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### Regendering the military

**Citation for published version:**

Duncanson, C & Woodward, R 2016, 'Regendering the military: Theorizing womens military participation', *Security Dialogue*, vol. 47, no. 1, pp. 3-21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010615614137>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1177/0967010615614137](https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010615614137)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Security Dialogue

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## **Regendering the Military; theorising women's military participation.**

### **Abstract**

Abstract:

This paper considers how, in the light of contemporary military transformations, feminist theorizing about women's military participation might be developed to take account of an emergent reality: the inclusion of increasing numbers of women in a range of roles within armed forces. A brief overview of established debates within feminist scholarship on women's military participation is provided, and we explore the trajectory of feminist strategies for change both within militaries and other institutions. The promise and limitations of UNSCR 1325 are discussed. The paper argues that existing feminist critiques often remain deterministic, and have too readily dismissed the possibilities for change created by women's participation, given the context of military transformations. Drawing on the idea of the regendered military, the paper presents a conceptual strategy for considering how feminist theorizing about the gender-military nexus can take seriously women's military participation whilst remaining alert to feminist political goals of gender equality, peace and justice.

Keywords:

Feminist, gender mainstreaming, military, participation, security, women

## Introduction

Military transformations, evident over the past decade across the armed forces of NATO member states, inevitably include transformations in the nature of women's military participation. Such transformations, precipitated both by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and by fiscal crises and consequent budgetary restructuring, include shifts both in the deployment of women personnel and in the policy frameworks which structure such deployments. The most visible of these, inciting most media and academic commentary, is the January 2013 announcement in the USA of the lifting of restrictions on women's participation in direct combat roles from January 2016, but the ensuing discussion has prompted renewed interest in the issue of women's military participation more generally.

In this paper, we take a step back from the empirical detail about women's military participation to consider how feminist theorizing about such participation might be developed.<sup>i</sup> There are two reasons for doing this. The first is that whilst theorising about women's military participation is not a novel topic in feminist international relations, post-Cold War shifts within many Western military forces towards peacekeeping, peacebuilding, counter-insurgency and stabilisation operations<sup>ii</sup>, and their realisation particularly in Afghanistan<sup>iii</sup>, changes the nature of this debate about women's military participation in quite specific ways. It is timely, therefore, to take stock of these debates. Secondly, a significant number of women are, year on year, continuing to join national armed forces and pursue (indeed, enjoy) careers therein. It seems fundamental to us that feminist theorizing about the gender-military nexus needs both to understand and account for that fact, whilst remaining alert and contributory to feminist goals of gender equality, peace and justice.

We start with a brief overview of the contours of established debates within feminist international relations and sociology about how women's relationships to military institutions can best be understood. We then link these to feminist strategies for change more broadly, drawing on well-established frameworks of inclusion, reversal and displacement (Squires 1999; 2005). Third, we look at how gender

mainstreaming, as an approach which can be said to operationalize strategies of displacement,<sup>iv</sup> informs a key UN initiative on women, peace and security (UNSCR 1325), and argue that for all the difficulties associated with the application of this approach, there remains a central utility to a feminist approach to the gender-military nexus based on the deconstruction of gendered dichotomies. We explore this approach through a discussion of Cockburn and Hubic's idea of a 'regendered military' (2002, 114–18). We consider how feminist strategies for change in other workplace or governance contexts could inform such an approach, and argue against deterministic approaches towards the gender-military nexus which deny the possibilities for change within military institutions. We conclude by exploring the conceptual and empirical agendas for feminist international relations (and critical military studies more generally) generated by avoiding a determinist feminist anti-militarist approach.

## **I Feminist debates on women's military participation**

"Feminism," as Jean Bethke Elshtain once noted, "has always blown an uncertain trumpet in the matter of women in war" (Elshtain 2000, 443). In decades-old debates over women's military inclusion, particularly in combat roles, feminists have focused less on whether women are *capable* of performing military roles, the preoccupation of mainstream analyses, but rather whether women *should* seek inclusion, asking whether this would be progress for women, for gender equality and for feminism (Goldman 1982; Enloe 1982; Carter 1996). From the 1970s, the debate has been conducted between two rather different political positions. On the one hand, there have been those arguing for the 'right to fight,' emphasising women's equality with men. On the other, anti-militarist feminists have argued that women's military participation (however manifest) merely legitimises an institution which is antithetical to the goals of feminism.

'Right to fight' feminists argue that, on equality grounds, women should have rights of access to military participation equal to those of men. With regard to direct

combat positions, they argue that preventing women from holding such roles limits women's opportunities (for example, for promotion) beyond those particular jobs, such that the combat exclusion perpetuates women's inferior military and social status (Segal 1982; K. L. Snyder 1990; Peach 1994; Stiehm 1996). Whilst right-to-fight feminists tend to be categorised as liberal feminists (see, for example, the classifications in Jones 1984; MacKenzie 2013), some draw on theoretical traditions which are more republican than liberal, arguing for women's full participation as equal citizens with an equal duty to undertake military service. In this view, women's military participation is as much a matter of democratic participation and responsibility as of gender equality (Mazur 1999; R. C. Snyder 2003; Kronsell 2012). The liberal and republican positions are of course intimately linked, as given the historic and symbolic links between citizenship and military service (Goodman 1978; Hartsock 1983: 186-209; Elshtain and Tobias 1990), the only way to be worthy of equal rights is to do equal duty. Alongside these liberal and republican arguments, more instrumental arguments assert the benefits of women's military participation. Judith Hicks Stiehm (1989) suggests that if male soldiers see women in positions of agency and strength it makes it more difficult for them to objectify and sexualise women. More generally, Stiehm has argued that women can change the military, making it more democratic, less hierarchical, more compassionate and more suited to the modern world; as such, women's military participation provides opportunities for disruption, subversion, and even transformation of the military, and by extension, she suggests, international relations (Stiehm 1982; 1989; 1996).

An alternative view is more sceptical of the claim that participation in militaries can enhance women's equality or citizenship. Anti-militarist feminists suggest that an increase in women's military participation is neither progressive for women, nor for a more peaceful international order (Cockburn 2007; Enloe 2007; Eisenstein 2007; Peterson and Runyan 2010; Stachowitsch 2013). First, far from furthering women's equality, these feminists argue that women are never fully equal in the military. The challenges of routine workplace discrimination, the greater efforts women personnel must make to gain unit acceptance, and the ways in which they are

constructed as disruptive (Carreiras 2006; Herbert 1998; D'Amico and Weinstein 1999; Callaghan and Kernic 2003; Woodward and Winter 2007; Sjoberg and Gentry 2007: 45-46) all undermine the argument that military participation represents increasing female equality. Where they are denied access to combat roles, they are denied the chance to reach the highest levels of command. Where combat restrictions have been lifted, evidence suggests that women still face discrimination and abuse ( see the articles in MacKenzie 2013, a special issue on women in combat). Second, commentators have pointed to the ways in which military training relies on the identification of an opposite, inferior, feminised Other as a means of motivating men to attain levels of fitness and aggression (Enloe 1983; Kovitz 2003; Whitworth 2004). Misogyny, including sexual harassment and violence, is in this view therefore almost inevitable, and will not be challenged by an increase in the number of women. Third, anti-militarist feminists reject the claim that an increase of women will result in institutional change, arguing that they can only be mere tokens in institutions which are by definition masculinist and violent. Whilst there are increasingly many nuanced positions on this issue, which note the complex mixture of simultaneous resistance and compliance that characterises women's experiences within state militaries (Sasson-Levy 2003), most note the resilience of gender norms which make challenging militaries seem unlikely (Cowan and Siciliano 2011).<sup>v</sup> Not only are militaries organised for the execution of state-legitimized violence, they are implicated in the structural violence incurred when public funding goes on military rather than social expenditure (Enloe 2007; Peterson and Runyan 2010).

Whilst militaries may use the language of women's rights and equal opportunities to fill the ranks, anti-militarist feminists contend that women are being duped, given the absence to full institutional commitment to progressive gender change (Enloe 1983; 2007; Stachowitsch 2013). Women's influence is thus better wielded through political rather than military intervention and through challenging conditions of female inequality (Jones, 1984). Rather than accepting a conception of citizenship linked to national defence, the feminist task is to critique and reformulate the meaning of citizenship (Brock-Utne 1985; Reardon 1996; Chapkis 1981).. The

ultimate goal for anti-militarist feminists is the eradication of militarism in society rather than legitimization of military institutions and power through female participation (Cockburn 2007; Cockburn and Enloe 2012; Brock-Utne 1984, 1985; Reardon 1996).

## **II Feminist strategies for change**

This brief overview illustrates well the predicament facing feminists more generally (Pateman 1989, 196-97; Squires 2005). Put simply, is it better to opt for inclusion within male-dominated institutions and structures of power as a pathway to gender equality, or to celebrate the alternative values associated with women as a route to re-making the world? As decades of feminist activism show, both strategies have their limitations. Emphasising 'sameness' and pursuing a strategy of inclusion tends to require women to assimilate to the dominant gender norm of masculinity – which they are deemed to never quite manage. As such, they are not treated as equal, and, moreover, masculine norms remain unchallenged whilst women's partial inclusion fuels complacency about further change. Emphasising 'difference' and pursuing a strategy of 'reversal' risks privileging 'feminine' modes of operation in ways which are essentialist in their determination of the 'nature' of 'women' as different to men, in ways that oppress or undermine women (Squires 2005).

These risks are perhaps even more acute in the security sphere. In military institutions, which are dominated by men and ideals of masculinity, it is possible that women may only ever be tokens or never fully accommodated, and militarism may never be challenged. Yet to argue *as women* for non-violent alternatives to war risks reifying women's age-old association with peace and pacifism, which ignores the diversity of women's experiences and aspirations, and, as anti-militarist feminists themselves acknowledge, makes women less likely to be taken seriously in public life (Tickner 1999, 4; also see Sylvester 1987; Elshtain 1990; Enloe 2002, 23).

Furthermore, as military transformations proceed, ever increasing numbers of women have enjoyed successful and fulfilling employment as members of armed

forces; any feminist theorising about women's military participation must not ignore these women (Agostino 2000).

From the 1990s onwards, many feminists have argued that feminism has needed to move beyond 'inclusion' and 'reversal', and focus instead on deconstructing the idea that there are important differences between men and women, indeed, that men and women constitute meaningful categories at all (Scott 1990; Peterson and True 1998; Squires 1999, 2005; Zalewski 2000). This development in feminist theory, that the central theoretical and political task must be to displace gendered binaries, led to some agonising, as it did not seem to generate an obvious practical strategy to replace that of inclusion or reversal, in order to further the other equally important element of the feminist project, that of an emancipatory political movement (Squires 1999: 230).

It was in response to these sorts of questions that the policy of Gender Mainstreaming was developed, drawing from pioneering work in development practice and scholarship dating from the 1970s and 80s (Walby 2005). Launched at the UN conference on women in Beijing in 1995, the policy of Gender Mainstreaming aims to identify how existing structures or institutions cause or exacerbate inequalities and to redesign them (Rees 2002: 46-48).<sup>vi</sup> In so doing, by placing an emphasis on *diversity* rather than the binary of *sameness versus difference*, gender-mainstreaming was hoped to facilitate the displacement of masculine and feminine binaries (Squires 2005). Rather than focussing on individual rights, or group disadvantage, gender-mainstreaming focuses on the systems and structures that give rise to group disadvantage. Crucially, therefore, it can be thought of as involving the displacement of gendered binaries through its focus on challenging the systems which categorise people or activities as masculine and feminine: "the strategy of displacement seeks to deconstruct those discursive regimes that engender the subject" (Squires 2005: 368).

Scholars have identified many different variants or conceptualizations of gender-mainstreaming, which are more or less transformative (see for example Jahan 1995;



True 2003; Squires 2005). Some have argued that many gender-mainstreaming projects are limited in that they focus on bringing in 'gender experts' without changing the overall institution; as such, gender-mainstreaming can collapse back into the strategy of 'inclusion' which it was supposed to replace. Hilary Charlesworth (2005: 2), for example, argues that gender-mainstreaming 'has allowed the mainstream to tame and deradicalize claims to equality.' Charlesworth acknowledges, however, that it is the application rather than the intention of gender-mainstreaming which is problematic (2005: 11, 18). Such critiques of the implementation of gender-mainstreaming thus do not detract from the transformative *intent* and *potential* of gender-mainstreaming, which are highlighted by other scholars (such as True 2003; Squires 2005; Rees 2005). In this vein, Elizabeth Prugl writes:

Gender mainstreaming in part emerged from a discontent with feminist strategies that aimed for women's equality with men while holding in place existing gendered structures and in part from a realization that many aspects of the patriarchal state remained immune to feminist critique. Its purpose is to transform structures by integrating considerations of gender into all government projects, programs and policies (Prugl 2009, 175).

Although in practice gender-mainstreaming has had variable success, it is a strategy which *aims* to take us beyond the dilemma of whether to focus on the inclusion of women in institutions and policy-making processes or the valorisation of a different, 'womanly' way of doing things, and focuses on transforming the institution or policy making process so that gender is no longer a structure of inequality constitutive of that institution or policy. Indeed, it is because it takes a systems approach that gender mainstreaming has more transformative potential than other feminist strategies. In Rees's influential typology, if strategies of inclusion are 'tinkering' and strategies of reversal are 'tailoring,' gender mainstreaming is about 'transformation' (Rees 2005, 557). Although many poststructuralist feminists might contest the marrying of deconstructive and transformative agendas, we argue that this is

perfectly possible and precisely what is required: progressive feminist change requires elements of deconstruction *and* reconstruction.

Returning to the military, several questions follow from this brief account of gender-mainstreaming. Could a policy of gender-mainstreaming involve displacing the gendered dichotomies which are instrumental in the persistence of violence, such as the association of combat with masculinity and peace with femininity? Are all three strategies compatible, thus enabling feminists to adopt a three-pronged approach, or do the strategies of inclusion and reversal, given their risks outlined above, simply reinforce gendered dichotomies thus *undermining* the potential for transformation? In other words, do policies of inclusion and reversal *further* or *hinder* the aim of displacement and therefore transformation?

Of course, there *is* a gender mainstreaming strategy in the sphere of peace and security which intimately concerns militaries, especially in their shift towards peacebuilding, counterinsurgency and stabilisation operations in the post-Cold War world: United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), which is aimed at mainstreaming gender perspectives in peace operations. As we go on to discuss, whilst initiatives under UNSCR1325 have been subject to quite stringent feminist critique, the ideas informing gender mainstreaming – deconstruction of gender so that the policy has a transformative effect – still, we argue, have potential for thinking beyond the impasse apparent in debates over inclusion or reversal as strategies for feminist theorising around women’s military participation.

### **III Gender Mainstreaming in Peace and Security Contexts and Institutions**

UNSCR 1325 aims to mainstream gender perspectives in peace and security operations by considering the specific needs of women and girls in the development and design of policy, and by incorporating the perspectives, contributions and experience of women’s organizations in policy and programme development.

Adopted by the UN Security Council in October 2000, it was the result of sustained

lobbying by feminists and women's organisations, drawing from their expertise on the impact of gender-blind peacekeeping operations on the prospects for sustainable and just peace. The key question concerning this resolution, within the context of this paper, is whether it has been transformative in the ways envisaged by its original proponents.<sup>vii</sup>

UNSCR 1325 prompted considerable activity in terms of resources, targets, and National Action Plans. The UN Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) published a *Gender Resource Package for Peacekeeping Operations* (2004) and a Global Action Plan (2006) which contained concrete policy guidance on gender equality, operational support to guide gender mainstreaming, and set goals of equal proportions of men and women both at headquarters and in the field. In the light of rather slow implementation progress at the national level, in 2004 the Security Council called on Member States to implement resolution 1325 through the development of National Action Plans (NAPs) or other national level strategies, and this started to generate more activity, with 43 countries developing NAPS to date (Feb 2014). At the ten year anniversary of the resolution, however, the flurry of reports and commentary on the resolution (such as Willet 2010; Pratt and Richter-Devroe 2011) made clear that the high hopes generated by its adoption in 2000 had largely been replaced by cynicism amongst feminists, including those instrumental in its genesis (Cockburn 2011).

The criticisms made of 1325 are many and varied (see, for example, Willett 2010), but a key complaint is the way in which something which originated with feminist critiques of militarism and war became something quite limited, robbed of its transformative potential. Whitworth's (2004, 130-1) influential analysis of UNSCR 1325 concludes that the way in which gender mainstreaming has occurred has 'largely emptied gender concerns of their critical content'. She contends that it has been translated into a set of technical issues (such as increasing the number of women military personnel, the inclusion of gender advisors, the use of gender training for peacekeepers, or an increase in the number of times women and gender are mentioned in operation mandates), rather than being used as an analytical tool

to demonstrate how conflicts arise and endure. Numerous studies have repeated the charge since (see for example Charlesworth 2008; Cohn 2008; Shepherd 2008; Willett 2010; Harrington 2011; Olonisakin et al 2011; Pratt and Richter-Devroe 2011; Irvine 2013). The consensus of feminist IR scholars is that the Resolution has done little to transform the way that the international community responds to armed conflict in the way that many feminists had hoped.

UNSCR 1325 has meantime also led to a renewal of the debates around women's military participation. It 'urges the Secretary-General to seek to expand the role and contribution of women in United Nations field-based operations, and especially among military observers, civilian police, human rights and humanitarian personnel.' It is variously claimed that a peacekeeping contingent that includes women as well as men: will be more trusted by the local community; is better equipped to undertake many tasks such as house searches, body searches, working in prisons, providing escorts for victims/witnesses and screening combatants at DDR sites; can better make meaningful contact with local organizations and marginalized groups; can more easily support conflict-affected women who would have difficulty speaking to male personnel; is less likely to have problems with sexual exploitation and abuse; and promotes and encourages the participation of local women and their organisations in post-conflict political processes (Bertolazzi 2010; Bridges and Horsfall 2009; Hendricks and Hutton 2008; Hudson 2004; Kent 2007; Olsson and Tryggestad 2001; UNIFEM and DPKO 2010)

What is of particular interest to note is the novel mix of inclusion and reversal strategies in the arguments justifying the use of women soldiers in peace operations. Rather than equality arguments and reversal arguments informing the two divergent feminist positions of 'right to fight' and 'anti-militarism,' we see elements of both positions being used to promote the use of women soldiers. Alongside the familiar 'sameness' arguments for increasing the number of women soldiers and the posts to which they can apply, there are arguments for women soldiers which draw on ideas associated with 'difference' feminism. That is, in the arguments suggesting women

have particular contribution to make to peace operations, we see a valorisation of alternative ways of soldiering: more collaborative, communicative, and constructive.

It follows that the mix of inclusion and reversal arguments for women soldiers in peace operations brings with it the risks associated with both, conceptually and practically, and with that a doubling of the limitations. Certainly, most of the feminist commentary on the proposition that women peacekeepers offer a solution to (gendered) insecurity and inequalities is scathing. Women's specific contributions are contested both on the empirical level (Olsson et al. 2004; Sion 2009) and, more vigorously, for their implications (Valenius 2007; Jennings 2011; Hudson 2012). As feminists have long pointed out, and as mentioned above, the association of women with peace damages their credibility as actors in matters of international politics and national security. Similarly, arguing that an increase in women soldiers can help eradicate sexual abuse and exploitation is said to be both wrong because there is little evidence for it, and misguided because it arguably makes women soldiers responsible for their male colleagues' behaviour (Olsson et al. 2004; Valenius 2007; Simić 2010).

In addition to these problems, we can identify more general risks associated with strategies of reversal or inclusion, particularly tokenism. The idea that a small number of individuals can challenge an organizational culture such as the military is said to be naïve in the light of scant evidence that the inclusion of a number of women into militaries conducting peace operations has challenged masculinist military cultures and made militaries more democratic or gender sensitive (Hudson 2012). Most problematically of all for many feminists, not only does the inclusion of women fail to challenge the masculine nature of militaries, it does little to challenge the assumptions underpinning the entire endeavour of peace operations, which may also be masculinist and violent. There are quite profound questions about the ways in which peacebuilding as a UN endeavour endorses interventions rooted in politics of liberal internationalism which itself perpetuates the insecurities such interventions are ostensibly promoted as resolving (see, for example, Orford 1999;

Razack 2004; Whitworth 2004; Enloe 2007; Al-Ali and Pratt 2009; Cockburn 2010; Peterson and Runyan 2010; Hudson 2010; Pratt 2013).<sup>viii</sup>

#### **IV Inclusion and Reversal: Hindering or Furthering Transformation?**

To summarise, then, gender mainstreaming, as a way past the conceptual limitations of inclusion or reversal, has been found wanting in its application to military and security contexts. It is seen as collapsing back into inclusion and reversal, and thus combines the limitations of both in a particularly toxic brew of tokenism and essentialism, distracting feminists from transforming society. This raises the question: are inclusion and reversal always so problematic, hindering rather than furthering transformation?

Insights from other contexts may be instructive, given that this dilemma over strategies is far from confined to security contexts. In feminist work on the business world, Charlotte Hooper's (2001) research is suggestive of more potential for policies of inclusion and reversal. Her argument considers the 'New Man' in business contexts, a model of masculinity which incorporates many practices traditionally considered feminine: communication, attention to appearance and detail, compromise, flexibility and so on. The result of this 'reversal' – the revalorisation of feminised practices – is that more women are able to 'fit the bill' (Hooper 2001: 230): more inclusion. Hooper makes clear the necessity for the inclusion of women to take place alongside the valorisation of previously feminised practices. Together they contribute to displacement of gendered hierarchies – challenging what is coded feminine and masculine – and thus to transformation across multiple networks of gendered relationships.

In feminist work in other contexts – for example, on gender-mainstreaming in the European Union, development organisations, and in national parliaments – there is a similar willingness to take the potential of women's inclusion and reversal strategies seriously. Although few studies point to gender-mainstreaming as being fully successful, our point here is that they are more likely to adopt an analytical approach which is open to seeing success (Squires 2005; Walby 2005; True 2003; Rai and

Waylen 2008; Abels and Mushaben 2012). Similarly, in feminist work on gender mainstreaming in other contexts, it is seen as possible and desirable to pursue all three strategies: inclusion, reversal and the displacement of gendered dichotomies associated with the more transformative versions of gender-mainstreaming. Yet when considering military institutions and forces, this possibility seems to be vehemently denied by some: inclusion (of women soldiers, of women at the peace table) and reversal (the valorisation of women's non-violence) are more likely to be considered as problematic, as hindering transformation, because of the way in which they reinforce the binaries which are in need of transformation. Such accounts appear to suggest that the military is unique as an institution.

This approach is quite explicit in the writings of some influential anti-militarist feminists. Enloe, for example, argues that 'the military must not be seen as simply one more institution – like schools or business firms – where women will try to gain access' (Enloe 1982, 331 also see Enloe 2007: 63-92). Similarly, for Peterson and Runyan (2010, 252):

'...adding women to militaries where violence is constitutive raises different issues from adding them to positions of formal political authority. The aggressive and hypermasculinized climate of militaries is particularly hostile to feminized identities and bodies, so that women and feminized men are not and arguably cannot be treated as equal, not matter how well-intentioned individual agents and policies might be.'

Enloe, Peterson and Runyan are careful to make explicit that it is the military focus on violently upholding a patriarchal political-economic order which is problematic. This leaves space for a more optimistic account of the potential for female military personnel to transform militaries if the military role was different. Yet, the emphasis in these writers' words is that militaries are inherently and irredeemably masculinist and violent.

We would agree militaries are different. Militaries are the institutional manifestation of the state-legitimised monopoly on the potential application of violence; no other

institution, except the police and here it is exceptionalised, asks its members to kill and risk being killed. Yet we would argue that militaries both have the capacity for change – the shifts in the ways in which women have been accommodated within armed forces of, for example, Britain is testament to that (see Woodward and Winter, 2007) – but also that they comprise people who just might have an interest in inducing institutional change. This is not to suggest that such transformation is easy. Rather, just as it is true of other institutions such as states, parliaments and international organisations, including those which were said to be irredeemably masculinist in their culture and norms until gains were won by feminist engagement, so it can be for armed forces. In other contexts, the inculcation of change through inclusion and reversal is a primary feminist objective; in the context of militaries, it seems increasingly untenable for feminist arguments to insist that women should remain outside.<sup>ix</sup>

We make these observations not because we wish to denigrate the pioneering work of those working to a feminist anti-militarist politics, but rather because we would argue for a feminist politics that resists determinism and which is committed to change, even where (maybe, particularly where) change might appear least likely. The problem with a deterministic position is that it limits the possibilities for progress, which seems contradictory to a feminist politics motivated by that need for change. This is particularly significant with regard to conceptualising military institutions, which require conceptual approaches of sufficient nuance to understand how, and under what circumstances, they *can* change.

Cynthia Cockburn's theorizing in a totally different context provides us with a framework for thinking through how small changes which seem superficial can lead to more fundamental transformations (Cockburn 1989). Her insights suggest that it is wrong to dismiss small changes in institutions, because there is always the possibility that they can provide the foundation for more revolutionary change. In her study of Equal Opportunities in a retail organization, Cockburn argues that although the short-term aims are the minimizing of bias in recruitment and promotion procedures, 'at its longest, its most ambitious and most progressive it has to be



recognised as being a project of transformation for organisations', because even the short-term agenda 'brings into view the nature and purpose of institutions and the processes by which the power of some groups over others in institutions is built and renewed' (Cockburn 1989: 218). In other words, what might seem like limited progress, or superficial changes, *cannot but* force us to consider the wider issues of the purpose and nature of institutions. Although a passionate anti-militarist herself, her argument in this context indicates that limited changes in militaries could lead to transformation. Other theorists, working from urban inequalities to asylum policies, have made similar claims, formulating a position of 'radical incrementalism' – 'the multiple small revolutions that at unanticipated and unexpected moments galvanize into deeper ruptures that accelerate tectonic shifts of the underlying logics of domination and what is considered possible (Pieterse 2008: 6; Darling, 2014: 84).

## **V Regendered Militaries**

Returning to military contexts, Cockburn's research with Meliha Hubic (2002) with Bosnian women's organisations also concerns how seemingly limited reform can lead to more transformatory change. Their research revealed the extent to which Bosnian women valued the international peacekeepers in their country. When this desire for peacekeeping soldiers was examined further, however, what became clear was that the women welcomed certain aspects of a military presence but not others. The women articulated a complex range of attributes and practices which they wanted to see from a peacekeeping force, including a more gender-conscious policy of recognition and respect, accessibility and communication, co-operation and partnership, sensitivity to local culture and humanity and warmth, along with the military assertiveness required for the tasks of demilitarization, weapons collection, landmine clearance, protection and the arrest of war criminals. As Cockburn and Hubic suggest, then, the request was not for soldiers *per se*; rather, the implicit demand was for a 'regendered notion of the soldier.' They ask:

Can we create a military culture in which democratic equality between individuals is valued, in which authority does not mean tyranny, orders may sometimes be questioned – but one that nonetheless produces soldiers who are effective in facing danger and disarming violence? Can we create a military culture that is respectful of women as people – but (even more difficult) respectful also of things usually associated with femininity, such as domestic life and the nurturing of relationship? Can this military culture respond creatively to soldiers' distress and trauma, not require the suppression of feelings of weakness and fear, allow for the exploration of values and choices? Can it allow for bonding between men that is not based on the rejection, diminishing and abuse of women and femininity? Or predicated on the despising of less militarized forms of masculinity? (Cockburn and Hubic 2002: 117–118)<sup>x</sup>

The first point to note about this vision for a 'regendered military' is that it describes an institution where gender has been mainstreamed in a transformative sense. This is important to note, given the critiques cited above of the outcomes of UNSCR 1325, and the much more limited approach to gender mainstreaming found therein. This is what gender mainstreaming could look like. A regendered soldier assumes a peacebuilder identity which is equally open to women and men, which equally values 'masculine' and 'feminine' traits so much so that they cease to be masculine and feminine. In such a military, soldiering is not a masculine identity, but becomes much more fluid, and is constructed through relations of equality, empathy, care, respect and recognition of similarities and shared experiences. The displacement of gendered dichotomies is immediately recognisable in this conceptualisation. Not only are the meanings of masculinity and femininity questioned, but so is the valuing of masculinity over femininity and therefore the hierarchical thinking and material domination which has characterized gender relations.

The second point to note is that achieving regendered militaries appears to involve all three feminist strategies which we have identified above – inclusion, reversal and displacement. Cockburn and Hubic are clear that central to their vision of a

regendered military is an increase in women soldiers. They do not base their arguments on equality and/or difference, but on the potential of women's bodies to disrupt dominant norms. A regendered military is not one in which women do the 'womanly stuff' and men 'act tough,' 'because if we wish to change male cultures for the better we should not exempt women from, and load exclusively onto men, responsibility for wielding just and necessary violence' (Cockburn and Hubic 2002: 116). Just as Hooper concluded, they argue female bodies need to be involved in 'masculine' activities in order to begin the process of destabilizing their definition as masculine (for similar arguments in a military context see Kronsell 2006; Woodward and Winter 2007; Basham 2012). The inclusion of women is necessary but not sufficient, however. Reversal, the revaluation of practices previously feminised, such as empathy, care and cooperation, is also required. Together they contribute to displacement.

The phrase 'regendering' to us captures the idea that, for us, the feminist goal is not necessarily to go beyond gender, but is to go beyond gender as we currently know it, as a hierarchical structure of power. We think 'regendering' is more useful than 'degendering', because regardless of any transformation in the military as an institution, there still will be bodily performances.<sup>xi</sup> Regendering thus captures what we see as an important feminist goal: a variety of bodily performances, without *one* category – that associated with a particular form of masculinity – valued over all others (Butler 1990; 1994).

Of course, there are some feminists for whom militaries will always be obstacles to peace. These feminists insist we remain alert to the origins of militaries as the state-legitimized perpetrators of lethal force, arguing this means violence is their very *raison d'être*. For such feminists, any shift from a focus on *eradicating* militaries towards *reforming* them represents capitulation or co-option. Post-colonial feminists (see for example Razack 2004) are also troubled by the line used by many who defend the role of militaries in peacebuilding: 'as long as there are bad men with guns, there is a need for good people with guns,' arguing that this plays into racist discourses that the sources of violence are 'dangerous brown men' from the global

south. This narrative, whereby soldiers from ‘more civilized’ nations have to ‘save brown women from brown men’ (Spivak 1994) ignores the role of colonialism, Cold War rivalries and neoliberal globalization in causing insecurity and violence in the global South.

We understand these concerns, yet there seems to us to be several good reasons why it is important to retain an analytical framework which is open to the idea that militaries are important contributors to peace. First, *contra* the anti-militarist feminists who argue that violence is the *raison d’être* of militaries, making them uniquely toxic, it could be contended that militaries’ main purpose is *security*. This subtle shift opens the door to a less determinist approach to the gender-military nexus. Security can be defined in many ways – from the traditional understanding of a state using force to ensure its survival in a hostile world, to ‘human security’, which stresses the importance of individuals feeling secure not just from physical violence but from the structural violence of poverty and inequality too. Indeed, feminists have devoted much energy to reformulating the concept of security, and feminist formulations cohere with human security in many ways (Tickner 1992; 2001; Hudson 2005; Tripp, Ferree and Ewig 2013). Thus we maintain that, to the extent that militaries are shifting towards a focus on facilitating human security, which some are or have been (Elliot and Cheeseman 2004; Kaldor 2012; Curran 2013), then we should seek engagement and reform, rather than eradication.

Moreover, whilst post-colonial feminists have good reason to be troubled by any justification of military intervention which reinforces narratives of ‘white knights in dark lands’ (Razack 2004), it is nonetheless hard to suggest alternative ways to protect civilians and refugees, to arrest war criminals, to safeguard the distribution of aid, and so on, in situations such as Assad’s Syria, Charles Taylor’s Liberia or Taliban/Northern Alliance terrorised Afghanistan. And whilst an intervening military on a peace operation *risks* reinforcing that narrative, it does not *necessitate* it.

We also think it important to recognise that militaries are not going to disappear any time soon. Whilst it remains important to work towards demilitarisation in some contexts – as not all situations require a military response – we believe that there

are situations in which militaries are the only organisations that can facilitate security. We likewise believe that there are military personnel who are committed to a vision of militaries which prioritise human security, and see the potential for ‘radical incrementalism’ in their efforts to deliver, for example, gender and conflict resolution training (see Curran 2013; Knell, Grimes and McCourt 2014). As such, we do not think it is defeatist to push for reform rather than eradication of militaries.

Of course, the creation of regendered militaries cannot on its own transform the neoliberal underpinnings of peace operations, the key problem for many feminists. Nevertheless, this does not mean that transformed and transforming militaries count for nothing. Picking up on our point above, it is possible for militaries to intervene in ways which do not reinforce civilizational narratives but which facilitate human security, if they focus on partnering with local populations (Kaldor 2012; Duncanson 2013). Building relationships with local populations is a crucial feature of Cockburn and Hubic’s vision for regendered militaries. Partnership, including building capacity and forging transnational links, can lead to the strengthening of civil society, which is necessary for holding international and domestic elites to account – arguably a crucial ingredient in any challenge to the neoliberal agenda which undermines security for the majority. What is more immediately obvious to us, though, is that feminist scholarship needs a framework which is *open* to militaries being regendered ‘forces for good’, so that we can interrogate this proposition in different contexts.

## **VI The regendered military: a research and conceptual agenda**

If the purpose of theorizing is to help formulate the questions we ask of social phenomena, then it is important to consider the research and conceptual agendas suggested by such a framework – one that engages with militaries whilst remaining alert and contributory to feminist goals of gender equality, peace and justice. Here we outline three key overlapping areas which could constitute such a research agenda and elucidate their contribution to key debates.

The first of these involves paying close attention to empirical evidence around the numbers and proportion of women personnel employed and deployed by armed forces. This means engaging with some seemingly prosaic questions about the recruitment, retention and promotion of women personnel, in the context of wider personnel strategies for armed forces, and still wider labour markets and social understanding of armed forces. What factors promote or inhibit women's military participation? Such questions have informed the work of many military sociologists and others, feminist and non-, for many years. Less attention has been given, however, to the specific question of the extent to which the participation of women furthers or hinders the displacement of gendered dichotomies and thus more transformative change to military institutions and their activities. We are not arguing for a-theoretical empiricism, but rather for a conceptually informed exploration of empirical detail in order to establish how, in practice, transformatory change might work. There is potential for the closer application of key concepts in feminist political science – concepts of presence, process and voice (Phillips 1995). When does women's *presence* translate into *processes* which tackle gendered inequalities and contribute to the transformation of the institution? Can military women use their *voice*? In other words, there is a need for scholarship on the gender-military nexus to engage with *when* and *how* the participation of military women leads to transformation, and equally, the circumstances when it does not, or even incurs backlash.

Drawing on feminist post-structuralist theorising of gender as performative, which foregrounds individuals' understandings of themselves, institutions and possibilities for change, the second research agenda focuses on whether shifts in soldiers' and wider militaries' self-understandings can be identified, along the lines suggested by Cockburn and Hubic's regendered militaries, as militaries engage in peace operations. Research on military personnel's self-understandings in terms of both their gendered subjectivities and their positions within gendered organisations (see, for example, Duncanson 2013), coheres well with International Relations' and critical geopolitics' increasing concern with the experience of security and insecurity at

scales from the global to the personal and embodied (Dowler and Sharp 2001; Hyndman 2001; 2004; Sylvester 2012). Work on the integration of women in direct combat roles, or the conceptualisation of unit cohesion as task rather than social cohesion (King 2013b; King 2013a), or understandings of military identities as professionalized consequences of social action, rather than the consequences of social identification (Woodward and Jenkins 2011), or the complex patterns of resistance and compliance amongst female and LGBTQ personnel (Sasson-Levy 2003; Bulmer 2013) indicates some of the routes such scholarship is taking.

A research agenda open to identifying transformation also needs to be attentive to the wider military context, our third suggested area of focus. This includes the extent to which the trend towards focus on peace operations is likely to continue amongst western state militaries. It also includes shifts in personnel strategies. In the UK context, such shifts have entailed a reduction in full-time regular forces and increase in demand for reservists, the disbanding of centuries-old regiments, and a renewed focus on soldiering as a professionalised occupation complete with a conceptualisation of the transferable skills this entails. Such transformations, as King (2013b) notes, inevitably entail reconsideration of gender roles, conceptualisations and relations within armed forces. The key research agenda here is to interrogate the implications of some of the contextual shifts – such as transitions from conscription to volunteer forces, or the rise in PTSD – for regendering militaries.

Such overlapping research agendas will contribute to several important debates. They open the door for feminist scholarship on militaries to make important contributions to ongoing debates about institutional change (Krook and Mackay, 2012). Building on the important work of Helena Carreiras (2006) and others, we need more scholarship which can further our understanding of how and where the inclusion of women moves beyond tokenism and backlash in a military context. The military, with its continued slow gradual increase in number of women and the mixed picture of progress (opening of more roles, respect for women on the basis of professionalism) and backlash (rates of sexual harassment and violence), offers a fascinating case – the hard case – for testing theories of institutional change.

The regendered militaries research agenda also has the potential to provide a more informed debate about the pros and cons of 'boots on the ground' in current and future contexts of mass human rights violations, genocide and war. If we know more about the ability of soldiers to be empathetic, responsive and collaborative, this would make a difference to our assessment of the rights and wrongs of military intervention. This research agenda could also contribute to feminist reconceptualisations of security, through empirical work with men and women in conflict contexts as to how they define security and how they think it can be realised. Do they value intervening soldiers? In what ways? To do what?

Finally, the idea of a regendered military has purchase beyond the immediacies of the institution and its personnel. The archetypes of 'Just Warrior' and 'Beautiful Soul', for instance, forged in wartime (see Elshtain 1982), have continuing power to shape civilian ideas of appropriate masculinity and femininity. Given the importance of militaries in constructing gender, and in contributing to security, the task of understanding and advocating for the regendered military is arguably a social and feminist responsibility.



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<sup>i</sup> Our focus is on western state militaries. Although non-state armed groups and non-western state militaries are also important contexts in which to study the participation of women, they are beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>ii</sup> There is extensive debate as to the precise definition of each type of operation, and the extent to which national militaries have shifted to focus on them. The nuances of this debate is not our focus here. We do assume, however, a broad sense of transformation in advanced capitalist armed forces such that exclusively combat-associated activities are seen as only a part of what armed forces now do, a significant shift from the 1980s when the focus was on large-scale combat operations (or nuclear war, if we were really unlucky).

<sup>iii</sup> We also acknowledge that there is extensive debate as to the precise nature of the operation in Afghanistan. We acknowledge that it has often involved traditional war-fighting and counterinsurgency, but we also maintain that it has involved elements of peacebuilding, both on the ground and in the ways in which the operation has been justified by NATO militaries.

<sup>iv</sup> This is not a universally accepted conceptualisation of gender-mainstreaming, but one we argue for, drawing on the work of Judith Squires (2005), in section II below.

<sup>v</sup> Also see Bulmer (2013) which, though focusing more directly on sexualities than gender, makes sophisticated arguments about the way in which gender norms in the military are both unstable and resilient.

<sup>vi</sup> The UN definition states that: 'Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that men and women

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benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.’ (United Nations 1997).

<sup>vii</sup> Although see Cohn 2008 for detailed discussion of the range of motivations – some more transformative than others – held by the different NGOs involved in advocating for 1325.

<sup>viii</sup> For Sandra Whitworth, for instance, the key question is ‘whether the United Nations and its member states ever could provide anything more than technical fixes’ in a context ‘that privileges the idea of liberal internationalism as an always benign and humanitarian endeavour’ (Whitworth 2004). Many feminists argue peace operations ignore the legacies of colonialism and the Cold War, the arms trade and the impact of neoliberal globalization in causing and perpetuating insecurity and conflict. Indeed, they present neoliberal reforms as the solution, disregarding the evidence that such policies tend to concentrate wealth and power into the hands of the few, undermining peace and justice (Paris 2004; Klein 2008; Pugh et al 2008; Cramer 2010).

<sup>ix</sup> Moreover, there is congruence between these feminist arguments and those propounded by conservative militarists about military specificity. In the case of the latter, evident for example in policy briefings and commentaries on diversity in the British armed forces, a discourse is frequently articulated around the idea of military forces as different, and as necessarily so, on the basis of their state-legitimized role in the execution of lethal violence. This translates readily into a range of arguments about the necessity of institutional resistance to the input (whether in ideas, or in bodies) from anyone who does not fit a defined ‘norm’ as a legitimate commentator or participant, with legitimacy conferred by a fairly predictable collection of identity attributes based on gender, ethnicity, social class and sexuality (Dandeker 2000). There is something quite instructional in thinking about how a feminist politics can align so neatly with a conservative masculinist position.

<sup>x</sup> Laura Sjoberg (2010: 68) covers similar imaginative terrain when she writes: “Perhaps it is time to ask what a ‘gender mainstreamed’ experience for female soldiers would look like, rather than what it looks like when women are added to militaries with pre-existing value structures biased towards men, masculine ways of thinking, and traits associated with masculinity.”

<sup>xi</sup> As such, this is a different usage of the term than that deployed by Sasson-Levy and Amram-Katz (2007) in which they use ‘degendered’ as the signifier of progress, and ‘regendered’ as the reinscription of old gender hierarchies.