers' biases or backgrounds, little about their experiences of doing the research, and little to no reflection on the relationship of their research to the powers served by peacekeeping.

Much work on peacekeeping effectiveness is either based on case studies or also includes case studies with quantitative research as a mixed method project.⁽¹⁴⁾ There are numerous methodologies for doing case studies and for analysing interviews, and little of this literature addresses the issue of their qualitative methodology, thus limiting our understanding of how the knowledge was produced. They rarely discuss their own embodied practices of being a researcher and the contexts in which they learn. However, in these case studies we tend to hear some of the voices of those interviewed. They tend to be high level UN or other multinational peacekeeping intervention staff, or national elites and leaders. Much of this literature is in the objectivist traditional science frame, or as Diehl (2009) recommends "value-free social-science". There is also literature on how peacekeeping works that seems a combination of general theorizing, interviews, and personal experience written by military peacekeepers or advisors to military peacekeeping (Durch 2006; Sartre 2011). Knowledge produced through these methods has nuance and complexity in explaining how peacekeeping works. The presence of the researcher is more apparent in the choices made of material to share, though still largely unacknowledged. In contrast with my work, however, none of this work explicitly includes

the perspectives of ground level peacekeepers.⁽¹⁵⁾ Nor does it deeply interrogate the relationship of their position as researchers, their own power, the power of peacekeeping, etc.

There is some research focused on the ground level experience of peacebuilding (peacekeeping being subsumed in larger agendas in most current operations) from the perspective of those in the community where peacekeepers work.⁽¹⁶⁾ This research includes the voices of everyday local people, and/or peacebuilders in the midst of the aftermath of violence, and the threats of further violence, as it relates to their experience of receiving peacekeeping. While most of this literature is based on interviews, Mvukiyehe and Samii (2008, 2010) base their work primarily on data from surveys collected by local staff. Pouligny's work is an extensive exploration of how local people view peace operations (Pouligny 2006). She interviewed local people (she says little about her methodology) from many social strata and in a number of missions and constructs a narrative primarily of negative experiences. Similarly to Howard (2008) and Zanotti (2011), she shares a bit of information regarding her work for the UN in various missions, and it appears she did at least some of her data collection while working for the UN. While her framework is not addressed, she seems to write in an objectivist frame, sharing with us the reality she has uncovered. She shares perspectives that indicate local people experience disrespect, the undermining of local ownership and initiatives, ignorance of local conditions and apparent apathy toward local suffering, as well as experiencing direct harm. Higate and Henry (2009a) interviewed peacebuilders and local people in communities hosting several different missions and found that peacekeeping creates both security and insecurity, creating hostility and resistance to the intervention, as well as appreciation for some useful contributions. They state that their work is created within a critical theory frame, and address issues of power and what powers these interventions might serve as this manifests at the community intervention level and in the eyes of those working there. They also share insight into their own experiences in doing the research.

How peacekeepers know

(All of the quotes below are excerpts from interviews with former peacekeepers conducted between July 2011 and June 2012. The initials are unrelated to their names. The first initial indicates the role or category in which they served – M indicates they were military (MAN served in the military), P indicates police (PAI served as a police peacekeeper), C a civilian in military mission (CAD was a civilian in a UN mission), and U indicates they served as an unarmed civilian peacekeeper (UBH served as such).

There are at least two questions alive in my work related to knowing. How do peacekeepers know what works, what is their process of knowing? And of equal importance, how do I know that what peacekeepers have to say has any accuracy or validity?⁽¹⁷⁾ I will deal with the second question first. I was struck by a comment made by one of the peacekeepers, UAM, who said *“We take it as true when someone says we saved their life”*. There are several components in this statement. Peacekeepers have a relationship with certain people which they experience as characterized by trust. And implied perhaps is also respect in the phrase “take it as true”. This comment was made in response to my query about how they knew what worked. I took this to mean, we respect the people (all civilian activists) we work with, we trust them, why would they lie to us? But it is also a position – we choose to believe what people say is true. And it relates to power – even though we have some power in these communities that might distort what people tell us, we believe them. It is a political position.

Perhaps in the same way, I trust what peacekeepers told me to be true. Their knowledges developed in the context of their work, through the lived interactions with others in their teams or units, and the communities and people they worked with. They experienced the confusion of being an outsider in a very stressed, complex community, the actual conversations, live gunfire, and the varied sights and sounds of living and working amidst conflicts. I do not claim that what they told me is true in some essential, objective way. But it is their truth. And that is all I was asking. That said, the similarities between what people said, from many different countries, missions, and roles, was striking to me. And much of what they told me is echoed in other related literature. But that is not why I believe them, why I trust what they told me. I was the recipient of lengthy discussions of peacekeeping experiences, and heard sincerity and concerns, at times anguish and joy in their sharing. I have the lived experience, the jointly constructed, relational experience of an interview. I find that as trustworthy as other modes of research.

I focus now on how peacekeepers know what works, as shared in response to a prompt about how they knew, their process of knowing, about peacekeeping. Peacekeepers described knowing what worked primarily by their experience of what others say and do. Peacekeeping today takes place primarily in communities and peacekeepers are in frequent interaction with local government officials, belligerents, local leaders of various types, and ordinary local people from different social sectors. The communities in which they work have been deeply affected by previous violence and often are experiencing both on-going violence and the threat of future violence. They learn in an embodied, relational context, in their day-to-day interactions.⁽¹⁸⁾ Embodied knowing implies developing knowledge(s) through action, through the bodily experiences of the senses and the felt sense of intuition, as well as the mental/conceptual meaning making processes. Relational knowing or social knowing implies they developed knowledge(s) in interaction with others, in dynamic contexts. In particular, as the overall context is in communities

affected by conflict, the relational fields are affected by issues including trust/mistrust and cooperation/coercion, and all this impacts their knowing. They experience the agency of local people as it impacted their work, particularly through good relationships (trusting and cooperative) or coercive relationships.⁽¹⁹⁾ While a few peacekeepers referred to knowing what was effective through external measurements, (i.e. meeting a goal to get a certain number of former belligerents to demobilize), most mentioned they knew they were effective either because of what people said to them and/or the actions of the people they were working with. They bring to their peacekeeping assumptions and biases in their standpoints (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002), which at times they acknowledge as colouring their perceptions of being effective, and at times they seemed unconscious of this.

As discussed above, how knowledges are constructed is rarely touched upon in the literature on effective peacekeeping. Howard (2008) is one of the few who stress learning itself as an element of effective peacekeeping. However she is focused on organizational learning, and the important link of learning to an increased ability to be effective. She points to an integrative relationship with the environment as key for organizational learning, so that there is two way communication and connection between the field and headquarters. Thus while I am clearly also talking about learning, it is at the individual and community level.

Peacekeepers told me they understood their impact in part through what people said to them. People told peacekeepers they were alive because of their work, or that their presence had made a difference. Other actors in the region such as diplomats or government officials also told peacekeepers about their impact. The actual act of coming to the peacekeepers to ask for help, or in the case of police, reporting a crime, was seen as a demonstration of effectiveness by speech and action. For instance UAH talked about both individuals they worked with, and diplomats who cared about their work as indications of their effectiveness. *UAH: "People would say if you weren't there I would be dead now, an individual response, and individual gratitude, saying thank you. We worked a lot with international diplomats in Colombo, they said NP [Nonviolent Peaceforce] played an important role, we did things no one else did."* MAN points to the quality of interactions as evidence of effectiveness. *MAN: "The locals would speak to you in a different way... locals would speak to you in a more informal way. They would ask you things... The sense of frankness in the discussions, as compared to the formality in other discussions."* MAQ points out that while it was only what people said, that several people said the same things. *"MAQ: "It was mostly what several different people told us what would happen if we weren't there. Just their word, but we heard it from several different sources."*

Peacekeepers most frequently shared with me that they understood their effectiveness through their perception of changed behaviour. As peacekeeping takes place in a relational field, changes in behaviour which peacekeepers found positive, were noticed and valued. Peacekeepers interviewed for this research reported signs of effectiveness in changes in interactions between themselves and others, and in the interactions between people in communities. In general this related to evidence that people were feeling safer, less afraid of violence, less isolated, more confident in the peacekeepers themselves, more able to approach local authorities themselves, or in the case of mentoring, more capable. This knowing clearly has a conceptual or language component, but seemed to also reflect intuition, a felt sense, the experience we have as things shift in relationships so that we feel differently and then explain that difference to ourselves and others, in words.

CAD describes knowing she was effective because women came to vote. *CAD: "It worked because, at the beginning women were scared to go out, and one year after they showed up in the polling stations."* PBF narrates dramatic changes he saw over time, highlighting knowing as a lived experience. *PBF: "We had a structure in our area, meeting with the village chiefs, we were starting to problem solve with each of the villages, so you've gone from this area that was totally devastated, where everyone has run away, there is so much violence, to where we've given the area stability... and we have had high visibility patrolling attending incidents until the community trusts us and comes in with their normal problems, until everyone is basically happy again."*

UAK points to the relational aspect of knowing the work is effective, as an experience of being trusted. *UAK: "How do you know if you are trusted? To be effective you have to have trust and acceptance, people would be willing to meet with you and approach us with appropriate requests, that is an example of trust ...people share the sensitive details of their challenges that they don't share with others. You can say through the level of engagement with, if people engage and approach you, if families, local activists, local networks, community based organizations, approach you, they trust you. ... they are not stupid, they know how to survive. If you are not helpful, they will stay way away."*

Several peacekeepers mentioned that it was important for local people to have confidence in the peacekeeping intervention to increase safety as an important contributing factor to being effective. They believed people had confidence in them because of observed changes in behaviours. Here MAZ explains that he knows he was successful through relationships. *MAZ: "People came around and want to talk to you, shake hands with you, it shows they have confidence in you. They want to give you information, if they don't have confidence, they won't tell you. These kinds of action show they have a confidence. They come to you by themselves, you don't have to call them ... they have confidence that telling you will get a response, that is why they are*

talking to you, telling you all their problems. PAR, in a context of rebuilding policing in the community, noticed that reports of domestic violence increased, which he attributed to confidence, a belief that reporting would be useful. PAR: "Like for instance domestic violence doesn't get reported at all in most places. It isn't one of the things people like to talk about. We went from no reports of domestic violence in the area, to reports coming in, not just by neighbours but by the people involved in it. You have to have confidence the police will do something, you have to trust that the police will do something ... and the reports went from 0 to 4 or 5 per week." He also experienced other changes in the way the community interacted with police, which indicated to him, their effectiveness. "The street riots went down, they were coming to the police to help sort things out, there were still disputes, like what someone's pig did, that sort of thing. There were a huge number of events in the community, and they never consulted with the police about them, but this started, to consult with us, all through the police office."

Not all relational changes are positive or pleasant. Peacekeepers use various forms of coercion to prevent violence (Furnari 2014). UBH points out that sometimes pushback indicates impact and effectiveness, though it can be quite uncomfortable. UBH: *"Often what appears to be a negative response, is pushback that we start getting from authorities, or pushback from those who are hiding behind a smokescreen...that is telling us that we are touching a nerve they are not comfortable with. And somehow addressing, letting us know that we are getting closer to issues that are usually around impunity and either overt abuses or failure to protect issues from the state side...So there are changes in behaviour, sometimes, which is a negative situation, which feels uncomfortable. We feel pressure from the state that tells us we are being effective in reduction of violence, in raising attention and concerns."*

Other peacekeepers said they knew they were effective based on a felt sense, an intuition. UAG mentions it is hard to describe in a report, but she knew their work was helping local people overcome fear and silencing, becoming more active in addressing conflict related issues in their community. UAG: *"We enabled them to start thinking, " I am an actor", it is hard to share this in a report. It was something you could sense or know in an interaction."* MAA notes that once his battalion (in the Balkans) was under NATO command, he intuited that people felt safer, and this made him feel more effective. MAA: *"With NATO the victims felt safer, you can feel it... my intuition... in their body language."*

Unarmed civilian peacekeepers who worked in small NGOs also addressed concerns about how peacekeeping is evaluated by funders. Several talked about the problems of being asked to produce numbers as the knowledge which would prove the effectiveness of their work, when that might not be an appropriate methodology for knowing. UAW talks about how hard it is to measure impact. UAW: *"How do you measure not getting threats, or not being killed, it's hard."*

I guess if the number of threats go down. But they never seem to, they are always there. I guess if human rights defenders can do their work, the number of cases they file, or the fact they are still filing cases, they are not intimidated.”

UBH talks about the struggle to produce numbers for funders. UBH: *“And we all know, the long standing challenge is how do you prove prevention? How do you absolutely say, had we not been here, doing our work, people would have been physically hurt or killed. And that is extremely difficult and we are falling under the standard log[logical] frame, measured indicators, quantitative reporting that donors desperately want ... because the challenge constantly, is mostly from the donor community, is about how to prove, people want proof.”*

Peacekeepers reflected feeling powerless at times to be even partially effective, so their knowledges are also a reflection of their experiences of being ineffective. While as an outsider I imagined them as having power, their own experience was often one of feeling powerless to do what needed to be done to protect people and prevent violence in particular. This led to judging their work as ineffective. This particular disconnect between what other research reports as civilian’s perceptions of the power, and misuse of power by peacekeepers (Poulligny 2006; Higate and Henry 2009a; Talentino 2007), and peacekeepers self-perception, seems to me an example of the intertwining of power and knowledge. For those serving in large UN sanctioned missions, with weapons, transportation and communication equipment, etc., it was as if they were not able to know, unable to perceive and discuss their power, and the problematic nature of its use. They could see that they were unable to do all the good that they had hoped to do, but seemed forbidden for the most part, to see that the harm their missions were causing reflected their power. They shared many concerns about the negative impact of their missions too, but with a sense of being powerless to do anything about it. As discussed below, peacekeepers understood the imposition of solutions in the communities where they worked, for example, to undermine their effectiveness.

In summary, peacekeepers shared knowing what works through their everyday experience with people, in the communities where they work. This is a lived experience, created in specific contexts. Their knowing is created in relationship with the people they work with, a practice of social learning, in communities struggling with the aftermath and often continuance of violence. This is not a knowing which lends itself easily to measurement, as some of them point out. It is not based on an abstraction of human behaviour, codified in numerical variables. Their knowing reflects active learning through participating in many different kinds of peacekeeping tasks. It creates standpoints as well as enacting them simultaneously.⁽²⁰⁾ Their knowledges are not objective, in the sense of a separation between the knower and the known and existing in some external space, nor a universal truth that stands alone from the context in which it was created.

They learned situated in specific institutions and specific conflicts affected communities in particular stages of struggle that all affected their knowing.

Influences on knowing

Their knowing was deeply influenced by various factors. Armed soldiers serving as peacekeepers were influenced by their training. The military trains its personnel in the use of weapons, with the intent to win battles and kill if necessary (Whitworth 2004). Several of the peacekeepers I interviewed mentioned that they had to struggle against this training in order to be more effective in their everyday work in the communities where they served.

The degree of violence they experienced and the specifics of each context also impacted their knowing. Three soldiers, (out of the nine peacekeepers interviewed who served during the Balkan wars), were the only peacekeepers who believed the most important factor in peacekeeping was good weapons and rules of engagement allowing their use more freely (as experienced under NATO rather than the UN). This contrasts, for instance with a soldier who served in the NATO forces in Afghanistan. *MBP: "Relationships are more important than any body armour or mine resistant vehicle the government could purchase. I can only speak about Afghanistan because that is where the majority of my experience has been. It is a human terrain, and in order to operate effectively on that human terrain, you have to have relationships."*

Unarmed civilian peacekeepers served in a variety of contexts, including in the midst of the on-going civil war in Mindanao both during ceasefires and between them. Nonetheless they remained committed to nonviolence, and developed knowledges that suggested to them that being armed created more danger than protection in most circumstances, and that they were safer and more effective because they were unarmed and reliant on good relationships. Many also acknowledged that UCP would not work in all contexts, as it requires at a minimum armed actors that would be reluctant to kill foreign civilians.

Another factor which I believe influenced their knowing, particularly for the peacekeepers in UN and NATO missions, was their global north or global south backgrounds. Most peacekeepers stated or implied they arrived with what I term a saviour mentality – they anticipated that as peacekeepers they would be able to protect and help the poor suffering people in a region of violence and chaos. When they inevitably experienced the limitations to their ability to protect, help and save, the resulting frustrations coloured their perceptions of the organisations in which they served, the leadership of missions, the potential effectiveness of peacekeeping interventions, and the commitment of others around them, to peace. A significant difference between them, in terms of global north/south backgrounds, is that many of the global north soldiers and police

developed knowledges (which I found painful and labelled racist) about the corruption, incompetence and mean spiritedness of their fellow peacekeepers from the global south. They believed that one of the important reasons for ineffectiveness in their missions was caused by soldiers and police from the global south. They believed these others were there only for the money, with a tendency toward being corrupt, exploiting local people, and being poorly trained and frequently incompetent. Soldiers and civilians from the global south tended to acknowledge there were problems, but developed knowing which suggested that what was needed was better training and orientation to the specifics of each peacekeeping mission, and a full explanation of why the local people needed them to do a good job. They suggested that this would strengthen the commitment to helping others and decrease the issues of exploitation and corruption. A few also mentioned what they perceived as the arrogance and related incompetence of peacekeepers from the global north (painfully reverse racism?).

Many other factors impacted the learning and knowledges created. Unarmed civilian peacekeepers generally live in the more rural or smaller communities where they serve, often with knowledge of local languages, and always with local staff who translate. They interact with people in the community in many day-to-day activities such as shopping at the market, as well as in more formal roles. Military peacekeepers of all sorts – soldiers, police and civilians – generally live in well protected compounds or bases, often only in larger cities. Several of the peacekeepers I interviewed noted that they had to travel long distances to get to communities they were monitoring and as the UN was unable to provide translators for their teams, their ability to interact and establish relationships with local people was limited. One noted his team finally hired a translator themselves. Other factors included age, gender, the specific history and purpose of the mission, and the pre-deployment mission preparedness training they received which set up preconceived assumptions (Furnari 2014 chapter 7).

How peacekeepers know influences what they know

The knowledges developed through the experience of working in relational fields with people from various social sectors led peacekeepers to emphasise good relationships as a central factor in effective peacekeeping.⁽²¹⁾ While peacekeepers talked about the need to use coercion (at times violent coercion by military peacekeepers, and nonviolent coercion such as presence and advocacy by UCPs), many identified that cooperative, trusting, mutually beneficial relationships were more effective. Whether to deter violence, protect people or support local ownership of change process, relationships are both the context in which peacekeepers worked and the vehicle or conduit for influencing others. However, as one peacekeeper put it: *MBL: "These are not normal relationships."* These are relationships created in the midst of violence

and threat of violence toward civilians, various officials, other armed actors, and the peacekeepers themselves. Peacekeepers themselves work in multicultural teams or units that are challenged to create productive relationships across differences. Thus, while seen as a crucial, if not the most crucial aspect of effective peacekeeping, relationships robust enough to withstand the movement between coercion and cooperation, and across many differences and divides, were not easy to make and need constant maintenance. As noted above, peacekeepers knew their relationships were good relationships, through the things people said, and the way people behaved with them.

Acceptance was also identified as a critical factor in effective peacekeeping. In order to develop good relationships, peacekeepers needed to be accepted. While the literature tends to discuss the need for legitimacy (see, for example, Whalen 2010; Gelot 2012; Johnstone 2011), peacekeepers talk about being accepted. While legitimacy can be a formally conferred status, acceptance was a relational experience. Peacekeepers mentioned they knew they were accepted when people in the community or armed groups shared information, asked for help, provided needed services, and even helped to protect the peacekeepers by warning them of dangers.

Supporting local ownership to address conflicts was also identified as a critical factor in effective peacekeeping as well as a purpose or goal of peacekeeping. While the meaning of local ownership is contested (Richmond 2009a; Charbonneau 2012; Sending 2010; Martin and Moser 2012), I believe that peacekeepers in general meant local in the sense of supporting people who were rooted and lived in the communities where they worked. By ownership, they meant supporting local leaders, local initiatives, rather than bringing in pre-packaged programs or reforms. Peacekeeping which was seen by peacekeepers themselves, as well as local people, as undermining local ownership and/or imposing unwanted or inappropriate solutions, undermined acceptance and the potential for cooperative, trusting relationships. Peacekeepers experienced a sense of unease when they felt their missions were involved with imposing solutions or interacting in ways incongruent with local needs and culture. They also experienced the lack of cooperation that arose at times in these conditions. Thus for them, the lack of local ownership was an obstacle to effective peacekeeping, as it was an obstacle to acceptance and good relationships. This impacted their security as well as limiting the knowledge with which to intervene effectively. While there is a body of work which analyses the liberal peace agenda embedded in most UN sanctioned peace support operations today from a political perspective (see, for example, Richmond 2009b; Jabri 2010; Chandler 2010), peacekeepers experienced the repercussions relationally, in everyday, embodied experiences.

Why what peacekeepers know, matters

Much of the literature on effective peacekeeping is oriented toward problem-solving rather than problematizing (Cox 1994). That is, it primarily addresses questions of whether peacekeeping is effective at some definition of success or specific purpose. A smaller subset examines how peacekeeping works (Fortna 2008; Fortna and Howard 2008). This literature does not question the larger frame of peacekeeping or peacebuilding interventions as it relates to geopolitics (Pugh 2004; Pugh 2012; Stamnes 2010). Reflecting on my research, I came to believe that frontline peacekeepers' knowledges suggest a potential evolution of peacekeeping to address some of these problematized concerns including: the contradiction of creating peace through violence and the over militarization of peacekeeping (Francis 2010; Han 1992; Marten 2004; Jabri 2010); the current practice of peace support operations to undermine local ownership in the pursuit of the liberal peace agenda (Mac Ginty 2011); and the havoc this frequently creates in local contexts (Eriksen 2009; Peterson 2010; Leonard 2013).

I imagine an evolution of peacekeeping toward a more fundamental, robust relationship peacekeeping (see, for further development, Furnari (012) based on the knowledges of frontline peacekeepers. Their knowing points to the potential for peacekeeping to make greater contributions to emancipation in the communities, regions and countries where it is deployed. By emancipation, I mean not only an increased potential for individual people to lead the lives they choose with increased freedom from oppression, but also at a community or society level, an increase in justice, equality, tolerance and agonistic (or nonviolent) political processes (Wyn Jones 2005; Pieterse 1992; Shinko 2008). I argue that what peacekeepers know, through their embodied, experiential and relational knowing processes, supports an evolution of peacekeeping which is oriented toward developing trusting, cooperative relationships which depend on supporting local problem solving, so as to be accepted and mutually beneficial. While there is much discussion in the literature on making peacekeeping more robust (Tardy 2011), the general focus is on the use of greater violence.⁽²²⁾ I suggest that there is a need to focus on building relationships sufficiently robust to withstand the stress and strain of work in conflict affected communities, and the movement between periods of cooperation and periods of coercion. This peacekeeping would focus on the fundamental tasks of preventing violence, protecting civilians and supporting local efforts to address conflicts.

This is a vision which might be dismissed by those with power in current peacekeeping institutions as naïve, and not worth examining. Many of those in positions of power are somewhat contemptuous of the knowledges of those in the frontlines (Kramer 2007). That is how power dynamics work, to limit whose knowing has value and what can be discussed. My knowledge processes suggest that the knowing of frontline peacekeepers is valuable, based in relational,

lived experience, and suggests paths to not simply make peacekeeping more effective, but for significant evolution to make it contribute to more just and sustainable peace.

Conclusion

Different processes of creating knowledges, of knowing, lead to different knowledges. Quantitative peacekeeping research leads to a discussion of variables and probabilities regarding issues such as the likelihood of a return to war, or the variables associated with attacks on civilians. They appear motivated by the desire to find the truth in the causes of conflicts and the appropriate ways to intervene, based on assumptions that this truth is out there and can be known and applied.

I constructed a narrative which gives voice to frontline peacekeepers, recognizing that these voices are shaped by my choices. It is personal, making choices, recognizing the non-duality between myself as interviewer and the peacekeepers I interviewed. We are implicated in each others' experience. We are visibly humans making meaning from our lived experiences.

Their knowing is shaped by lived experiences in their everyday work in conflict affected communities; the things that are said to them; and their observations of how people change in response to their work. It is also impacted by their beliefs about the use of violence to support peace, previous training, the roles they play in the field, and many other factors.

How we know has much to do with what we know. Peacekeepers were actively engaged and experienced the agency of local civilian rather than passive receiving as implied in much of the literature. Reflecting this agency, the interviewees' knowledges lead to discussions of relationships, acceptance and local ownership.

As I began this paper, I also conclude with something about my own process. I have used my power as researcher and author to present some knowing, and not others. I am aware that my belief in the efficacy of nonviolence and commitment toward a more just and peaceful world shape my choices. I hope I have used my power in that pursuit, without doing injustice to the narratives of effective peacekeeping shared with me in the interviews. Once I acknowledge my power and choices, there is an uneasy sense, the instability of knowing that rather than presenting truth, I present interpretation and others might interpret the same interviews differently. This is the impact, at least for me, of knowing that knowledge and power are intricately intertwined, and that how we know, impacts what we know.

Endnotes

- (1) This article would not have been possible without the many former peacekeepers who generously contributed their time and intelligence to my research. Thank you.
- (2) I use the plural – knowledges – here, as I believe we create multiple knowledges, drawing on the knowledges from multiple sources, created through multiple processes.
- (3) For examples see Berdal (2000), MacGinty (2010), and Pouligny (2006).
- (4) Based on my research with peacekeepers and literature in the field, the definition of peacekeeping I use is organized action by third parties to prevent violence, protect civilians, and support local problem-solving by controlling or influencing belligerents and/or their proxies as well as local people.
- (5) While I seem to generalise, I recognise that I am only discussing the processes shared with me by a limited number of peacekeepers. Please keep in mind that when I discuss peacekeepers, I am always only referring to those I interviewed unless otherwise stated.
- (6) See the following web pages accessed in April, 2013
<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=know>;
http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=knowledge&searchmode=none ;
<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/knowing?s=t> ;
<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/knowledge?s=t>
- (7) Interviews were conducted primarily through Skype, an online VOIP. Several were conducted in person. Participants were located primarily through convenience and snowball sampling Morse, 2007.
- (8) A brief summary of the characteristics of those interviewed: 32% female; 34% military, 31% police, 31% unarmed civilian peacekeepers and 4 % civilians in multilateral missions such as UN, EU; and 15% from the global south. Further information on the sample available from the author.
- (9) See Holton (2007) and Lempert (2007) as well as Charmaz (2006; 2009), for discussion of grounded theory research methodologies.

- (10) The Nonviolent Peaceforce undertakes unarmed civilian peacekeeping in areas where civilians need protection from the renewal or continuation of political violence. See <http://www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org/> for more information.
- (11) As a small sample see Last (1997), Druckman et al (1997), Fetherston (2000), Pugh (2004), Durch (2006b), Pouligny (2006), Aoi, Coning and Thakur (2007), Fortna (2008), Howard (2008), Higate and Henry (2009a), Richmond and Franks (2009), Mac Ginty (2011).
- (12) See Uppsala conflict database <http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/UCDP/> and correlates of war database <http://www.correlatesofwar.org/> as leading examples of data and related research. As two examples using quite different methods and assumptions but based on statistical analysis, see Pushkina (2006), and Hegre, Hultman, & Nygard (2010).
- (13) I choose not to engage here in the debate regarding the validity of traditional social science versus constructivist epistemology, so will just acknowledge much has been written on this subject and refer the reader to several excellent articles and books if they are interested. For instance see Smith (1997), Harding (1998), Willams (2001), Moses and Knutsen (2007), Steele (2007).
- (14) As examples Kramer (2007) uses case studies and is the only one in this list who does specify his methodology, Fortna (2008), referred to above uses statistical analysis augmented by case studies. Howard (2008) is primarily based on case studies. Kreps (2010) and Kreps and Wallace (2009) use both statistics and case studies in their work.
- (15) In Kraner's research he notes the disdain that officers have for frontline soldiers, perhaps a similar bias affects peacekeeping research as well (Kramer, 2007).
- (16) For example see Pouligny (2006), Talentino (2007), Mvukiyehe and Samii (2008; 2010), Whalan (2010).
- (17) I have been asked this question more than once in reporting my findings.

- (18) See Polanyi (1962). For a discussion of tacit and explicit knowing and his example of bicycle riding to explain 'we know more than we can say', see Merriam (2008) and Kilgore (2001). For discussions of contextual, relational learning, see Cook and Brown (1999). And for a discussion of the difference between knowledge and knowing, see Gueldenberg and Helting (2007).
- (19) To provide context, an incomplete listing of activities or tasks that peacekeeper described as their day to day work includes: accompanying key people or communities to help keep them safe; patrolling; rumor control; linking local people to other resources; problem-solving; building relationships; monitoring; creating safe spaces; mentor and coach; community policing.
- (20) See Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis (2003) for a discussion of standpoints as reflected social positions and power, as being created through actions.
- (21) This section is a very brief summary of how frontline peacekeepers interviewed understood some of the key elements of effective peacekeeping, as it relates to their way of knowing. For a more in-depth discussion of these points see Furnari (2012, 2013).
- (22) See Sartre (2011) for a more comprehensive discussion of robust peacekeeping..

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