Depoliticization, Essentialization, or Transformation? UN Women's Representations of Men and Masculinity

John McMahon
The Graduate Center, CUNY
jmcmahon@gc.cuny.edu

Prepared for 2013 International Studies Association Annual Convention
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Abstract: The efforts, advocacy, and analysis carried out by the United Nations (UN) in pursuit of gender equality and women's empowerment necessarily implicate men and masculinity. More equitable, reciprocal, and liberatory gender relations demand not only technical fixes or moderate reforms but a substantive reconstitution of gender performances, norms and roles. Organizations within the UN, and especially those that work on issues of gender – primarily the relatively new United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) – must figure out what to do with, and how to represent, men and masculinity. The naming and/or silencing of men and masculinity by the UN and especially by UN Women raises questions of strategic efficacy and theoretical complexity for a project of gender quality and liberation. I investigate how the UN Women website both makes men and masculinity explicitly present and render them absent in different discourses, why it might engage in this dual process of naming and obscuring, and the discursive consequences of these representations for global feminism(s) in its UN form.

The efforts, advocacy, and analysis carried out by the United Nations (UN) in pursuit of gender equality and women's empowerment necessarily implicate men and masculinity. More equitable, reciprocal, and liberatory gender relations demand not only technical fixes or moderate reforms but a substantive reconstitution of gender performances, norms and roles. Organizations within the UN, and especially those that work on issues of gender – primarily the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) – must figure out what to do with, and how to represent, men and masculinity. The naming and/or silencing of men and masculinity by the UN and especially by UN Women raises questions of strategic efficacy and theoretical complexity for a project of gender equality and liberation. As a newly-formed organization bringing together disparate components of gender advocacy and analysis within the UN,[1] UN Women has had the opportunity to (re)construct official discourses of gender, women, men, and masculinity in a consolidated way. Thus, the texts of UN Women present a unique occasion for analysis of authoritative UN discourse(s) on gender. In this essay, I analyze the most public text of UN Women, its website, for the way it does and does not represent men and masculinity in relation to gender and gender equality. I investigate how the UN Women website both makes men and masculinity explicitly present and render them absent in different discourses, why it might engage in this dual process of naming and obscuring, and the discursive consequences of these representations.

I begin by discussing two aspects of my approach to this project: my choice of UN Women and specifically its website as well as my poststructural-informed discourse-theoretical

[1] The formation of UN Women was authorized by the unanimous adoption of UN General Assembly resolution 64/289 on July 2, 2010 (United Nations 2010). UN Women, which became operational on January 1, 2011, merges the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues Advancement of Women (OSAGI), and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

approach to analyze this text. I then turn to an analysis of the UN Women website for its representations of men and masculinity. Here, I describe the three primary ways men are present on the UN Women website: as explicitly named allies and partners; as (mostly) passive beneficiaries of gender inequality; and as perpetrators of violence, both voiced and unvoiced. This is followed by a discussion of the potential strategic reasoning for these kind of representations of men and masculinity, and, more importantly, of the limitations of these discourses in the pursuit of gender equality. I argue that the way that men and masculinity are represented lacks complexity and problematization, and thus works against efforts at gender equality and women's empowerment by both depoliticizing men and masculinity in some instances while pathologizing and essentializing gender at other places in an overall obscuring of gender's performativity and of non-gender normative bodies. Finally, the conclusion briefly sketches out an alternative discourse and the implications of this project for the study of global feminisms.

Much thoughtful, important work has been done to analyze various aspects of the United Nations vis-à-vis gender. The gendered culture and organizational structure of the UN (among others, (Charlesworth 1994; Slaughter and Charlesworth 1995; Whitworth 2004), gender mainstreaming (among others, Erturk 2004; Bessis 2004; Eveline and Bacchi 2005) peacekeeping and security operations (among others, Patil 2008; Shepherd 2008; Valenius 2007; Väyrynen 2004; Whitworth 2004), efforts at transitional justice (Ní Aoláin 2009) and the work of specific treaty bodies and organizations of the UN (among others, Gallagher 1997; Johnstone 2006; Otto 2002) have all been subjects of feminist investigation. Furthermore, scholars have analyzed gender in specific texts and discourses: the Beijing Platform (Baden and Goetz 1997); "womenandchildren" (Enloe 1990); decolonization (Patil 2008), and UN Security Council

Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on the adoption of a gender-perspective in post-conflict reconstruction (Puechguirbal 2010; Shepherd 2008; Shepherd 2010). While often touching upon men and masculinity, these projects all foreground representations of 'gender' more broadly, or women and/or women and girls more specifically. Related work on the UN and global feminisms more broadly also regularly sidesteps discussion of men and masculinity. My project supplements this literature on gender and the UN through its explicit focus on discourses of men and masculinity in relation to gender equality. It also enters into a conversation with a growing set of scholarship on global masculinities (Connell 1998; Connell 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Gutmann 1997; Patil 2008; Duncanson 2009). The motivation behind this analysis is not to move focus away from 'women' or 'gender,' or to re-inscribe men as the most significant object of analysis, or to engage in a "men's rights" or "mythopoetic" masculine discourse that is often tacitly or explicitly anti-feminist (see Hearn 1998, 792–793; 797), or because men have been missing from literature on the UN; indeed, men have always been the unthought and unacknowledged standard as well as the normative referent of scholarship. Instead, my conviction is that because gender norms constitute our very notions of human life and intelligibility (Butler 1999; Butler 2004; Shepherd 2010), and because "gender inequalities are embedded in a multidimensional" system "of relationships between women and men" (Connell 2005, 1801), understanding men and masculinity, and especially the way that organizations focusing on gender equality understand, represent, and constitute men and masculinity is crucial. The UN Women discourse of men and masculinity, however, constructs an obstacle to a project of gender equality and liberation.

Approach: A discourse-theoretic approach and new text(s)

This project focuses on the website of UN Women (UN Women 2013a) to analyze the way that men and masculinity are present and absent in discourses of gender equality and gender inequality. I choose UN Women because, as a new organization bringing previously disparate components of UN work on gender under one institution, it has the opportunity to (re)construct a sort of official UN discourse on gender. Its website is shaped but not determined by previous iterations of public representations of UN organizations such as UNIFEM, DAW, etc. The discourse(s) newly constituted by UN Women are, I claim, distinctively important for understanding how those carrying out advocacy and analysis on gender equality themselves represent their work to a global audience. Because UN Women and its texts are new, there is an imperative to carry out investigations into the organization and its discourses.

In focusing on the UN Women website, I have analyzed the home page of UN Women (UN Women 2013a), the 'About UN Women' page (UN Women 2013b), the pages of the focus/priority areas of UN Women (UN Women 2013c) – 'Violence Against Women' (UN Women 2013d); 'Peace and Security' (UN Women 2013e); 'Leadership and Participation' (UN Women 2013f); 'Economic Empowerment' (UN Women 2013g); 'National Planning and Budgeting' (UN Women 2013h); 'Human Rights' (UN Women 2013i); and the 'Millennium Development Goals' (UN Women 2013j) – and the main sub-pages of these different focus areas.[2] I choose the UN Women website for this project as arguably the most public/popular text

[2] A complete list of the sub-pages analyzed: *Violence against Women*: Strategy (UN Women 2013k), Facts and Figures (UN Women 2013l), UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UN Women 2013m); *Peace and Security*: Facts and Figures (UN Women 2013n), Resolutions and Instruments (UN Women 2013o), Peacebuilding (UN Women 2013p), Peacebuilding – Peace Negotiations (UN Women 2013q), Peacebuilding – Peace Operations (UN Women 2013r), Peacebuilding – Prevention and Early Warning (UN Women 2013s), Security and Justice (UN Women 2013t), Security and Justice – Security Sector Reform (UN Women 2013u), Security and Justice – Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (UN Women 2013v), Security and Justice – Transitional Justice (UN Women 2013w), Gender-Based Violence ((UN Women 2013x), Gender-Based Violence – Human Trafficking (UN Women 2013y), Gender-Based Violence – Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (UN Women 2013z), Post-

of UN discourse on gender, more so than specific Resolutions, training documents, published reports, etc. Moreover, many of these other documents were produced by other institutions before the formation of UN Women, and thus are less relevant to looking at the specific construction of a UN Women discourse.[3] I am particularly interested in representations of men and masculinity in the way that UN Women officially represents itself to policymakers, government officials, advocates on the ground, and other groups. This kind of discourse implicates a consideration of the audiences in the development and creation of the texts in addition to the frameworks and understandings of those creating the text.

If we understand policy-related documents as discursive practices that should be read as performing and constituting meaning(s) and knowledge(s), then the crucial question to ask is how certain understandings of reality, disparities of power, and multiple forms of oppression come to be apprehended and/or accepted (Shepherd 2010, 144–145). I argue, then, that texts that are likely to have explicitly considered their audience and reception in the process of their formulation are uniquely ripe for analysis. Furthermore, websites in general are an important component in understanding what the ideological and communicative commitments of the UN are. The Internet solves a major problem of dissemination of information and provides an official text about the UN's work on a given issue (Alleyne 2004, 104; 109–110). As such, websites can

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Conflict and Humanitarian Planning (UN Women 2013aa), Post-Conflict and Humanitarian Planning – Humanitarian Response and Early Recovery (UN Women 2013ab), Post-Conflict and Humanitarian Planning – Funding and Budgeting (UN Women 2013ac); *Leadership and Participation*: Gender, Governance, and Political Participation Programme (UN Women 2013ad).

[3] There is a methodological obstacle in knowing exactly to what extent UN Women changed or updated previous iterations of various websites in the design and execution of its website. Some of the pages analyzed, especially the subpages under Peace and Security are hosted at a <http://unifem.org> domain. Thus, it is unclear how much reformulation occurred. A worthwhile, related project to the present one would be to analyze cached pages of the previous UNIFEM, DAW, INSTRAW, and OSAGI sites to compare the discourses there to those on the UN Women site.

be crucial in analyzing the "particular rhetorical features of the organization's discourse on the topic" (Alleyne 2004, 109).[4]

I carry out a poststructurally-informed discourse-theoretic reading (Shepherd 2008; Shepherd 2010) in which I am attempting to conceptualize and categorize the discourses of men and/or masculinity deployed on the website on the basis of their representations in this text. Specifically, I am reading for and theorizing the presence *and the absence* of men and masculinity in discourses about the work that UN women does. Indeed, in many theoretical and policy texts, men are often only present in their absence (Connell 2005, 1805–1806; Hearn 1998; Shepherd 2008, 121). There are limits to this kind of textual analysis. I do not claim to produce the only meaning/reading, or the true meaning/reading, nor do I think such readings exist. Nor am I trying to fix the meaning or truth of the UN Women website or of the discourse(s) of men and masculinity. Väyrynen, performing a similar reading of the "UN discourse on gender, peace and war" argues that this kind of reading

> does not intend to examine and classify the authors behind the UN discourse or their intentions, as a more positivistic- oriented reading would do. Neither does it provide absolute answer and solution to the 'problem', but tries to understand the conditions […] Since there is no one true view or interpretation of the world, the essay tries to offer one possible, and critical, reading (2004, 127).

Likewise, I seek to understand the representations of men and masculinity on the UN Women website, and their discursive implications for international efforts at gender liberation and for the study of global feminisms, and do so through one possible, critical reading.

Three representations of masculinity: Ally, Beneficiary, Perpetrator

Men and masculinity do not appear frequently on the UN Women website; indeed, they are often present in their absence. My discourse-theoretic reading of the website finds three primary

[4] I do not adopt or enact Alleyne's entire Gramscian "propaganda approach" to the study of the UN, only his claim about the significance of studying UN websites.

representations of men and masculinity on the website: men as the named partner or ally in the struggle for equality; men as (mostly) passive beneficiaries of inequality; both named and unnamed; and men and masculinity as the perpetrators/causes of violence against women and girls, primarily unnamed but sometimes made explicit. I will now turn to each of these three representations, describing the way men and/or masculinity are constructed in different areas of the UN Women website, representation that will then be analyzed in the next section.

Men as (explicit) allies

One representation of men and masculinity is that of the ally/partner. Here, men (and boys) are participants in efforts to prevent or forestall instances of gender inequality, especially violence against women. In that focus area, while men, males, boys, and masculinity are not directly mentioned on the 'Violence against Women' home page, they are explicitly named as (potential) partners twice. The first is on the 'Strategy' sub-page, which includes four "Areas" of work and six "Strategies" for UN Women. There, the fourth area involves "targeting primary prevention with key groups, especially men and young people" (UN Women 2013k). On the same page, one of the listed strategies includes "advocacy and communication" to "'change hearts and minds,'" but the hearts and minds to be changed are unnamed (UN Women 2013k). One could infer, especially given the representation of men as perpetrators of violence discussed below, that these are indeed men and boys. Men and boys also appear as potential allies and partners in the delineation of the projects of the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women. There, one of the organization's stated main activities is to

> [p]revent violence against women and girls by empowering groups especially at risk of violence, including adolescent girls and indigenous or ethnic minority women, and engaging strategic groups such as youth, men and boys, and traditional and faith-based leaders in prevention efforts (UN Women 2013m)

Similarly, in a press release from September 2011, Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director or UN Women and former President of Chile, announced a partnership with the Clinton Global Initiative, through which UN Women committed to fund "projects working exclusively in engaging men and boys to fight violence against women" (Bachelet 2011).

Another instance of the men-as-allies formulation is on the 'About' page for UN Women, where one of the three "issues" that the organization works for is the "achievement of equality between women and men as partners and beneficiaries of development, human rights, humanitarian action and peace and security" (UN Women 2013b). Ultimately, one of the forms of agency for men is as a potential, reformed ally or partner that is engaged in preventing violence against women, although it is unclear whether their role is that of active advocate against violence or passive avoidance/refusal of committing violence. This implies, arguably, that masculinity is not static but open to change. The formulation on the 'About UN Women' page is the only time that men and boys are explicit beneficiaries of equality; elsewhere on the site, this relationship is ambivalent.

Men as (mostly) passive beneficiaries of inequality

The most common way of representing men on the UN Women website is as the beneficiaries of gender inequality. In this discourse, the men are usually passive instead of being agents of inequality, and are more often than not unnamed and thus present by their absence; as I argue later, this de-politicizes their role. A formulation in which men are passively benefitted by being affected *less badly* than women and girls appears most often. For example, the opening page of the Peace and Security area states that war "as always impacted men and women in different ways, but possibly never more so than in contemporary conflicts," such that

women "increasingly suffer the greatest harm" in times of war and conflict (UN Women 2013e); the 'Resolutions and Instruments' sub-page's discussion of UNSCR 1325 notes that "women are disproportionately affected by conflict" (UN Women 2013o). Similarly, the 'Security & Justice' sub-page asserts that gender-blind approaches to economic support, mine clearance and transitional justice in Peacebuilding "increase insecurity for all, reinforce socio-economic divides between men and women, and prevent women from realizing their potential" (UN Women 2013t). Gender-based violence during conflict "target[s] mainly women and girls, but also affect[s] men and boys" (UN Women 2013x); the same applies to human trafficking (UN Women 2013y). In "post-conflict" scenarios, humanitarian organizations operate with a male standard, and thus respond to men and need better than women and girls (UN Women 2013aa). Finally, in the 'Women, Poverty, and Economics' page of the Economic Empowerment area, it states that "[w]omen bear a disproportionate burden of the world's poverty" and of the "current financial crisis" (UN Women 2013g). In all of these instances, men benefit from inequality in relation to women and girls, but it is a passive benefit that places them in a less-bad situation than women and girls.

The other primary mode of expressing this representation is depicting men as benefitting in a clearer, more direct way, although they still are not necessarily active in creating inequality. The 'Peace Negotiations' sub-page of Peace and Security describes the overrepresentation of men in peace negotiations (UN Women 2013q), while the 'Gender, Governance and Political Participation Programme' sub-page notes that "electoral systems are not neutral to gender" (UN Women 2013ad). Because of assumptions of gender-blindness, "investments in the private sector are not equally accessible to men and women" (UN Women 2013ac). The overview to the Economic Empowerment area states that "[w]omen lag far behind men in access to land, credit,

and decent jobs" (UN Women 2013c). The 'Gender-Responsive Budgeting' page features a call to "adjusting budget policies to benefit all groups" due to gender bias and discrimination (UN Women 2013h). In each of these instances, men are in a 'good' position as opposed to being in a 'less bad' position.

Here, along with representations where men benefit by being affected less badly, men benefit from various forms of inequality, but passively so. The 'About UN Women' page captures this most clearly, with an elaboration somewhere in between the two formulations described above:

> […]gender inequalities remain deeply entrenched in every society. Women lack access to decent work and face occupational segregation and gender wage gaps. They are too often denied access to basic education and health care. Women in all parts of the world suffer violence and discrimination. They are under-represented in political and economic decision-making processes (UN Women 2013b).

Men benefit, but they do so passively and are not named. Even when the word 'men' is explicitly used, it is not that men seek or employ domination, oppression, or inequality; they simply benefit without being agents of inequality.[5] There is no mention or question of the source, structure, and/or agent of this situation beyond 'inequality,' broadly understood.

Perpetrators of Violence

The final major representation of men and masculinity is as the perpetrator or cause of violence, sometime named and sometime present through absence. On the main page of the Violence against Women focus area, the words 'man,' 'men,' 'male,' and 'masculinity' do not appear; it discusses violence against women as something that happens, and happens frequently, but at least on this main page there is no explicit agent of violence. On its 'Facts and Figures'

[5] The only exception to this is on the 'Gender, Governance and Political Participation Programme sub-page, where it is noted that "there is still opposition against women's progress in power and decision-making positions and in fields that are traditionally controlled by men" (UN Women 2013ad). This is the most active formulation not related to gender-violence. Interestingly, this is also the only page I analyzed with a <http://un-instraw.org> domain.

sub-page, it is men, specifically, who perpetrate violence: "up to 70 percent of women experience physical or sexual violence from men in their lifetime – the majority by husbands, intimate partners, or someone they know" and "it [violence against women] takes many forms and occurs in many places – domestic violence in the home, sexual abuse of girls in schools, sexual harassment at work, rape by husbands or strangers, in refugee camps or as a tactic of war" (UN Women 2013l).

A similar pattern is repeated in the Peace and Security focus area. On the main page, that women are affected disproportionately by conflict, especially by sexual violence, is stated, but men are almost entirely absent. Other than the phrase "[w]ar has always impacted men and women in different ways," the words 'men,' 'man,' 'male' and 'masculinity' do not appear (UN Women 2013e). They also are absent from the 'Human Trafficking' area of the 'Gender-Based Violence' sub-page (UN Women 2013y), and from the 'Conflict-Related Sexual Violence' area of the 'Gender-Based Violence' sub-page (UN Women 2013z). In these instances, much like on the main page for Violence Against Women, gender-based violence occurs frequently but without a doer. The 'Disarmament, Demobilizzation, & Reintegration' (DDR) area of the 'Security and Justice' sub-page, however, notes that DDR processes often do not address "psychosocial trauma of extra combatants," including "male perpetrators and ex-combatants" (UN Women 2013v). Moreover, the Peace Operations' area of the 'Peacebuilding' sub-page claims that "women peacekeepers can be at an advantage" in certain areas, including "diffusing hyper-masculine approaches to peacekeeping that contribute to the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by UN personnel" (UN Women 2013r). This is the only appearance of the word 'masculine' or 'masculinity' in any of the pages analyzed. Hence, as perpetrators of

violence, main pages and some sub-pages render men present through their absence, while other sub-pages name men and masculinity as perpetrator/cause of violence.

While these three representations of men and masculinity do not exhaust the discursive constructions present on the UN Women website, they do constitute the predominant significations. The first portrays men as (potential) allies and partners in combating gender violence, explicitly; the second depicts men as the passive beneficiaries of an almost cause-less gender inequality; the third constructs men and masculinity as the perpetrators and cause, respectively, of gender-based violence, both explicitly and in their absent presence. I now turn to an analysis of these representations in relation to UN efforts at gender equality, and to gender equality more broadly.

The problem of masculinity on the UN Women website

These representations of men and masculinity do not problematize or offer a complex vision of men and masculinity, or of gender more broadly. Gender is binary in this discourse, and whether it is performed, constructed, a function of power, or biological is more or less unexplored. Furthermore, as Connell argues about international policy documents on gender equality, the way that men are talked (or not talked) about oversimplifies the category and agency of men:

> […] men are present as background throughout these documents. In every statement about women's disadvantages, there is an implied comparison with men as the advantaged group. In the discussions of violence against women, men are implied, and sometimes named, as the perpetrators. In discussions of gender and HIV/AIDS, men are commonly construed as being "the problem," the agents of infection. In discussions of women's exclusion from power and decision making, men are implicitly present as the power holders. *When men are present only as a background category in a policy discourse about women, it is difficult to raise issues about men's and boys' interests, problems, or differences* (2005, 1805–1806, my emphasis).[6]

[6] Connell continues by discussing the dangers of this kind of this discourse: "This could be done only by falling into a backlash posture and affirming "men's rights" or by moving outside a gender framework altogether. The structure of gender-equality policy, therefore, created an opportunity for antifeminist politics. Opponents of feminism have now found issues about boys and men to be fertile ground" (2005,

In this section, I critique the way that the discourse(s) of men and masculinity on the UN Women website functions as an obstacle to substantive efforts at gender equality and liberation.

The tactical consequences of these mostly non-complex representations of masculinity are not difficult to envision. If men have the potential to be allies, benefit from inequality but in a passive, non-agentive way, and sometimes perpetrate violence, it is not necessarily difficult for men to support UN Women, whether it be in national governments, other organizations around the UN, as a funder, etc. Bessis contends that even if there is a recognition that gender equality demands "critical examination and profound reform," in order to satisfy the contending, often conservative interests, gender at the UN is often watered-down and de-radicalized such that everyone is happy because no one is happy (2004, 638). For example, not naming something structural like 'patriarchy' as generating or contributing to inequality from which men passively benefit avoids contentious, and potentially derailing political debates. Furthermore, if the role of gender at the UN is to be a problem-solving tool instead of a concept and practice for substantive change, as Whitworth and Väyrynen both suggest (Whitworth 2004, chap. 5; Väyrynen 2004), then better the issue of men be left relatively uncomplicated and masculinity be almost entirely absent. Perhaps the mostly unproblematized representations of men and masculinity by UN Women enables more flexibility in practice for UN personnel, NGOs, and grassroots organizations, especially because "manhood and womanhood are culturally variable, and sexual practices and beliefs are contextual" (Gutmann 1997, 390). That is, perhaps the lack of specificity of masculinity enables more flexibility for culturally variable praxis. Finally, that gender, men, and masculinity are not problematized could be understood in part because of the

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1806). I engage in a closer reading of a specific set of texts than Connell does, as this is only one small component of her larger article. In doing so, I disentangle the representations of men as the "implied comparison" – passive beneficiaries in my language – and perpetrators of violence as two separate but related images of masculinity.

limitations of a large bureaucratic organization creating a single set of texts intended for public viewing and use.

If these are the possible 'positive' implications of the UN Women discourse(s), what are the more problematic repercussions? Or, to ask the Foucaultian question, what are the knowledge(s) produced and the truth-effects of this discourse (cf., among others, (Foucault 1980; Foucault 1990, pt. IV.1)? I argue that the three representations of men and masculinity provide a superficial disaggregation that fails to interrogate or problematize gender. There is potential in the very act of disaggregating men and masculinity at all; doing so is a crucial component of a larger project of gender equality and/or liberation. However, the UN Women discourse is not complex enough as it enacts a problem-solving discourse that takes gender as an uncomplicated instrument or question instead of "problematizing the complexity of gender" (Shepherd 2008, 92). As Connell contends, "institutions may construct multiple masculinities and define relationships between them;" masculinities are actively produced (1998, 5). However, doing so in a non-complex way risks co-optation.[7] The three problematic knowledges constructed by the representations of masculinity are that of depoliticizing gender inequality, pathologizing men and masculinity, and (re)producing a superficial and essential understanding of gender.

Depoliticizing inequality

The representation of men as mostly passive beneficiaries of inequality, and to some extent that of men as potential allies, depoliticizes gender and general social relations such that the potential for substantive transformation is limited. This representation reproduces the discursive practice of "absence, fixed presence, and avoidance" described by Hearn, which

[7] Co-optation of feminist discourses and strategies can occur when these are used in a way that can deteriorate or reverse effects on gender equality and/or when the concept as used an alibi to work against mobilization of gender for radical purposes (Stratigaki 2004, 36). Stratigaki uses the concept co-optation vis-à-vis EU policies on the reconciliation of work and family, but I contend that the concept is also applicable to the discourse(s) I discuss here.

contributes to obscuring the radical problematization and critique necessary for equality and/or liberation (1998, 786). While specific to social theory, Hearn's argument is still relevant here; he asserts that in this mode of theorizing men, the "category of men is usually taken for granted, implicit, and untheorized, occasionally explicit, but either way central/centered" (ibid.). The presence of men through their absence in the UN Women representations, I argue, enacts this same discursive practice. As described above, as mostly passive beneficiaries of inequality, men are indeed mostly absent but nevertheless fixed in an advantaged position; they are mentioned and/or implied but never theorized. A consequence of this is the failure to adequately problematize the sources or complex means of addressing inequality: "not explicitly talking of men, not naming men as men, is a structured way of not beginning to talk of and question men's power in" (Hearn 1998, 786). The representation of men as passive beneficiaries of inequality constructs inequality without theorizing any motivating agents, causes, discourses, or relations; this works against efforts to address this inequality. It further risks obscuring the potential for men as well as women to benefit from gender equality or liberation from constraints of normative or hegemonic masculinity.

This depoliticization reproduces an instrumentalization of gender by the UN evident in other areas. Gender-mainstreaming, for example, has been subject to much critique for the way that it fails to adequately theorize or challenge roots, structures, and discourses of gender inequality. Indeed, as Cohn suggests, where gender analysis and accountability is mandated, it becomes an opaque word with little specific knowledge or attached meaning (Cohn and Enloe 2003, 1192–1193). In ECOSOC, gender mainstreaming has become part of a liberal 'add women and stir' approach that is not transformative and does not ask difficult or complex questions (Erturk 2004, 6–7); mainstream economic approaches to gender mainstreaming operationalize

gender in such a way as to make it static and reductionist, ignoring politics, power, relationality and ideology (Baden and Goetz 1997, 7). A superficial approach "can and often does simply entrench the status quo by categorizing women as 'needy'" or "by allowing the asymmetrical relation of power and advantage […] to disappear from the analysis" (Eveline and Bacchi 2005, 504). This renders gender and gender-mainstreaming ripe for co-optation. Here, UN civil servants – mostly men – "master the gender equality vocabulary" such that women are added/integrated without investigating or challenging the gender logic producing inequalities (Bessis 2004, 642).

When not made complex, gender becomes an instrumental, problem-solving tool that fails to challenge the extant system, instead of a concept crucial to change. If gender, men, or women become depoliticized, then institutionalized power relations and inequality – whether in the UN itself or in the institutions with which the UN works goes unaddressed.[8] This may make the UN itself more 'effective,' but it also makes any changes introduced more cosmetic than effectual (Valenius 2007, 512–513). Depoliticizing gender – or, in this case, depoliticizing men and masculinity – limits the possibilities for critique (of UN masculinities, or masculinities more generally, for example) and empties gender "of its radical political potential" (Whitworth 2004, 126). If men are simply passive beneficiaries of inequality, but their power and the complexities of that inequality go overlooked, then substantively addressing that power and inequality becomes near-impossible.

The depoliticizing of men also risks re-inscribing women as helpless victims without agency, and men as the only possible saviors, potentially removing the 'doer' of violence. When men are the "absent presence," they often end up in the role of protector, robbing women of

[8] This has often been the case in UN activities in the areas of transitional justice (Ní Aoláin 2009, 1059–1062) and peacekeeping (Whitworth 2004).

agency, as is the case with UNSCR 1325 (Shepherd 2008, 121). I argue that this is a function of both the passive beneficiary and potential ally representations. As unvoiced presence, men as mostly passive beneficiaries reproduce the kind of discourse Shepherd describes. While the representation of men as potential allies starts to move away from this by not constructing men as automatic saviors and by using the language of "partners" and "allies," the failure to problematize or interrogate social norms and gender performance recapitulates a great deal of this protectionist discourse. If this happens, agency remains the purview of men and (uninterrogated) masculinity, while women are "primarily represented in a narrow essentialist definition that allows male decision-makers to keep them in the subordinated position of victim" (Puechguirbal 2010, 173). Race and imperialism are also present in this kind of discourse. If and when the international community, or even a more benign masculinity, are constructed in the role of superior, democratic, peace-loving, heroic Self, the Other becomes vulnerable, passive, victimized, irrational, and in need of protection (Whitworth 2004). Depoliticizing men and masculinity, whether as passive beneficiaries or potential allies risks reproducing this imperial discourse.

Pathologizing the masculine subject

A similarly unproblematized representation of violence against women risks the pathologization of men and masculinity. Much like the discourse(s) fail to address deeper motivating factors of gender inequality, the representation of men as perpetrators also does not call into question broader social, discursive, and/or structural factors contributing to gender violence. An analysis of gender-based violence demands an intricate account that "recognizes the effects of the larger social context on gender performance" and provides a complex view of power; failing to do so collapses into superficial binaries of perpetrator/victim, male

batterer/passive female victim, powerful/powerless, etc. (Merry 2009, 3; 17–18). To a significant extent, the perpetrator of violence representation reproduces this kind of understanding of gender violence. This is especially true given the unproblematized formulation of 'men.' The 'Peace Operations' suggest something more social, constructed, and performative through its use of the term "hyper-masculine approaches to peacekeeping" (UN Women 2013r). The rest of the discourse, however, recapitulates an uninterrogated category of men, both explicit and silent, as holding responsibility for violence.

This kind of construction engages in what Shepherd critiques discourses about UNSCR 1325 for doing, "pereptuat[ing] a conceptualization of violence that reifies and pathologizes gender as dichotomous and essential through their representations of gender" and "fix[ing] gender as a pathological relationship based on sexual bodies, an eternal hierarchy in which men enjoy the privileges of masculinity through their power over women and girls" (2008, 95). Especially when present as an absence, this simplified notion of gender violence risks committing a kind of "discursive violence" with an "overwhelmingly negative representation of masculine subjects" as "pathological, manifesting in behavior that is maladapted and unhealthy" (Shepherd 2010, 153).[9] Moreover, the discourse of UN Women almost limits out the possibility of violence against men and boys. Only once, on the 'Gender-Based Violence' sub-page of the Peace and Security area, is this form of gender-based violence raised: gender-based violence in wartime is described as "targeting mainly women and girls, but also affecting men and boys" (UN Women 2013x). A discourse like this

> [a]rticulat[es] 'women victims of violence' as the focus of policy aimed at [prevention and protection] again predicates 'women victims' as the problem, rather than acknowledging that women could be perpetrators of such violence or part of the solutions to such violence, and is heedless of the need for such solutions or any position in

[9] In the case of the UN Women discourse, the overall lack of complexity in the representation of gender, when paired with the 'perpetrator' image, risks silently assenting to this kind of understanding.

> between. Furthermore, this construction precludes the notion that men can be victims of gendered violence (Shepherd 2008, 94).

It may also feminize men that experience gender-based violence, such that they may be less likely to speak out (Shepherd 2010, 155).[10] Finally, even when men are potentially empowered – in the case of UN Women, as potential allies/partners – men are often depicted in "need [of] assistance in overcoming their (natural?) violence tendencies" (Shepherd 2008, 95). The question becomes one of individual men and their nature instead of social gender and norms. Instead of this sort of discourse and the implications sketched here, what is needed is a complex representation that calls into question social performances and norms of masculinity and femininity, and other broader structural and social processes. Doing this as opposed to unproblematically depicting men as perpetrators would more substantively address the global pattern of gendered violence.

Essentializing gender

Finally, these representations of men and masculinity serve to freeze gender as essential and binary: there are women (and girls) and men (and boys).[11] Gender is not social, discursive, or constructed. There is no acknowledgment that, as Butler describes it, "there is no recourse to a body that has not always already been interpreted by cultural meanings" (Butler 1999, 12). The UN Women discourse belies an unarticulated presumption of gender as two fixed categories. This is, not, however, an outlier in UN constructions of gender. Gender-mainstreaming programmes default to placing 'men' and 'women' into "fixed, oppositional categories" (Eveline and Bacchi 2005). Discourses surrounding UNSCR do not attempt to differentiate or

[10] This is not to imply that there is widespread acceptance or support of women subjected to gender-based violence coming forward.

[11] This is clearly related to the previous discussion of the potential pathologization of men and masculinity, but my argument in this sub-section seeks to investigate the implications for broad understandings and construction of gender.

problematize sex and gender (Shepherd 2008, 93); perpetuating a biological understanding of gender, men and women become "constrained, almost defined, by their bodies" (Shepherd 2010, 154). Perhaps the foremost implication of this form of discursive violence is the erasure of trans*, intersex, genderqueer, and other gender-non-conforming individuals from the realm of possibility and intelligibility. As Shepherd writes,

> [t]he inclusion and exclusion of groups of people on the basis of their adherence to a culturally determined set of 'natural' ideals (sex binaries mapping to physical dimorphism, sexual desire following an oppositional logic) does a violence to those whose lives are already likely to be marked by violence, by virtue of their perceived transgressions of gender norms (2010, 154).

If gender, as a norm and as social power, "produces the intelligible field of subjects" (Butler 2004, 48), then this instantiation of gender normalization reproduces gender as binary and essential.

The unproblematized dichotomization of gender in the UN Women discourse also functions as a substantial obstacle to challenging gender inequality and oppression. Through its confinement of gender to binary categories, the discourse creates a system of meaning and truth that freezes gender as something immutable and difficult to transform. Ultimately, it "locate[s] thinking about gender into the existing structures of binary oppositions where nature/body/private/women/peace are set against culture/mind/public/men/war" (Väyrynen 2004, 126). This discourse thus reproduces a long history of gendered hierarchies that resist complexity, problematization, or modification. Where "gender is understood as a difference between men and women and not as a system of femininities and masculinities and power hierarchies," change will never be systemic and/or transformative (Valenius 2007, 513). Gender itself becomes depoliticized in a way similar to that of the depoliticizing of inequality and oppression as discussed above.

One consequence of essentializing gender is that a crucial component of understanding the construction of gender – the ways in which violence itself constitutes gender – is obscured. As Hearn explains, violence is constitutive of gender, gendered power, and gendered hierarchies; it is especially vital in the constitution of certain masculinities, where violence functions as "one of the most fundamental elements in dominant formations of men" (1998, 785). The discourse(s) of UN Women, however, consistently construct an already-gendered body (almost categorically male) who commits violence against another already-gendered body (almost categorically female). The subjects in this script are assumed to be fully constituted outside of the (gendered) interactions of which they are a part. It thus reproduces a similar construction to that of UN documents relating to UNSCR 1325, in which there "is no space for the suggestion that violence constitutes subjectivity, […] as the Reports assume predetermined subjects that are constrained/enabled by acts of violence. [… they] do not consider the ways in which the violences of which they speak actually function to reproduce gender as a lived experience" (Shepherd 2008, 95–96). That is, gender and subjectivity – and especially their mutual constitution – become static and pre-given, while violence has little to no meaning or effect beyond its pure physicality in this unproblematized discourse. Gender becomes essentialized (again), and potentialities for transformation are cut off (again).

As I have shown, a similar pattern repeats itself throughout the representations of men and masculinity on the UN Women website. The implications of the discourse that is constructed impede efforts at transformation. Gender inequality is depoliticized, men and masculinity are pathologized, and gender itself is essentialized; this cuts off the radical potential of gendered inquiry and efforts at gender equality and/or liberation more broadly.

Conclusion: The potential for transformation and the question of global feminisms

While critical of the discourse of men, masculinity, and even gender more broadly, this purpose of this essay is not to give up on any part of the project of UN Women.[12] Indeed, the consolidation of organizations, functions, and sites of knowledge production under UN Women has generated a new potential for transformation. To that end, critique is a necessary component. As Shepherd argues about her criticisms of the discourses surrounding UNSCR 1325 and the document itself:

> [T]he pursuit of gender equality is problematized precisely because of what it represents: not the question of whether women should enjoy equal privilege with men – of course they should – but the question of how these differences are (re)produced and entrenched even through the most well-intentioned policy (2008, 131).

That is, we should not unproblematically accept any discourse of gender equality; instead, these discourses need to be subject to critique in order to amplify their radical potential and seek out aspects of them that may have discursive implications contrary to their goal. I view this current analysis as part of this project.

What, then, would a more transformative UN Women discourse on men and masculinity look like? Most broadly, it would need to navigate a double challenge of not objectifying and fixing categories of men, and of not deconstructing them so much that lived experiences of people of all genders are ignored; it needs to deal with a "particular and acute contradiction:"

> to name men and masculinity, to make those categories visible and to recognize their power; and to deconstruct them, to undermine, subvert, and dismantle them. Making "men" explicit in this way, simultaneously, and somewhat paradoxically, may assist in the decentering of "men" in discourse. This involves making problematic the ways in which "men" may be conventionally and unproblematically at the center of discourse (Hearn 1998, 798).

A crucial component of this is representing gender in a more lived, social, and embodied way. As described above, the discourse of the UN Women website freezes and essentializes gender

[12] Especially in response to the claims by activists that academic feminists' over-critique may efface the real transformational potential, for example of UNSCR 1325 (cf. (Cohn, Kinsella, and Gibbings 2004).

and depoliticizes gender inequality. Instead, gender may need to conceptualized and represented such that gender becomes a verb instead of a noun; here, it would be signified as a lived, contingent social process that is intimately linked to power and to the body (Eveline and Bacchi 2005, 500–502). For example, on the UN Women website, an emphasis on the social, performative components of violence and subjectivity, or a representation of the way that institutions themselves are gendered would constitute moves in this direction. There is a parallel to be drawn with Sally Engle Merry's work on the difficulties the UN has in representing and addressing culture, especially vis-à-vis gender (2006, chap. 1; 2003). She calls for a greater emphasis on culture as contested, flexible, historically produced and implicated in power relations (Merry 2006, 7–9); a similar change is needed for UN Women's discourse of men and masculinity. Effective practice requires the development and representation of analytical premises about deconstructing gender hierarchies involving questions of the gendered social order (Erturk 2004, 15–16). Ultimately this is a project of amplifying the radical transformative potential of a struggle for gender equality and/or liberation.

Finally, this analysis suggests the need for a greater, more explicit focus on men and masculinity in the literature on global feminisms. A more substantive incorporation of these concerns should not be limited to UN Women alone. Failing to problematize and investigate men and masculinity – including doing so across time, space, and culture – risks reproducing the representations critiqued here, especially that of men as the passive beneficiaries of inequality. Because the need for a more thorough problematization of men and masculinity is so crucial to a project of gender equality, this kind of analysis also ought to be carried out in the transnational feminisms literature. A danger of shifting the focus more to men and masculinity, of course, is the (re)colonization of scholarship on international institutions, social movements, and gender

equality, etc. by men in such a way that inequality, oppression, and violence is made invisible (again). However, recognizing the complexity and implication of men and masculinity in a more explicit way – an investigation into masculinity and "the variety of forms and guises of engendered power relations" – can and should occur "without losing sight of fundamental inequalities between men and women in many contexts" (Gutmann 1997, 398). Indeed, as I claim above, a more definite focus on men and masculinity in a complex way may be crucial to any project, academic or practical, seeking gender equality and liberation.

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