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# Norms and Practices in UN Peacekeeping: Evolution and Contestation

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This is an introduction to a special section of *International Peacekeeping*

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In spite of being multi-billion-dollar undertakings fundamentally reshaping the lives of people around the world, UN peacekeeping has only recently started to attract scholarly attention among a broader audience. While the evolution of norms and practices in other international organisations, such as the World Bank, the IMF, or the UNHCR, has been extensively analysed, the transformation of peacekeeping operations has been no less significant.

This journal has, of course, been at the spear tip of publishing scholarly investigations into UN peacekeeping, and has in recent years received more competition from other journals covering international relations more generally. We think this is a good thing, as it reflects the importance of peacekeeping as a central instrument in the international peace and security toolbox, and a useful empirical starting point to tease out a more fine-grained theoretical understanding of continuity and change in international relations.

The four articles in this special section focus on norms in UN peacekeeping (gender, impartiality, human rights, and environmentalism) and how they are implemented in practice. They look at the evolution of these norms over time, take an explicit theoretical perspective (feminist institutionalism, norm contestation, and securitisation), and report the results of original field research in Rwanda, South Sudan, and New York UN headquarters. The articles present a coherent narrative because they all look at practices either explicitly or implicitly, often at the mundane everyday level among troops or UN staff. But the focus on everyday experiences should not betray their theoretical importance: each of the articles uses this empirical material to better understand and theorise international relations. Georgina Holmes provides us with micro-study of norm implementation on the individual level with her bottom-up study of training of female military peacekeepers.[1] Marion Laurence reveals how

[1] Holmes, "Situating Agency."

legitimating practices are changing in tandem with the changing understanding of the impartiality norm.[2] Emily Paddon Rhoads analyses impartiality as a composite norm and unpacks its procedural and substantive dimensions to reveal how human rights and protection are being privileged to the detriment of a more political understanding of impartiality.[3] Lucile Maertens is forcing us to examine the causal chain of securitisation theory by showing how security is shaped by environmentalisation.[4]

Finally, the articles also have significant policy implications: questioning the need for more female peacekeepers if they are trained according to militarised gender protection norms and relegated to spaces and tasks that are perceived safe; contemplating the consequences of reframing or even moving away from impartiality; assessing the impact of the human rights agenda on the UN's ability to provide good offices and play a central and impartial mediation role; and considering the tendency of the environmentalisation of security which also leads to the securitisation of the environment. Together, the articles contribute to the literature on the evolution of international organisations; on norms and their contestation, institutionalisation, and implementation; and on the role of practices in giving meaning to norms.

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[2] Laurence, "An 'Impartial' Force?"
[3] Paddon Rhoads, "Putting Human Rights up Front."
[4] Maertens, "From Blue to Green?"