

# Briefly Noted

*The End of Peacekeeping: Gender, Race, and the Martial Politics of Intervention*,

by Marsha Henry (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024), 208 pp., cloth \$55, eBook \$55.

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The peacekeeping missions of the United Nations are intended to contribute to the organization's founding purpose, as stated in the UN Charter, of saving "succeeding generations from the scourge of war." Marsha Henry's newest book, *The End of Peacekeeping: Gender, Race, and the Martial Politics of Intervention*, claims that the peacekeeping missions fail to fulfill that purpose and cannot be reformed. She argues that the practice must be abolished based on its gendered, colonial, and militarist foundations and mechanisms. She emphasizes that peacekeeping "is not innocent—it is a moral, political, and epistemic project that reflects global inequalities and systems of oppression" (p. 159). The missions do not address the root issues of violence and instability, but rather further the imperial dynamics that only add to the issues at hand.

According to Henry, a major impediment to the widespread understanding of the failures of UN peacekeeping rests on what she criticizes as "single-axis analysis." This refers to a problematic practice of global organizations and institutions wherein they identify a supposed single unit of change (for example, increasing the number of women in

missions) that will enable them to reform their practices without overhauling the underlying intersectional issues. When scholars and analysts—whether UN affiliated or not—use such analysis, it "mask[s] the wider political effects of peacekeeping on the peacekept" (p. 162). This analysis reinforces "Global North ideas about gender" in that, rather than remediating core, essentialist concepts of gender, "rigid" versions of gender and performance of gender are encouraged by UN institutions—"women officers were almost never given the opportunity to drive vehicles, despite . . . possessing proven proficiency in technological skills" (pp. 79–80). The watershed 2017 report by the retired lieutenant general Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz *Improving Security of United Nations Peacekeepers*, or the "Cruz Report," directed by the UN secretary-general, also exhibited this analytical failure: it was focused solely on reducing deaths of peacekeeping personnel, leading to recommendations that prioritized increased militarization of the peacekeeping force. Henry argues, however, that the remilitarization of peacekeeping is not the solution to the failures of peacekeeping to create or keep peace (pp. 127–28).

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Henry concludes with references to the abolitionist perspectives of Angela Davis, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Sherene Razack: Because UN peacekeeping missions are militarist projects with “foundationally problematic roots” and harmful legacies “akin to colonial attitudes,” future scholarship on peacekeeping must take an abolitionist rather than reformatory position (pp. 100, 163). To decolonize and demilitarize peacekeeping, leading nations and institutions must reject the Western-centric sense of superiority. Instead of holding the peacekept as a “referent object” in which individuals are only “objects that require securing,” missions must center the experience and viewpoint of the peacekept to avoid the “epistemic centeredness . . . with its colonial, patriarchal, and martial roots” (p. 154).

Henry’s book is a hard-hitting, thoroughly researched critique of the way that conflict is managed in our supposedly post-colonial world. She utilizes a variety of frameworks, including Crenshaw’s principles of intersectionality, to show that missions are “complex and multifaceted power projects” that cannot be rectified through reform (p. 3). Henry’s use of a broad range of critical theory concepts is uncommon in peacekeeping scholarship; this is noted in her opening chapter, which details existing critical approaches in the field, most of which take on a feminist *or* decolonial *or* antimilitarist approach, as opposed to Henry’s multidimensional argument. Overall, *The End of Peacekeeping* is an original and welcome addition to existing scholarship on the topic.