

Can we create a military where authority does not mean tyranny?

On militarized masculinity, feminist analysis and change.

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Can we create a military culture in which democratic equality between individuals is valued, in which authority does not mean tyranny, order may sometimes be questioned – but one that nonetheless produces soldiers who are effective in facing danger and disarming violence? (Cockburn and Hubic, 2002: 117.)

A few months ago, in the summer of 2007, a six-year old girl was playing with her friends in the streets of Bagdad. When hearing the shooting somewhere in the distance, she turned to the Swedish journalist who had stopped to talk to the children and simply concluded: “The bad are killing the good” and then she ran off to continue her play. It is by now an old project of the international community to create a military force able to reverse what the child in Bagdad said. In the best of worlds, the good would be able to protect all people, including the children, from “the bad one’s”. The vision is that if childhood could really be safeguarded for children everywhere, children would not grow up to become violent aggressors as adults or believe in violence as a means to resolve conflict and eventually humanity could build a better world. Throughout history, the *war question* has come and gone in academia, the media and among policy makers. It is a discussion highly influenced by actual world events and the struggle between the civil and military sectors of the international community over the political agenda.

The aim of this paper is to begin sketching some lines of thinking on the theme of civilian and military cultures in western democracies today. In a US context, we have seen how this relationship has changed since 9-11 and the United

States' consequent launching of "a war against terrorism". More importantly however, are questions of a more timeless character, questions that relate militarism to gender constructions, keen to investigate its short term and long-term influences of society and constructions of sexuality and gender overall. An important source of inspiration for me is Cynthia Cockburn's work in academia as a professor of sociology, and as an activist in the antimilitarist network Women in Black Against War. Cockburn describes herself as a feminist researcher and writer at the intersection of gender studies and peace/conflict studies. In sociology, most will know her for her earlier work (prior to 1995). Cockburn has done several highly acclaimed gendered analyses of masculinity, technological development and the labor process. The title of this paper "Can we create a military where authority does not mean tyranny?" comes from an article by Cynthia Cockburn and Meliha Hubic. In their paper, they analyse the experience of women's organizations in Bosnia and Hercegovina (B-H). Women's organizations in B-H were either invited to participate in a limited way, or, in different ways, altogether hindered from constructive participation in the process of rebuilding society in cooperation with the foreign powers' peace missions. Cockburn's and Hubic's extremely interesting conclusion is that there has to be a new kind of soldier, a new kind of military. For if peacekeeping forces are not rethought along the lines of seeing gender as a social process present in all human spheres of life, not the least in the military organization and in war "they risk contributing directly to the malign gender relations operating locally". What they saw in their study was that the SFOR, sent to B-H with the purpose of demilitarizing, was, in itself, simply a contradiction: "They (the SFOR) are a masculine force cast in a mode not dissimilar to the masculinity that has been implicated in the war. *How can one militarized masculinity defuse and neutralise another, rather than playing into it, 'man to man'?*" (Both quotes from Cockburn and Hubic, 117. Italics added). Thus, in the case of H-B, local circumstances were such that peacekeeping

military was brought in to exert the use of violence when needed in order to protect and safe-guard the rebuilding of democratic society and institutions. However, experience from B-H tells us that if peacekeeping forces are to be effective in the future, they have to be *essentially different* from the historically rooted war-making masculine military organization that they are there to fight. How does one go about creating a military that is *civilianized*; non-sexist, non-hierarchical and democratic in its core? Against the background of the state military organization's deep historical roots of hierarchical chains of command that seem to foster exploitative relations, could the vision of a democratic, armed organization that protects the good from the bad become reality? In that case, what is being done to get there?

Civilianizing the military

Judging from the many scandalous actions committed by US soldiers and other US personnel in Iraq and elsewhere in the world plus a number of scandals related to sexual exploitation and racism at the UN peace missions, the military everywhere seems to be more or less a type of organization for historical or structural reasons entrenched by misogynist, homophobic, tyrannical, racist, non-democratic traditions both in action and frame of mind. If this is so, could there be any hope that the international community may ever reach the goal of a good, democratic-based authority with the right to use violent means to secure peace? My research on this question is in the initial stages, but tentatively one can conclude that what is being argued for, and in some cases also done along the lines of Cockburn's and Hubic's conclusion, falls into two categories;

I. We need more women in the peacekeeping forces and in the military as a whole (Add-Women-and-Stir? Or, A specific women's knowledge /presence?), and, II. We need better and differently educated soldiers that can conceptualize gender in terms of power relations (Men have a Gender Too).

The *war question* for feminism

Historically, the peace movement and the women's suffragette movement were highly connected, in some countries to a large extent consisting of the same women advocates. This is perhaps not surprising considering that for many women in the first couple of decades of the last century, it was via women's right to vote that governments' foreign policy and war-making could be have a long-term influence and wars permanently stopped. Around the time of Europe's first world war the most influential women's writing described wars and war-making closely connected to men and nationalism as a masculine idea. "As a woman I have no country..." wrote Virginia Woolf in *Three Guineas* (1939). On the other hand, there were also women within the women's movement who argued against women's vote and women's introduction to the dirty business of men's politics and wars. Women would be able to contribute more overall by having their own sphere, focusing on other types of work than narrow parliamentary politics. Cockburn's words and activist work in the 21th century may serve as an illustration of this inherent split within feminism.

The continuum of violence ("violence feeds violence")

Two understandings of man/the soldier and sexuality

a) Pessimist; "Boys-will-be boys" (essentialist). The disciplinary measures are all we have got. More and clearer order-giving from above; another word for education. If the milititas had more money we would not have the problem for then they could buy sex too.

b) Optimist; "We can educate away the problem" (constructivist)

It is far more complex; layers of historical relationships such as the colonial past, rasism, today's globalization, poverty, extreme unequal power relations on a global scale come into play here. Constructivist solutions to the problem: Militaries need to work more, pay more attention to questions of sexuality. The idea of one particular form of masculinity as *more* valid, or higher-ranking, than

all others, hovers over the military as a way of understanding the world and power. Is the pessimistic outlook on soldiers as needing more disciplining perhaps belonging to the same frame of mind as the thinking mentioned above that what is needed is simply more women soldiers? Does it tie in with the – at least in Sweden – highly influential norm of the complementarity of the sexes, i.e. that the male and the female are two parts that together form a whole. Consequently that heterosexuality is the pillar of society. In this way, heterosexuality as a norm becomes an essentialist way of thinking about men and women, rather than seeing gender and sexuality as constructions and something that is performed differently throughout time and in different contexts?

Conscription in Sweden

In my own research (together with Annica Kronsell, Lund University) on the practice of conscription in Sweden the tug of influence between the military versus the civilian agenda was clearly detectable. An example of this is the discussion on whether or not to change the draft to apply equally to both women and men citizens so that both could become conscripted soldiers in the Swedish military via the draft. This would entail changing the constitution into a gender-blind law valid equally for both men and women. As it is now Sweden has in fact a constitution stipulating different state-citizen relationships for men and women. Whether or not to make military service obligatory for women as well as men was discussed in a Swedish context several times from the 1970's onward. Participants in the discussion involved mainly representatives of four groups; some of the political parties, some of the volunteer organizations in the military sector, the conscripts' organization and a few high ranking military men. To sum up these discussion one could divide them into cold war and post-cold war, both types concluding against it. During the Soviet era it was concluded that drafting women was not a good idea because it would risk

destabilizing the regional equilibrium. If Sweden were to start drafting women as well as men it would most likely be perceived by the other states in the Nordic region that Sweden was stepping up on the militarization ladder. By drafting all, both men and women, Sweden would become a highly militarized society (the example of Israel was often mentioned). In the 90's, in the aftermath of the ending of the cold war, the financial aspect of introducing the draft for women was argued. When the defense sector was asked to make drastic cutbacks as post-Soviet Russia was perceived to pose no immanent threat to Swedish security, it would be completely irrational to in this phase, double the expense of conscription as drafting all 18-year-olds would entail.

The volunteer defence organizations

The classical role division; women as the constant helper and supporter of men (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau)

- Dependency relationship vis-à-vis the state
- structural dependency more aggravated in the all-men org. the 47-year-olds
- gendered tasks and engagements; gendered labelling of places, tasks etc.

Gendered citizenship in practice in Sweden via conscription

- Lottorna and the citizenship argument

Duty vs. volunteer – the information problem

- all men & some women; Today: some men & some women

The citizenship question

The Civilian-Military divide, what kind of power struggle?

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