Marketing the Gurkha security package: Colonial histories and neoliberal economies of private security

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Abstract
This article contributes to the existing critical theory and gender scholarship on private military security companies by examining how the gendered subjectivities of third-country nationals (TCNs) are constituted through the intersections of colonial histories and neoliberal economic practices. Focusing on Gurkha contractors, I ask how it is that both the remuneration and the working conditions of TCNs are inferior to those of their white Western peers within the industry. The article shows that Gurkhas’ working conditions flow from their location on the periphery of global employment markets, a disadvantage that is further inflected by their status as racially underdeveloped subjects. Thus, their material and cultural status within the industry – regardless of the abilities of the individuals in question – is argued to be the outcome of tenacious colonial histories that continue to shape the labour-market opportunities of men from the global South within larger global security governance practices that increasingly feature outsourcing of military labour in operations.

Keywords
feminism, gender, Gurkhas, masculinities, postcolonial, private military and security companies (PMSCs)

Introduction
As private military and security companies (PMSCs) go global in their operations, they increasingly rely upon the labour of men and women from the global South, in a context in which gender and race practices continue to produce labour hierarchies and divisions in labour practices (Barker, 2009; Eichler, 2013; Chisholm, 2014). Gurkhas, a group of men from Nepal with a history of over 200 years of military service on behalf of the British Empire and now in contemporary British military operations globally, are increasingly being drawn upon by PMSCs as security labourers. Labelled ‘third-country nationals’ (TCNs) by the private military and security
industry,¹ these men work as security contractors in Afghanistan, Iraq, Brunei, and throughout Asia and the Middle East. Their labour is indispensable within current global security operations and yet silenced from mainstream discussion on PMSCs. The experiences of these men as TCN security labourers represent a modernizing/imperial project, as reflected in the works of Barker (2009), Ware (2012), Eichler (2013) and Chisholm (2014). Yet missing from these discussions are the ways in which the managers of this TCN labour rest upon and reproduce modernizing/imperial logics in their marketing and management schemes. Such analysis can reveal the ways in which PMSC participants are complicit in racial and gendered practices that constitute existing security markets.

Placing the ways in which Gurkha security labour is managed and disciplined at the fore of discussions, this article considers the ways in which the Gurkhas’ labour is differentiated from that of their Western counterparts, and examines how race, gender and colonial histories might make intelligible these differences. By focusing on security labour, the article connects security-market practices to debates within migration studies and feminist global political economy. Consequently, it opens discussions into how the management and marketing of labour within PMSCs is also amenable to the labour-disciplining mechanisms used in other global industries, such as textiles and domestic care. By drawing upon feminist global political economy scholarship and focusing on labour, it seeks to bring into focus how colonial, gendered and racial scripts mediate the ways in which Gurkhas participate as security contractors, and how market actors – namely, the men who manage Gurkhas and Gurkhas themselves – are complicit in constituting these racial and gendered scripts.

To develop my argument, I draw upon ethnographic research conducted while living and working with security companies in Kabul, Afghanistan, between January 2008 and May 2010. Ethnography has yet to be openly applied as a research method within the scholarship on PMSCs and other critical security studies, largely because of the methodological issues surrounding ideas of objectivity. As Leander (2013) suggests, ‘doing’ ethnography necessitates looking at the question of objectivity differently. This does not mean that ethnography is not an important methodological tool for international relations studies. Ethnography challenges positivist assumptions of objectivity in fieldwork by demonstrating that there is no neutral, perfect or pure ‘field’ or ‘culture’ to research (Haraway, 1997: 37). Importantly, the ethnographer is always expected to engage in a certain creativeness and flexibility in theoretical framing and epistemological positioning when going to the field. This flexibility in approach and in actual questions is vital for any attempt to understand the complexities of ‘the field’, the ways in which security is practised, and how meaning-making occurs (Leander, 2013: 6).

A vital component of ethnography is rethinking objectivity and moving away from meanings anchored in positivist neutrality towards a position where objectivity is affixed to reflexivity and engagement with the field (Eriksson Baaz and Stern, 2009; Higate and Henry, 2009; Leander, 2013), where authors invite the reader into the world in which they have developed their research and how they have thought about things (Basham, 2013). It is through this inviting that transparency and accountability come into play. It is also through this engagement that different power practices are observed. In the case of my research, actual engagement in the field allowed for a much richer analysis than would otherwise have been possible. It offered ways to garner insights into the productions of security that might not have been apparent or noteworthy had I applied a different method to my research. I was able to engage in a deeper level with the men I was researching. I was ‘out there’ seeing and experiencing the things they saw and experienced (although in a different way), but we were able to talk about various perceived insecurities – which included the physical, the psychological and the emotional – and discuss the different opinions and approaches in real time. In addition, reviewing my research notes and interview transcripts after leaving the
field made possible another layer of analysis, where I was able to examine the ways in which I was (and remain) complicit in the security practices I critique.

My ethnographic observations were complemented by extensive interviews with former white British national Gurkha officers who now own security companies and market Gurkha security labour. This article engages with the perspectives of these former white British national Gurkha officers within the private military and security industry, and how Gurkhas, and they themselves as managers of these Gurkhas, are positioned within the market. In particular, I draw upon interviews with Ian Gordon of IDG Security and Tristan Forster of FSI Worldwide, both former British Gurkha officers who now work as Gurkha security company directors. From conversations with other representatives in the security industry, I learned that these two firms are the main companies providing Gurkha security services to the armed private military and security sector. In addition, and by way of offering a historical context for Gurkha employment in the private military and security industry, I present perspectives gathered through interviews with Jon Titley, the former director and owner of Gurkha Security Guards, and Tony Bergin, a former director of IDG Security. In total, four directors of Gurkha security companies (both past and present) were interviewed, some on more than one occasion. Additionally, I conducted interviews with three directors of recruitment agencies within Nepal to garner in-depth insights into how Gurkhas are not only managed, but also recruited into private security markets.

My research inquiries are largely informed by postcolonial feminist global political economy scholarship, such as that of Tsing (2008) and Agathangelou and Ling (2009). Unlike contemporary PMSC scholarship, which remains largely situated within security studies, postcolonial feminist global political economy considers the ways in which culture — that is, colonial histories and performativities of race and gender — constitutes market practices. Accordingly, a synthesis of feminist global political economy and postcolonial feminist analyses offers insights into the various ways in which market practices have brought into existence women’s and men’s gendered, classed and raced bodies, and positioned them within structural hierarchies, and how men and women have shaped and are shaped by gendered and raced market discourses. Drawing upon this literature allows me to explore how colonial histories condition and influence different forms of security labour. This research is novel to the PMSC literature, as it expands debates and considerations away from the confines of traditional security studies towards broader debates within migration and global political economy discussions concerned with the ways in which labour is disciplined and managed in capitalist markets.

The remainder of this article is divided into three sections. The first sets out the colonial narratives or scripts that are normalized and privilege whiteness in the private military and security sector. These colonial scripts/narratives make Gurkhas intelligible as security contractors in particular ways. The next section then examines in more detail the colonial script that rendered Gurkhas in an underdeveloped position both as men and as labourers, and placed their white British Gurkha officers in a position to know them, manage them and represent them to Western audiences. The final section demonstrates the very mechanisms and techniques Western managers and security company owners use to represent Gurkhas to Western clients. It highlights how representations of Gurkhas through this Gurkha security package are also claims of authority as to who can and cannot speak for Gurkhas. It also demonstrates how Gurkhas are divided into categories, marketed and commodified, and positioned in hierarchical terms in relation to their white Western counterparts.

The myth of the (white) market

While Gurkha labour, like other TCN labour, is indispensable to PMSCs, it is also largely excluded from academic and practitioner discussions. This silencing was illuminated during a conference in
2012 at which I was asked to present some of my doctoral research. Out of the various panels presenting over the two days, I was the only one to present research on a group of security contractors labelled TCNs. Using the Gurkhas’ own words, drawn from my interview transcripts, I described these men’s struggles to find work to support their families, their desires for more economic opportunities, and their frustrations over how PMSCs treated them differently from their white Western colleagues. Drawing upon interviews in which Gurkhas spoke of how their salaries and working conditions were significantly inferior to those of their white Western counterparts, I highlighted racially informed disparities and inequalities within the private military and security sector. During the ‘Question and Answer’ section of my presentation, the director of one security company stood up and responded to claims attesting to the poor treatment of Gurkhas by declaring, ‘but that’s the market’. For him, and for a large portion of the audience, this statement was an obvious one, which demonstrates how commonsensical this market logic was to him and the audience. Overall, it highlighted the naturalness of the labour and recruitment practices that constitute the overall working conditions of Gurkhas – and other TCNs – within the security industry.

For this director, the market was a natural force where people freely engaged on different levels. This is not to say that he did not acknowledge racial and gendered practices within the market, but his statement implied a view of market forces as being beyond his (or anyone’s) control. His comment worked to reinforce the market as a space that is disconnected from the everyday actions and beliefs of the people who participate within market spaces. The racialized and gendered practices constituting Gurkhas as TCNs, however, are obscured in the naturalizing construction of the director’s ‘but that’s the market’ claim. Accordingly, Gurkhas’ experiences are either considered unfortunate but inevitable, or viewed through a comparative advantage market logic that dismisses any grievances they might have on the basis that they are at least better off than their Nepalese counterparts. In either case, Gurkha positioning on the periphery of security markets is seen as inescapable. The naturalness of the Gurkhas’ position at the periphery of such markets is reinforced through academic discussions of PMSCs. Gurkhas (and other men and women labelled as TCNs) are rarely mentioned in discussions and debates on private military and security operations (Higate, 2012a; Eichler, 2013; Chisholm, 2014). When they are mentioned in the private military and security literature – with the exceptions of Chisholm (2014) and critical anthropologists such as Des Chene (1991), Caplan (1995), Streets (2004) and Ware (2012) – it is usually through a dehistorized and racialized lens that invariably reproduces them and their subjectivities as naturally different from those of their white Western counterparts.

Market narratives and the silencing of the labour practices of Gurkhas and other TCN labourers are mutually reinforcing. The neoliberal market logic involves an individualized ‘master of one’s universe’ narrative through which racial and gender mechanisms are obscured. This logic is even reinforced by the cases of traditionally marginalized women and men who garner more privileged positions – a practice captured in Sa’ar’s (2005) notion of the liberal bargain. Consequently, the neoliberal narrative remains pervasive; so much so that even when racial and gender practices are observed or acknowledged (as they were in my interviews), there continues to be a sense that the individual can overcome these barriers if they just try hard enough or network enough. Yet, as feminist and critical scholars are quick to point out, there is nothing neutral about these practices, and in various ways neoliberal markets have exacerbated gender, class and racial inequalities. The rest of this section demonstrates the ways in which racial hierarchies, legitimized through colonial narratives, remain constitutive of the market.

There prevails a master narrative in the private military and security field about who security contractors are. This can be observed in both detailed descriptions and imagery, as well as demonstrated in the implicit assumptions that are foundational to security practices. Explicit descriptions offer images and biographies of men who are white and Western (Pelton, 2006; Schumacher, 2006;...
Scahill, 2007; Higate, 2012a, 2012b). The implicit aspects can be seen in the assumptions in particular calls for regulation of the industry that invariably ignore the experiences of security labour from the global South. In both cases, the security contractor is almost always a man, most likely a Westerner, and someone who has acquired certain skill sets through special military or policing training.5

Gurkhas, then, are a group of men treated as the other contractor – a security contractor who is forever understood through his relationship to his white counterpart. Gurkhas’ participation as TCN labour in the private military and security industry is an example of the growing numbers of men from the global South taking up work within that industry as security contractors, menial labourers and support staff (Barker, 2009; Stillman, 2011; Higate, 2012a; Eichler, 2013; Chisholm, 2014). Yet the recruitment of TCNs into the security industry and their experiences are absent from mainstream PMSC scholarship and security practitioner discussions. As a result, their experiences and the racial and gender practices surrounding their recruitment and representations are silenced and the diversity of security contractors collapses into a Western perspective, while ideas of choice and value maintain a distinct Western-centric position. Crucially, there is nothing natural or inevitable about these men’s TCN status. As demonstrated in the works of Appadurai (1986), Kopytoff (1986), Skeggs (2004), Tsing (2008) and McDowell (2009), value in the market is differentiated and determined through culture; it is not inherent in individual labourers or their skill sets, but ‘a judgment made about them’ by the people consuming and exchanging their services (Appadurai, 1986: 3). In the private military and security sector, security value is intimately associated with the types of militarized masculinities security contractors embody (Higate, 2012a).

As in other political and social domains, claims to particular forms of masculinities are also claims to authority (Connell, 2005; Enloe, 2007). This is observed in Joachim and Schneiker’s (2012) assessment of the marketing of ‘professional masculinities’ by PMSCs. Masculinities are also used to enact particular privileges in ‘on the ground’ security operations. By locating where the men are in the private military and security sector, Higate draws attention to the multitude of masculinities employed by security contractors. These include the hypermasculine ‘chicks dig it’ US security contractors (Scahill, 2007), the British and US special forces-trained contractors, and the TCN Fijian and Latin American contractors (Higate, 2012a, 2012b). Yet neither Joakim and Schnieker’s nor Higate’s analysis considers how particular histories and racial logics make these masculinities intelligible. In fact, the only time race enters into the discussion is during Higate’s (2012a) examinations of TCN security contractors, whom he classifies under the notion of ‘enforcement masculinities’. With the exception of the work by Barker (2009) and Chisholm (2014) on the private military and security sector and Ware (2012) on the military, much of the literature on PMSCs reinforces the normalizing of whiteness in security, either by not incorporating a racial analysis or by implicitly treating all contractors as white – where being a security contractor implies that one is white, unless otherwise stated. Consequently, whiteness remains normalized, de-raced and privileged within discussions on the private military and security sector not only through the actions of practitioners, but also as a result of the reinforcement provided by academic inquiries.

Although not explicitly referred to in the above-mentioned gendered scholarship on PMSCs, whiteness appeared throughout my research on Gurkhas. Whiteness could be observed in the claim that private military and security contractors needed to have some of the business acumen peculiar to Western culture. In this logic, Western men are seen as culturally competent, can speak and understand English, and have Western military training with operational experience. It is their Western culture that allows Western men to understand and offer high-quality security to their often Western clients, and that separates them from TCN security contractors.

It is through this security discourse that we can also understand how different security subjectivities are brought into existence, embodied and valued in labour economies. Just as security and
security commodities are brought into existence through discourses (which include mutually constitutive body performances and language), security markets rest upon not only the commodification of security but also the inflation of differences in labour. It is differences, marked through racial, colonial and gender social hierarchies, that determine how security labour and commodities are valued. As detailed by Tristan Forster:

An expat [Westerner] will be coming in at 8–15,000 USD a month as opposed to a TCN who commands 1,000 USD. [The political economy of demand for different wages] puts people in different tiers. In terms of forgetting money and just comparing the capabilities it is really interesting. If you looked purely at the skill set, English language is a problem [for many Indian Gurkhas], and therefore their ability to communicate with expats is difficult. They’ve existed in an Indian and Nepal environment, so the lack of international experience also reinforces [their lack of familiarity with Western culture]. In terms of presentation, they are, or can be, less confident than a good expat. And certainly there is a perception in the market that ‘oh they’re the nice chaps that stand post’ but they aren’t as good in ability as my expat team.  

Difference is seen to justify inequalities in pay, work environment and contract labour. The markers of difference in the security industry are both gendered and racialized and come into existence through the same performativity that brings security into existence. In interview, Foster describes how he understands market articulations of difference between Gurkhas and Western white expats.

Gurkhas as [compared to] white expats as we call them in the security sphere … inhabit the third-country national tier of the private security industry and are seen as, rightly or wrongly, and I think wrongly, as the guys that do static guard or convoy protection and not the higher-paid close protection, VIP that the expats tend to do. Now in certain ways this makes sense. The private security’s view of Gurkhas, is really the Gurkhas are TCNs. Obviously what you got is the British Army Gurkhas, and the guys leaving the British Army these days have a level of English which is as good as an English person and they equally have an earning expectation which puts them into a similar bracket of any Brit really that might want to get into the private security industry…. The private industry doesn’t have their head around that yet, so in terms of British Army Gurkhas, these men tend not to go overseas to work because the industry would never dream of paying a Gurkha 5–7,000 US dollars a month because they don’t realize their value.  

The quotation above demonstrates how the market value of security labour is a product of social relationships. Value is constituted through a struggle between the participants, the marketers and managers, and the clients over which security skill sets are most desirable. These struggles are underpinned by social hierarchies in which race, class and colonial histories determine why some security labour is worth more than others. Thus, even though the British Army Gurkhas referred to in Forster’s comments met the expected requirements of English business, cultural and linguistic competency, they are still viewed by ‘the market’ as TCN labour and therefore command less market value than their white counterparts.

Understanding security through colonial scripts facilitates analysis into the ways in which security bodies are made intelligible and brought into existence through the language used to not only define, but constitute Gurkhas. While a full discussion is beyond the scope of this article, Gurkhas are compelled to perform in particular ways in order to make themselves intelligible political/economic and security subjects, as I have discussed elsewhere (Chisholm, 2014). Security and security providers become intelligible through the repetition of acts that conform and reproduce certain racial, gender and class norms. Participation is also compulsory, and the risks involved in not participating in an intelligible script are high: Gurkhas risk a kind of death, whether social, physical (Butler, 1990) or economic, if they do not recite their subjectivities in line with colonial scripts.
Security markets are global markets that increasingly rely upon the labour of men and women from the global South. Racial and gender practices within global South labour chains and colonial histories mediate the ways in which the commodification of race is articulated. While white men come to the market through their individual merit, Gurkhas and other TCN men are valued and made intelligible through their martial race and colonial histories. Gurkha access to security markets and the racialization of their labour began with their colonial encounters with the British military (Enloe, 1981; Caplan, 1995; Streets, 2004). It was legitimized through the British Army’s past and current treatment of these ‘martial’ men and reflected in the recruitment and commodification of Nepalese Gurkhas in the private military and security sector today (Ware, 2012; Tamang, 2013). What Gurkha representations in the private military and security industry reveal is that this market cannot be reduced to economics, but remains a hybrid space in which social relations and understandings of self are constituted through a blending of nationhood, military affiliations, capitalism, neoliberalism and colonialism. It is this blending that gives meaning to the production of commodities and the differences in value, divisions in labour and articulations of choice for the migrant worker. The next section details the colonial histories that make Gurkhas intelligible as TCN security labourers and provide them access to the security industry, but also mediate the ways in which they can participate.

From warriors of empire to third-country nationals

Over 200 years ago, colonial encounters between Nepalese hill men and the British brought into existence the notion of the Gurkhas as martial men, not only within the Western imagination (Caplan, 1995; Streets, 2004) but in Nepalese communities as well (Des Chene, 1991). At the centre of the newly constructed ‘Gurkha’ was the idea of a martial race warrior. Martial race logics were first employed as a strategy during British colonial control over India and then applied as a strategy to create trusted indigenous soldiers for other colonies (Killingray, 1999). Colonial administrations did not begin to actively apply martial race logics in the construction of their indigenous armies until after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. This event marked the point at which it became paramount for the colonial administrators to find soldiers they could trust, and the desire for trustworthy soldiers was coupled with a general growing belief that some indigenous populations were more suitable for military labour – and therefore more reliable – than others (Pradeep, 1995; Sinha, 1995; Roy, 2001; Streets, 2004).

Martial race remained ambiguous as a logic. It was this ambiguity that allowed it to be successfully applied not just as a logic, but also as a colonial strategy. It was not a precise logic, however. It could more accurately be described as ‘an array of fairly vague [strategies and logics] which display variation over time and in the hands of different authors’ (Des Chene, 1999: 122). The aim of the strategy was to create an ethnicity in which a military vocation was an integral identifying feature. In this way, the British hoped to draw upon a pool of martial recruits who could be counted upon as reliable upholders of the colonial system (Enloe, 1981: 25). It was this very flexibility and ambiguity that made martial races adaptable to a variety of socio-economic and historical contexts, and enabled them to inspire, include, exclude and intimidate (Streets, 2004: 4). At home in the UK, the concept of martial race functioned as an inspirational tool for the image of British masculinity and racial superiority. In India, the idea served as a tool to exclude certain populations deemed unsuitable and untrustworthy for serving the British Empire (Sinha, 1995; Streets, 2004: 4). Gender imaginings of the men involved were crucial. Indigenous groups of men deemed martial were positioned as the ideal subjects of the colonial project. These men were constructed in direct opposition to the Indian nationals. They were everything the Indian national was not: brave, loyal and physically fit. Their Indian national counterparts were assumed to be effeminate, religiously dogmatic, traditional and underdeveloped (Sinha, 1995).
Current representations of Gurkhas as martial men remain deeply rooted in this martial race colonial enterprise. In current security markets, both Gurkhas and the Gurkha officers who market their skill sets draw upon particular aspects of Gurkha colonial histories to offer the security market a description of who these men are and the market value of their labour. Claiming ‘he is a Gurkha’ functions in a similar fashion to what Butler (1993: 232) refers to as ‘girling’, observed in the discursive declaration, ‘it’s a girl’. Both do more than just describe: they bring into existence and make intelligible particular gender and racial subjectivities formed in larger cultural scripts. In the case of the Gurkha, declaring him as such brings him into existence and makes him intelligible only through the colonial script of martial race. Declaring Gurkha brings about imaginings of a fierce warrior who has physical prowess but is cheerfully disposed towards his allies. These characteristics are celebrated in exaggerated wartime stories, such those of Edmund Candler (1919: 4), an officer in a Gurkha regiment:

It is not the nature of any Sepoy [to complain]. Patience and endurance is the heritage of all, but cheerfulness is most visible in the ‘Gurkh’. He laughs like Atkins when the shells miss him, and he is never down on his luck. When the Turks were bombarding us on the Hai, I watched three delighted Gurkhas throwing bricks on the corrugated iron roof of a signaler’s dug-out. A lot of stuff was coming over, shrapnel and high explosive, but the Gurkhas were so taken up with their little joke of scaring the signalers that the nearer the burst, the better they were pleased. The signalers wisely lay ‘doggo’ until one of the Gurkhas appeared at the door of the dug-out and gave the whole show away by an expansive grin.

Candler’s story of the playful mischievous Gurkha in the face of war is coupled with popular military jokes such as the one that relates a Gurkha’s close encounter with a German soldier. In this exchange, the Gurkha takes a swipe at the physically larger German with his famous kukri. The German says, ‘Ha, missed!’, to which the Gurkha replies, ‘Shake your head’ (Gould, 1999: 1). Of course, such stories are embellishments, but they illustrate the Gurkhas’ contradictory colonial tropes of martial prowess coupled with an endearing childlike naivety. Importantly, these popular military vignettes reproduce the seemingly timeless warrior attributes embodied in the Gurkhas. Such stories reappear in contemporary journalist writings on these men.

The Daily Mail Online reproduces these contradictory images of Gurkhas as martial masculine men with the naivety of children who take everything literally, in its details of a military incident that occurred in Babaji, Afghanistan, in July 2010 (Hardman, 2010). In this incident, a Gurkha from the 1st Battalion of the Royal Gurkha Rifles was being investigated for the beheading of an Afghan man. The headline ran: ‘As a Gurkha is disciplined for beheading a Taliban: Thank God they are on our side!’ The image next to the headline is used to portray the timeless aggression and fierceness of these men, meant to provoke fear and intimidation in the audience. The caption below the image reads: ‘The Gurkhas display their traditional weapons of choice.’ The article goes on to detail a fictional exchange between the Gurkha soldier and his (white) commanding officer:

Just picture the scene as a soldier returns from hunting an arch-enemy. Commanding officer: ‘Did you get him?’ Soldier: ‘Yes Sir.’ Commanding Officer: ‘Are you sure?’ Soldier: ‘Yes Sir.’ Soldier reaches into rucksack and places severed head on table. Commanding Officer: ****!’ (Hardman, 2010)

Such vignettes draw us as an audience back to these men’s colonial origins, as well as portraying their contradictory masculinities, which involve, on the one hand, being martial, fierce and brave, and, on the other, childlike innocence. They also play out in contemporary politics, highlighted in Joanna Lumley’s campaign for UK settlement rights for Gurkhas. A British actress famous for her portrayal of Patsy in the television sitcom Absolutely Fabulous, among other appearances reaching
back to the 1960s, raised awareness of Gurkhas’ migration issues among the UK public. Separated from other economic migrants because of their long history of British military service, the citizenship struggles of the Gurkhas garnered supportive media attention (Ware, 2010). While the media was largely supportive of the Gurkhas’ claims for citizenship, racial imaginings of these men resonated through the media narratives. These racial imaginings were demonstrated in the Telegraph’s article of 21 May 2009, headlined: ‘Gurkhas are coming home after a famous victory on settlement.’ In the associated image, Lumley is captured cheering while surrounded by Gurkhas. While Lumley is mentioned throughout the article, no Gurkhas are individually named or their life stories and struggles offered. She is the only person identified by name in the article, which thus emphasizes her individual importance while lumping the struggles, experiences and efforts of various men and women from Gurkha communities under the homogenous category of Gurkha. Texts and images such as these silenced (or relegated to the background) the actual Gurkhas and their individual efforts, while the Gurkha settlement rights narrative became largely known in media depictions and photos as Lumley’s fight for the Gurkha.

Setting these stylized journal commentaries and military jokes aside, most of the literature on Gurkhas is authored by former white British Gurkha officers. These men describe Gurkhas through the lens of a celebratory colonial nostalgia, employing the usual colonial tropes (Des Chene, 1991; Caplan, 1995; Gould, 1999; Parker, 1999). Consequently, these stories have worked to solidify a natural martial discourse about these men from the hills of Nepal. Such colonial scripts not only make their way into larger political landscapes (including those of British military recruitment of Gurkhas in Nepal; see Ware, 2012; Tamang, 2013), but also resonate in the marketing of Gurkha security labour in PMSCs.

**Representations of the Gurkha through the Gurkha security package**

The martial race discourse also appears throughout the marketing of Gurkhas in the private military and security sector. Gurkha Security Guards (GSG), a PMSC that in the 1990s only recruited Gurkhas who had served with the British military, described the Gurkha in a marketing brochure as

> a phenomenon … unique among the world’s fighting men. Bred in one of the most inhospitable landscapes in the world, he is tough, self reliant and used to dealing with great hardship. The very word Gurkha has become a byword for steadfastness, courage and integrity and their reputation has won them respect and renown throughout the world. (Cited in Vines, 1999: 124)

GSG procured their labour from among Nepalese men who had earlier served in the British military as British Gurkhas. This was largely because individual directors in the company had formerly been white British Gurkha officers themselves and thus had a ‘special’ connection with a large unemployed Gurkha population. In an interview, former GSG director John Titley commented that marketing schemes were not particularly important in the ‘selling’ of Gurkhas, as most of the companies and clients knew of their martial qualities.

Importantly, the recruitment and marketing of Gurkhas was dependent upon their former white British Gurkha officers, in this case Titley. The officer thus remained the gatekeeper who connected Gurkha labour to global labour chains in the private military and security sector. Titley explained during interview that he felt he needed to give back to the Gurkha community. He felt compelled to help the former soldiers with whom he had earlier spent so much time. He also
believed that work in the private military and security sector would be more appropriate than other economic opportunities available to them after their retirement from the British military. Accordingly, Titley acted as the Gurkhas’ spokesperson, their marketer and their manager. These new employment opportunities were openly and eagerly accepted by Gurkha contractors as a way of providing financially for their families (Vines, 1999).

The security industry has changed significantly since the 1990s, and many companies have incorporated themselves in the meantime, rebranding as professional profit-seeking entities and enjoying a central position in current security governance (Leander, 2005). This has also led to a substantial growth in their services, and in turn a demand for more security contractors (Pingeot, 2012), with the result that Indian Gurkhas and Singaporean Police Gurkhas are now being employed as Gurkha security contractors within PMSCs. During the interviews I conducted with different security agents in Nepal, some pointed out that, in the field of unarmed security provision, even Nepalese men and women with limited police or military backgrounds have also enjoyed employment under the ‘Gurkha’ security label. This increase in the use of men and women labelled Gurkhas within the private military and security sector has also led to a large debate over who and what constitutes genuine Gurkhas. For both former British Gurkhas and their white British Gurkha officers, the definition of the Gurkha and the question of who has authority to speak about who the Gurkhas actually are is of great importance. A central part of this definition continues to rest upon the colonial legacies of Gurkhas as martial men, rebranded in security markets in the 1990s and reimagined again in contemporary security companies.

This is the global space in which newer companies such as FSI Worldwide and IDG Security currently operate and offer Gurkha labour for both unarmed and armed security. These companies describe Gurkhas in terms of their martial virtues, which are harnessed through the mentoring and management of white managers who know these men. In other words, not only are Gurkhas positioned as lesser valued, TCN, labourers, but British Gurkha officers are positioned as their mentors with the authority to represent and manage Gurkhas in the private military and security field. It is through these descriptions that Gurkha security labour becomes one part of a ‘Gurkha package’, involving the actual labour of the Gurkha alongside the management of the British Gurkha officer.

IDG Security’s website, reproduced in Figure 1, is simple, with no pictures, showing only the company’s logo. In an earlier version of the website (accessed on 1 July 2013), two brief paragraphs detailed the company’s objectives and gave contact details for potential clients to learn more about its services. The website opened with a sentence stating that the company was established and run by a former Singaporean Police Gurkha officer. The rest of the text referred to the Gurkhas’ history of 200 years of service and their loyal, trustworthy and disciplined martial traits. In both versions, the website further assured potential clients that the company’s security contractors were ‘genuine’ Gurkhas who had been personally selected, and indicated that the recruitment and management of these Gurkhas emulated the regimental management style. It was through proper selection, carried out by authority and coupled with proper management, that the client could be assured of getting the best out of these Gurkhas.

The website of FSI WorldWide, another prominent security company employing Gurkhas in armed private military and security functions, also displays the company logo in the foreground, together with a flattened blue world map in the background. This website provides much more information and detail about the company and the Gurkhas it contracts. Like IDG Security, FSI WorldWide states that the director and manager of the security company is a former British Gurkha officer. When describing the Gurkhas, the website opens with a quote from a former British Gurkha officer who served with the Gurkhas during World War I, together with a picture of a Gurkha in traditional dress. The caption reads:
As I write these words, my thoughts return to you who were my comrades. Once more I hear the laughter with which you greeted every hardship. Once more I see you in your bivouacs or about your fires, on forced march or in the trenches, now shivering with wet and cold, now scorched by a pitiless and burning sun. Uncomplaining, you endure hunger and thirst and wounds; and at the last your unwavering lines disappear into the smoke and wrath of battle. Bravest of the brave, most generous of the generous, never had a country more faithful friends than you. (Sir Ralph Turner, MC)

The quote above draws upon the Gurkhas’ history of resilience and determination. Below the caption is a brief paragraph indicating that FSI shares the sentiments expressed by this former Gurkha officer. Like IDG Security, FSI WorldWide also details its commitment to genuine Gurkhas (in this case defined as Nepalese nationals who have served with the British and Indian militaries and/or the Singaporean Police).

The website shown in Figure 2 further explains how management of these Gurkhas is essential for getting the best out of these men. Such management is provided by men who are familiar with and have commitment to the potential of the Gurkha. Here the company highlights its commitment to ethical recruitment practices and affirms that these practices make it possible to get the best out of all (non-Western) staff, not just Gurkhas. Like IDG Security, the audience is advised that it is Gurkha officers who are in the best position to know who the genuine Gurkhas are and how to manage them properly, so the client can rest assured that they will be provided with contractors who perform just as well as the Gurkhas of legend.

In both websites, it is made clear that the directors of these companies are white former British national Gurkha officers. The reader is also informed about Gurkhas’ martial qualities: those of heartiness, strength and fortitude. What is also important is that these websites detail that the
management qualities of the British national Gurkha officer coupled with the martial talents of the Gurkha produce the ideal TCN security package. After drawing on the Gurkhas’ colonial past, FSI Worldwide reinvents the Gurkhas as relevant security contractors in today’s security markets. Here
the importance of the paternal relations between the management (often white men) and the contractor (Gurkha) are made clear:

[The] FSI management team understand the outstanding professionalism and dedication of a well selected and well managed Gurkha soldier. It is absolutely essential in selecting and managing a Gurkha Guard force that we have Company Directors and Project Managers who feel the way about our staff that Sir Ralph did.\(^\text{15}\)

Like other globalizing industries, the private military and security sector depends on global South labour chains and TCN recruitment to fulfil static guard and convoy protection duties for which ‘martial race’ labour appears to be preferred over other men from the global South.\(^\text{16}\) In interviews and conversations, when I asked why martial men were more suitable for TCN security labour, industry practitioners and managers in Afghanistan and Nepal referred to these men’s military training and biological martial attributes, which provide them with discipline and the ability to handle (without complaint) the monotony of long hours standing in front of buildings or driving vehicles in remote (and often hostile) settings. Describing the Gurkha culture that allegedly made them more suitable for this type of labour during an interview, Tristan Forster declared:

the cultural presentation of the Gurkha is much more gentle, day to day, much more subservient, much more inclined to quietly get on with what they are doing. In certain respects that leads to the position that they are not suited for the more challenging management roles. Static guard is a simple role in that you don’t need a lot of map reading, negotiation skills. You need to follow rules, be disciplined, keep cool under fire and under boring conditions keep doing your job. I would choose an Indian Army Gurkha standing post than any other person in the world. I would choose an Indian Army Gurkha over an SAS man, Delta Force or Marine guy. They are not prima donnas, they are proud to do that job and bloody good at it. I think it’s really the boredom that expats just can’t handle in the same way.\(^\text{17}\)

Through their marketing campaigns and recruitment practices, British national Gurkha officers continue to enjoy a position of authority to speak for and mediate access to these exotic Gurkhas destined for Western consumption. Yet it is this authority to speak and make truth claims about the Gurkhas in private military and security markets that also acts as a site in which ‘regimes of value’ can be contested (Huggan, 2001: 5). Nowhere is this struggle more starkly observed than in the changing nature of market demands for TCNs and the broadening definition of what and who constitutes a Gurkha. The definition of the Gurkha has been broadened as the desire for TCNs (largely to procure security services at reduced rates) increases. During the 1990s, Jon Titley primarily employed retired British Gurkhas, yet both FSI WorldWide and IDG Security have broadened definitions of ‘Gurkha’ to permit the recruitment and employment of Nepalese nationals who have served with the British and Indian armed forces and (in the case of IDG Security) the Singaporean Police.\(^\text{18}\) Within the unarmed security sector – involving contracts throughout the Middle East, Hong Kong and on various cruise lines – evolving conceptions of the Gurkha are even broadening the definition and subsequent embodiment of Gurkhas in marketing schemes to also include women and Nepalese nationals with national police and military experience. Among the security company directors, third-party agents and Gurkhas interviewed for this study, what a Gurkha is within contemporary security markets continues to be disputed.

**Claiming authority on Gurkha security through the ‘Gurkha security package’**

The challenges faced by IDG Security and FSI WorldWide differ from those that Titley’s Gurkha Security Guards faced during the 1990s. One main challenge is that of claiming and maintaining
authority over the marketing and supply of Gurkha labour in the security industry. Both IDG Security and FSI WorldWide are attempting to regulate the borders of ‘the Gurkhas’ and how the market understands them through the marketing of the *authentic* Gurkha. They do this through management and recruitment practices that intimately involve British national Gurkha officers. In their business models, British national Gurkha officers and their administration teams understand what Gurkhas are as a result of their military service with them; conduct rigorous vetting to ensure the military qualifications of potential recruits; and mentor and manage these men in such a way as *to get the best* out of them. This marketing strategy achieves two goals. First, it assures the client that in employing an authentic Gurkha, one is getting the best kind of TCN: authentic Gurkhas endure hardship, they do not complain. Second, it is emphasized that simply employing an authentic Gurkha is not enough. These men also require appropriate and culturally sensitive management. Management comes through the British Gurkha officer, who has the history and knowledge of who these men are and how to manage them. For FSI WorldWide and IDG Security, bonded labour can be combated through ethical commercial practices whereby the client hires the ‘Gurkha package’ and can therefore be assured that security labour is vetted, recruited and managed to guarantee ‘authentic Gurkha labour’ is drawn upon. Clients can then be assured that these men will be as great as their military histories claim. Reproducing colonial logics of the underdeveloped Gurkha, FSI almost goes as far as to reassure potential clients that with proper management from the Western man, the Gurkha can be as professional as his Western counterpart. The paternal management style is marketed as being necessary, almost as a way of reassuring potential clients that Gurkhas can be as good as the white standard because they are managed properly by white people who have an intimate connection with them. By acknowledging such a racial narrative within its marketing strategies, even though FSI creates job opportunities for many retired Gurkhas, it remains complicit in perpetuating white privilege and racial hierarchies within the private military and security sector’s recruitment and valuing of labour.

IDG Security and FSI WorldWide contrast their own management styles and business models with the unscrupulous acts of some other manpower providers (who remain unnamed, but who are always in the position of exploiting the Gurkha name and reputation). Gordon related his admiration for the martial qualities of the Gurkhas and his desire to re-educate his clients about the importance of getting a high-quality Gurkha – something that he and his company could guarantee. In conversations with me, he argued that the security market is ill-informed about Gurkhas and treats them as just another TCN. In interview, Gordon claimed that Gurkhas can be just as good in terms of providing high-quality security as their Western counterparts, but what is required for that is someone who knows them and can properly recruit and manage them. For Gordon, this was a former British Gurkha officer. Through service as a British national Gurkha officer with the Singaporean Police, he had intimate knowledge of who the Gurkha was and what his capabilities were. In conversation, Gordon described his commitment to these men and his affinity with them, both forged through his military service in a Gurkha regiment. He saw himself as a protector of the Gurkha within the private military and security industry. Like Titley, he positioned himself as a person who knew the Gurkhas and could not only provide economic opportunities for his former military soldiers and other Gurkhas, thereby saving them from impoverishment, but also educate the market on Gurkha security services.

It became clear through repeated conversations with Gordon that he had a high level of commitment to employing Gurkhas and a belief in their attributes as security contractors, yet he also appeared to rely heavily on a colonial type of management style that inadvertently reproduced colonial power relations, positioning him as the white director in the position of authority. This management style was observed during a visit by Gordon to Kabul. Upon his arrival, the Gurkha contractors were lined up in the compound in their uniforms and saluted the director as he walked
down the line. Gordon shook hands with each of them in turn, speaking Gorkhali and exchanging pleasantries. The whole engagement reminded me of my own time in the Canadian military, where we would line up for inspection whenever a higher-ranking officer came to visit. The security company manager, a white British man who was not wearing a particular uniform, did not line up with the Gurkhas but stood off to the side and, like myself, observed the militaristic interactions between the director and the contracted Gurkhas. Once the ‘parade’ had finished, the Gurkha men politely excused themselves and the director came over to speak to the country manager and I. We both shook his hand and escorted him into the house.

The entire spectacle served two important purposes. First, it reproduced the hierarchical military relationship between Gurkhas as military men and the director as their officer. These Gurkhas and the director were both active participants in this performance. The Gurkha contractors were reproducing military rituals through the ‘parade’ greeting of their director/officer. This showcased to the country manager and myself – the spectators – the unique relationship between the director and his contracted Gurkhas, rooted in colonial histories. They spoke in Gorkhali, a colonial language, and their military formation was indicative of an intimate encounter in which we were relegated to the position of observer. Second, the spectacle reproduced the director as the white Western officer with personal experience and understanding of Gurkhas. Like his colonial British Gurkha officers, he positioned himself in a way that highlighted his authority to speak for Gurkhas and reaffirmed his white superiority and right to lead. This observation is not to suggest that all Gurkhas are managed this way. What it does highlight, however, is how some Gurkhas experience security labour and how their welfare largely depends upon their employer’s leadership.

While I did not observe the same colonial paternal management style with FSI WorldWide, Forster shared the belief in the unique role of British national Gurkha officers in the company’s ability to recruit and properly manage Gurkhas. He began by establishing himself as the ideal Westerner who could understand and manage Gurkhas to the best of their ability:

I guess I grew up as an expat kid in amongst all sorts of different environments, whether it was Hong Kong or India, had lived overseas with different groups and loved learning languages. It just somehow felt like home to me… I guess I sort of had it in my blood in the sense. I met Gurkhas as a kid when [my family and I] were in Hong Kong and India. I just sort of had this very strong affection for them from the first time I met them. My parents tell a lovely story about me, whenever we went to visit the Gurkhas not seeing me, because I was off with the lads and never wanting to leave, because I enjoyed bonding with them.

Forster highlighted how colonial relations continue to be foundational in producing not only Gurkhas, but also the Gurkha officers. He described the training process for Gurkha officers that he went through:

the way the brigade of Gurkhas likes to induct its officers, it goes back to the days of colonialism where you had the East African Rifles, brigade rifles … you had British officers working with native troops and trying to get the best out of both parties. You didn’t have the officers just standing around and giving order[s], you had them integrated in the community. It was very important for the officers to learn about the culture of where the men come from. It is taken very seriously. If you fail your language course or you don’t have the personality, you don’t get on well with the Gurkhas from a different culture then, similarly, you are not going to last long. It is brilliant, because you end up getting officers that are ideally suited, worthy of commanding these men.19

For Foster, this type of recruitment and training produced particular Gurkha officers who carried particular attributes:
[Gurkha officers] are very sensitive in the sense of really understanding how to get the best out of their men. They have equally been good at operating with local nations in whichever country you might be in. That sort of patience, [not meaning they] don’t get the job done, there is professionalism there, but they can do it and bring the guys along with them. [Gurkha officers have a] very good leadership and management style, very fit, very dedicated, very exceptional in their thinking and attitude. [They] enjoy travel and enjoy working with other cultures. The Gurkha regiment get a lot of people applying and not that many positions, they can be picky. Just really good people generally. All of the Gurkha officers, to a man, I am very fond of today.20

British Gurkha officers’ particular understandings of themselves as men are key to their ability to manage Gurkhas. Importantly, both officers and the Gurkhas as male subjects are intimately connected and made intelligible through a colonial masculinity script21 that positions the officer as a protector (in this case, offering economic opportunities while at the same time safeguarding Gurkhas from the harshness of the market, observed in bonded labour and exploitation). The positions of the Gurkha officer and the Gurkha are rooted in a long shared colonial history and reproduced in performative rituals (such as Gordon’s military parade). These rituals reproduce colonial and gender subjectivities, where the British national Gurkha officer is the protector/authority and the Gurkha his loyal serving soldier. They also work to exclude the participation of the outsider. Outsiders are relegated to the role of spectator or observer of a colonial family reimaged and reproduced in private military and security settings.

It is, then, the combination of the Gurkha officer’s colonial and gender attributes with the martial, masculine, raw physical prowess of the Gurkha that reappears as the Gurkha package in security markets. Forster commented on this type of raw talent and training package:

It all comes down to the training. The raw material is key and outstanding, if you are recruiting from the right areas and the right people. The trick is the training that turns that raw material into someone who is incredibly disciplined and proud. If you go into Nepal, into the hills, you will meet guys and girls, very tough, not a huge amount of discipline, not forward thinking … similar issues you would find in inhabiting developing countries…. Then you bring to it this tradition, this history. Had the Indian Army never recruited the Gurkhas, who knows what sort of honour and bravery would have been observed today. But, certainly, wherever we’ve taken these guys and trained them, they have been outstanding and continue to be outstanding on military operations and peace training.22

In both the marketing strategies of IDG and FSI and in direct conversations, the managers and directors of these companies seek to educate potential and current clients not only about how Gurkhas are ideal for contemporary security work, but also about how their own backgrounds as Gurkha officers give them the unique ability to recruit and manage these men. This type of Gurkha package appears to resonate well with the UK-based private military and security companies who use Gurkhas (or TCNs) as contractors.

As illustrated through the marketing campaigns and management schemes of these companies, Gurkhas’ subjectivities are connected to a larger political modernity in which these men are incapable of representing themselves. They require the white British Gurkha officer to articulate who Gurkhas are to the industry and how they need to be managed. These security practices of representation, like other racial commodities, are constituted through historical reimagined imperial projects and racial and gendered histories (Thrift, 2005; Agathangelou and Ling, 2009; McIlwaine, 2011). These practices say as much about the white managers as they do about Gurkhas. The latter market themselves as knowing the authentic Gurkha and having the necessary managerial masculinities, rooted in ideas of cultural sensitivity, to properly recruit and mentor them. Problems associated with Gurkha security are framed as management problems. The solution these men offer is
one of finding the right men (former British Gurkha officers) to manage Gurkhas. Consequently, the racial/racist logics that perpetuate the lower value and status of Gurkhas within the private military and security field do not get disrupted. If anything, they are further entrenched through the Gurkha security package marketing campaign.

**Differentiating among the Gurkha**

The different tiers of Gurkhas demonstrate that the security subject position of the Gurkhas, like that of all postcolonial economic subjects, is a result of ‘ongoing reshuffling of gender, ethnicity and citizenship’ (Sa’ar, 2005: 693), where colonial histories blend with the commodification of their labour. These gendered histories of Gurkhas as martial men and warriors of empire work in complex ways as they intersect with contemporary security markets, neoliberal consciousnesses of earning one’s own living, and host and home governing practices pertaining to economic migration.

Gurkha’s labour, like that of other men from the global South, is desired by PMSCs because of the martial traits that appear to make them amenable to particular forms of security work. The Gurkha’s labour is not founded on professionally acquired skills, as is the case with his expat counterpart, but is rooted in natural/biological traits. This focus on the natural/biological rather than professional skill sets justifies pay inequalities and racial divisions of labour – marking Gurkhas as being more naturally suited for poorly paid, dangerous and physically demanding labour. Gurkhas’ experiences in PMSCs are not unique, but represent those of a growing number of men from the global South who take up poorly paid and unregulated work for security company owners in the global North (MacLellan, 2007; Barker, 2009; Bolatagici, 2011; Higate, 2012a). What the experiences of Gurkhas and the literature just cited illustrate is that economic and social inequalities persist and continue to be founded on colonial logics, rearticulated in neoliberal security markets, in which they are understood as underdeveloped men. However, at the same time, like other men from the global South who take up work as security labourers, Gurkhas are not passive recipients of global imperial projects. These men also have agency through the varying ways in which they actively participate as contractors and invest meaning into the hierarchies of security labour. Their agency is observed in the various ways in which they interact with the security market to create new opportunities and different imaginings of who they are. As I have argued elsewhere (Chisholm, 2014), some Gurkhas exercise agency through refusing to ‘sell’ their labour in the security market, others by seeing their participation as a short-term sacrifice so that their sons and daughters might be able, through international education, to choose to be something else.

It is also important to acknowledge that Gurkhas, while largely represented in PMSCs as a homogenous group, are not qualitatively seen in that way by Gurkhas themselves or by the Gurkha British officers who manage/discipline/market their labour. Increasingly, as British Gurkhas are able to exercise more political and economic rights in the UK, they are becoming more distinct from their other Gurkha counterparts and are also viewed as a desirable subjectivity for many Nepalese men attempting to become Gurkhas (Tamang, 2013). The reproduction of hierarchies among Gurkhas by Gurkhas themselves is also mirrored in PMSCs. Because British Gurkhas have the ability to claim political, economic and social rights within the UK, they have more economic and political options open to them, and more incentives to buy into current neoliberal security markets. The new UK settlement rights granted to the British Gurkha enable him to demand a higher wage within the security industry and facilitate a greater choice of economic opportunities outside this market as well. By contrast, Singaporean Police Gurkhas can only remain in Singapore as long as they are employed by the state as Gurkhas. Once they are forced into retirement, they and their families must return to Nepal. Indian Gurkhas are not afforded the same relationship
with their host state as that enjoyed by their British or Singaporean counterparts and do not have the same opportunities to learn the skills necessary for coping and embodying a form of whiteness (in terms of proficiency in English language and business culture) that is required in neoliberal security markets. Throughout my interviews with Gurkhas, most of these men accepted the market practices that rendered their experiences as Gurkhas different depending on the specific military/police force they were associated with. Most of the men interviewed also believed that if they individually could master the English language and network with expats enough, they could also improve their economic and social positions within PMSCs (Chisholm, 2014).

Because of the material and political benefits afforded British Gurkhas, they remained the most ideal subjectivity for other Gurkhas to embody. Throughout my interviews, almost all the Gurkha men claimed to have tried (some on numerous occasions) to become a British Gurkha first. If this option was not possible, both the Singaporean Police Gurkhas and the Indian Gurkhas were considered the next best option. Yet even though British Gurkhas have been able to escape specific recruitment and economic vulnerabilities by using their personal connections with white British national Gurkha officers, they also face challenges. As Forster claimed in interview, the security market has not caught up with British Gurkhas’ capabilities and continues to see them as racialized contractors. As a result, these men continue to garner less of a real wage for doing work similar to that performed by their Western security contractor counterparts. In all cases, Gurkhas’ relations to their home and host states, as well as how they are culturally constituted, inform the material benefits and the ways in which they participate as wage-earners within the private military and security sector. While these men all have a shared martial history with the British Empire, their contemporary relations with their respective states result in vast differences in life trajectories and opportunities.

Conclusion

In private military and security markets, value is constituted through gender and racial hierarchies established through colonial histories, whereby men with particular skill sets – disproportionately white Western men – command a greater market value. For Gurkhas of all types, their market value is seen to lie in their raw martial talents, but these talents required former British national Gurkha officers, currently working as directors of security companies, to harness and manage them. Importantly, in this consumption practice, difference, not assimilation through a shared martial race history, becomes important in shaping the Gurkhas’ market value, as illustrated in the attempts by former British Gurkha officers/now security company owners to market the ‘Gurkha package’.

TCN labour continues to be viewed as inferior to that offered by the TCNs’ privileged Western counterparts (Chisholm, 2014). This is in part because their representation as martial labour renders them forever underdeveloped in a colonial narrative in which whiteness and being Western are privileged. Gurkha ‘culture’ then encapsulates a ‘new racism’, in that, like biology, culture is seen as essential and immutable (Barker, 1981; Balibar, 1991). Consequently, as TCNs, Gurkhas are seen through the lens of this ‘new racism’, where their levels of civilization, intelligence and – in my study – security competency are measured against the privileged (even if such privilege is not openly acknowledged) white Western culture. TCN labourers will forever be unable to bridge the gap between their developing culture and the fully developed Western culture. For Forster and Gordon, this gap can only be bridged through the Gurkha package, whereby Gurkhas’ raw talent can be managed properly by their particular white, culturally competent and sensitive masculinities.

Colonialism and colonial discourse in varying ways have worked to produce differences in value and divisions of labour. Colonial discourses reappear in and through constitutions of race and culture, and are embodied in the TCN labourer and the white Western security contractor within
private military and security markets. These essentialized and dichotomous security contractor identities also result in a division of labour, observed through the bodies of Gurkhas and their Western counterparts, whereby the Gurkha is relegated to the periphery in positions of static guard and convoy protection. Such divisions of labour, justified through racial logics, are not unique to security markets, but are documented in the work of a growing number of feminist global political economy scholars, such as Elias (2004, 2005), Stasiulis and Bakan (2005) and Tsing (2008). This scholarship continues to illuminate the ways in which globalizing markets and capital continue to rest upon particular notions of race, gender and colonial histories. For postcolonial thinkers, social experiences cannot always be reduced to class or Eurocentric understandings of capital void of colonial historic accounts. However, the material realities of men and women from the global South also feed into racial categories. Both race and class are dialectic. Therefore, culture and economics work in tandem to produce a variety of postcolonial economic and political subjects. Postcolonial scholars such as Lee (2011) and Zein-Elabdin (2011) have argued that postcolonial cultural studies coupled with neo-Marxist interpretations of global economic structures highlight the pervasive privilege of white Western knowledge and practices, the connections between culture and economics, and experiences of how men and women from marginal economic and cultural positions negotiate and make sense of their situations. These productions of white privilege, made intelligible through colonial histories, are demonstrated in the case of the abilities of British national Gurkha officers to represent, manage and speak about Gurkhas to the larger private military and security industry, as well as in the case of the Gurkhas themselves, who in various ways buy into these men’s ability to manage their labour.

Cultural meanings and subjectivities of Gurkhas and their subsequent economic conditions within PMSCs are deeply entwined. Culture ‘is a process in and by which economic meaning as well as rationality gets articulated and lived out … in a sense, meaning is always present inside the concepts and the acts of choice, labour, production and class or other economic terms’ (Zein-Elabdin, 2011: 55). This is revealed in colonial legacies that inhibit the Gurkhas’ abilities to represent themselves within security markets, where they must instead rely upon their white managers and security company owners. At the same time, whenever this point is revealed, it is erased through the articulation of Gurkhas as individuals with agency – agency exercised in their ability to choose between the limited employment options offered to them.

Market relations are constituted by attitudes towards particular notions of race and gender in which people bring life, give purpose and apply meaning to markets (Skeggs, 2004). These attitudes are what constitute value in commodity and labour: whose labour gets revealed and whose gets silenced. Importantly, within the neutral framings of individual choice, contractual agreements and free markets, it is essential not to lose sight of the ways in which men and women are conditioned to perform particular labour and are commodified in market practices (Skeggs, 2004; Stasiulis and Bakan, 2005; Nevins and Peluso, 2008; McDowell, 2009; Agathangelou and Turcotte, 2010; Peterson, 2010; Phillips, 2011; Piper, 2011). The material realities for many workers coming from the global South mean that they ‘can often only exercise their agency with huge sets of constraints, imposed personally, but also by national and global economies and by nation states’ (McIlwaine, 2011: 162). For them, there is nothing particularly free about the market. But, market framing of social relations remains a powerful discourse, because it obscures racial and gendered underpinnings that constitute social relations between the employee and the employer – reducing the market to a benign space where relations become an impersonal process between rational (read white and masculine) contracted individuals.

Gendered and racialized bodies within the security industry underpin the social and economic inequalities in labour and material conditions and at the same time sustain a gendered hierarchy among contractors. This hierarchy determines which masculinities and men are visible, which men
can speak, and which bodies are privileged or excluded (Chisholm, 2014). The global South contractor – labelled TCN – remains lacking and needs to be developed in order to emulate the Western white contractor. This article has demonstrated the ways in which the security ‘market’, far from being a neutral space in which individuals interact on equal footing, is underpinned by colonial histories and gender and racial scripts that compel labour to be performed in particular ways. These scripts mediate economic and social interactions between people within the security markets. They condition our understanding of TCN contractors, not as whole and complete people, but as gendered and racial commodities, where some carry more value than others depending on their racial-ized identities, their positions within metropolis/periphery economies, and their historic relations with the West.

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Notes
1. This article uses the terms ‘private military and security industry’ and ‘private military and security sector’ to mean market practices of security. The private military and security industry encompasses both armed and unarmed sectors, where the unarmed makes up the majority of the security work globally. However, my research focuses on the global armed markets, because these provide the most lucrative work for contractors and expose them to the most risk. It is also the area of the industry in which Gurkhas are actively recruited as TCN labour. The term ‘private military and security companies’ (PMSCs) refers to the actual companies that operate in these security armed markets. PMSCs provide a number of logistical and support roles for larger military operations, but my study focuses on Gurkha participation in what Singer (2003) refers to as the ‘tip of the spear’ – armed security – to illuminate the ways in which this area reinforces racialized (and precarious) TCN security labour.

2. While the postcolonial feminist tradition I refer to is diverse in its applications, ontological positionings and discipline origins, its analyses share a commitment to engaging with particular colonial histories and postcolonial conditions that reveal the differences and hybridity in gendered, classed and racial subjectivities, economies and politics. Put simply, these scholars agree that paying immediate attention to culture – that is, diversities in histories and meanings attached to capital and capital accumulation – is central to understanding the particulars of capital flow and commodification of labour.

3. The audience was primarily made up of serving military soldiers and former military soldiers who were now managers and directors of private military and security companies. There were also a few male academics working in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations, and even a few women as academics and representatives of the international development sector.

4. For works extolling the virtues or the rationality of the market, see Friedman (1962), Bhagwati (2004), Wolf (2004) and Friedman (2005).

5. It is beyond the scope of the present article to discuss the various mechanisms employed in the industry to produce particular versions of whiteness. Like all racial constructions, whiteness is varied and context specific. Among important works that detail these mechanisms, see, for example, Ballantyne (2002) and Painter (2010) for detailed examples of how whiteness has been constructed and performed in particular ways to enable the exercise of privilege. What is important to recognize is that whiteness in general continues to be treated as one of the benchmarks/ideals defining security contractors and a tool that is used in order to ‘other’ non-white security contractors.
6. Interview with Tristan Forster, director of FSI WorldWide, 28 August 2012.
7. See note 6 above.
8. See Burke (1996) and Nevins and Peluso (2008) for detailed descriptions of how colonial legacies continue to inform the ways in which the global South participates in global political economies.
9. It is important to note that, as a state, Nepal was never officially colonized by the British. However, historic arrangements were set in place following the Anglo–Nepalese War of 1814–1816 that allowed the British, first informally and then through the formal arrangements of the tripartite agreement of 1947, to draw upon a pool of male labourers from certain Nepalese hill communities.
10. France, Britain and other Western countries have applied martial race logics in varying ways to the local populations of respective colonies and, in the case of the USA and Canada, to their First Nation populations (Des Chene, 1999; Killingray, 1999; Parsons, 1999).
11. The British initially depended upon the Indian caste system and in particular the high-caste Puravivyas, for military service. However, after the Sepoy (a name referring to Indian military servicemen) Mutiny, these high caste Indians were seen by the British as cowards. At this point martial race logics began to be actively used in order for the British to recruit the indigenous men they believed to be naturally suited for military vocation. For more detailed discussion of the importance of this mutiny in redefining indigenous soldiers for the British empire, see Bullock C (2009) Britain’s Gurkhas. London: Third Millennium Publishing, 28-41; Des Chene M (1999) Military ethnology in British India. South Asia Research 19(2): 121-135; Pradeep B (1995) Inventing race: The British and India’s martial races. Historian 58(1): 107-117; Roy K (2001) The construction of regiments in the Indian army: 1859-1913. War and History 8 (2): 127-148; and Sinha M (1995) Colonial Masculinity: The ‘Manly Englishman’ and The ‘Effeminate Bengali’ in the Late Nineteenth Century. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
12. A kukri is a curved knife that holds practical, symbolic and mythical value. It is a symbol associated with Gurkha martial discourse and is described as their weapon of choice in battle (Gould, 1999; Caplan, 1995).
13. See http://www.idg-security.com (accessed 1 July 2013 and 1 September 2013). Permission to reproduce this image was sought and granted by IDG Security.
14. See http://www.fsi-worldwide.com (accessed 1 July 2013 and 1 September 2013). Permission to reproduce this image was sought and granted by FSI WorldWide.
15. See www.fsi-worldwide.com/index.php/services/management#.U1Tprl5vnzM (accessed 1 September 2012).
16. See http://www.fsi-worldwide.com (accessed 1 July 2013 and 1 September 2013); www.idg.security.com (accessed 20 May 2008).
17. Skype interview with Tristan Forster, director of FSI WorldWide, 1 September 2012.
18. Interview with Ian Gordon, director of IDG Security, Kabul, 10 May 2008.
19. See note 19 above.
20. See note 19 above.
21. See, for example, the third chapter of Caplan’s (1995: 55–86) Warrior Gentlemen: ‘Gurkhas’ in the Western Imagination, entitled ‘Officering Gurkhas: The Culture of Command’, for a historical examination of how the Gurkhas’ officers were central in the production and performativity of Gurkhas and integral to the construction of the Gurkha family – regiments that were understood as separate and an exception from the rest of the Indian army.
22. See note 6 above.
23. Interview with Ian Gordon, director of IDG Security, Kabul, 8 May 2008.

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