

## Review - Gender, Sex and the Postnational Defence

Written by Katharine Wright

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

# Review - Gender, Sex and the Postnational Defence

<https://www.e-ir.info/2012/09/29/review-gender-sex-and-the-postnational-defence/>

KATHARINE WRIGHT, SEP 29 2012

Gender, Sex and the Postnational Defence: Militarism and Peacekeeping

By: Annica Kronsell

Oxford: Oxford University Press

In *Gender, Sex and the Postnational Defence*, Annica Kronsell asks 'what role does gender and sex play in the postnational defence?'. Kronsell examines how gender has influenced military organisations engaged in postnational defence by taking a constructivist approach to gender. The book examines the cases of the EU and Sweden; draws on Sweden's role in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan; and the EU's Nordic Battlegroup. In doing so this book challenges an assumption that gender mainstreaming is more achievable than gender parity in military organisations.

In the first chapter 'Mother, Soldiers, and Nations in the 'Neutral' Defense' Kronsell outlines how Sweden's military has contributed to the construction of a gendered national identity and citizenship through both conscription and voluntary defense organisations. Kronsell draws out the striking gender dichotomy reflected across nations and time in which 'the mother and the conscripted soldier have two distinct but complementary roles' [pp.19]. In the case of Sweden collective and individual identities were co-constituted, with the individual feeling a sense of duty to the state

## Review - Gender, Sex and the Postnational Defence

Written by Katharine Wright

and this formed the basis of the Swedish welfare state or *folkhemmet* [pp.24]. The symbolic representation of gender dichotomies in Sweden has served to influence individual subjectivities making it difficult for a soldier not to be a man, or conversely for a woman to express a desire to become a soldier. Despite the neutral status of Sweden, militarism spread throughout society, through both conscription and voluntary defence organisations, connecting militarism to everyday life.

The military is an institution which can easily embody hegemonic masculinity because it has the potential to influence both materially and normatively. The military has a monopoly on the use of force and this 'requires a consensual understanding that this is the way things should be done' [pp.44]. The hegemonic masculinity found in militaries is unique to security, defence and military practices and becomes something which is aspired to. Interestingly this is still the case in Sweden, despite the fact that Sweden has not been engaged in a war for more than two decades, and this is expressed through the large market for war literature. Kronsell goes on to examine the impact of female recruits on the Swedish military from the perspective of the female recruit. In doing so she uncovers the difficulties they face in performing their gender. Female recruits must avoid being labelled 'feminist' and can experience favouritism if they are perceived as a 'weak girl' [pp.52]. Yet if these female recruits perform a role as 'manly women', threatening the hegemonic masculinity associated with the military by becoming more like a 'normal soldier', they will not be accepted. Female recruits continue to remain vulnerable to sexual harassment because of the pressure men face in organisations of hegemonic masculinity to demonstrate their sexuality and conform to the accepted construction of masculinity. This section makes a crucial contribution outlining how both sexuality and gender has become an organisational resource.

The postnational defense has revolutionised the relationship between security politics and the military, and including cosmopolitan ideals suggests that it is possible for the military to be denationalised and democratised. In this sense the case of Sweden is an important one to examine, at the end of the Cold War and with the opportunity to develop a postnational defense Sweden reevaluated its neutrality. Neutrality was strongly embedded in Sweden's national identity and so it was necessary to reconstruct this identity to encompass a cosmopolitan postnational outlook. Sweden's defence can be characterised as denationalised because Sweden has an internationalist outlook which is grounded in social democratic ideals common in Scandinavian countries. As such Sweden's cosmopolitan agenda means that Sweden's military is engaged in tasks beyond the traditional remit of military organisations, including peace-promotion roles beyond Sweden's borders. Kronsell then seeks to assess whether a cosmopolitan military which is less militarised and less nationalised, is also as a result less masculinised. The answer is that a less masculinised military will not be fully realised because of the paradox at the heart of militaries performing cosmopolitan peacekeeping roles, benign altruism is fundamentally at odds with the purpose for which militaries were created to perform. Further than this, there is a discrepancy between soldiers trained to kill and the role they are required to perform in peacekeeping roles. As a result postnational militaries must go through transformative changes in order to perform the roles required of them, including setting a positive example by supporting democratic values, the rule of law and human rights. The Swedish military has been active in articulating these values and their proactive implementation of UN SCR 1325 has played a crucial role in this.

An analysis of UN SCR 1325 is a necessary component of any assessment of the place of gender and sex in postnational defense. Kronsell exposes an unintended consequence of the Resolution's implementation, which is the articulation of alternative masculinities because identity construction was not a target of gender training because of a perception that it was purely a cultural issue. This draws attention to the interrelation of gender, sexuality and cultural identity. In contrast to this positive transformative effect, the application of UN SCR 1325 in the ISAF mission has resulted in the reinforcement of the 'just warrior' 'beautiful soul' narrative. The most prominent message peacekeepers took away from gender awareness training was that male soldiers should not look at or address Afghan women. Kronsell wonders whether this is because the message speaks directly to the chivalrous image of men as protectors.

Kronsell examines sexual misconduct in peacekeeping and argues that sexual relations between peacekeepers and local women and girls should be characterised as 'survival sex' because this provides an opportunity for the women and girls to pursue a different life. In doing so Kronsell touches on a flaw in UN SCR 1325 which presents women as victims rather than agents and this means the Resolution struggles as a tool to address sexual misconduct by

## **Review - Gender, Sex and the Postnational Defence**

Written by Katharine Wright

peacekeepers. The UN fails to acknowledge the agency of local women in issues concerning the sexual misconduct of peacekeepers and has individualised responsibility to avoid undermining the reputation of UN peacekeeping. 'Survival sex' perpetuates cultural and economic inequalities between peacekeepers and locals and has a lasting effect long after the peacekeepers have left, often transforming into sex tourism.

Increasing the number of women peacekeepers is perceived as the solution to sexual misconduct in peacekeeping. This places a burden on women to restore legitimacy to the military. It is also an unachievable aspiration given that only 2% of peacekeepers globally are women. In addition Kronsell questions whether increasing the number of women as peacekeepers can have a transformative effect on peacekeeping, given that the research on female military recruits suggests that women are more likely to conform to military values rather than actively challenge them. An essentialised view of women also causes problems, for instance in the Swedish military gender difference has been articulated to frame women as a resource to use.

In the final chapter Kronsell examines 'Defense and the Military Governance in the European Union'. The EU encapsulates the idea of the post-national defense with ESDP, the EU Military Committee (EUMC) and the European Defence Agency. Member states assume defence responsibilities for each other and can respond to challenges to security beyond EU borders with the EU Battlegroups, which focus on tasks including peace enforcement, crisis management and peacebuilding. The 'EU is a civilian and normative power' (Manners, 2002) in international relations and as such this could be expected to impact upon the emergence of ESDP and EU military activities. To establish if this is the case, Kronsell asks if democratic values, including gender norms, have been included in ESDP? If they had, this new type of defensive organisation would be less militaristic and unburdened by the 'pervasive link between national militaries, hegemonic masculinity, and defence practice'. Yet, the expectation that the EU would escape these limitations has not been realised and Kronsell asks 'why so difficult to 'add women and stir'? The formation of ESDP by the EU offered the opportunity to form a new type of military. However, these aspirations have fallen short with Catherine Ashton the only prominent women involved with ESDP.

Historically militaries have legitimated masculinity and as a result men are promoted as leaders. The EU's history as a civilian power has not overcome the history embodied in member states militaries which are dominated by men. The worst member states are Finland and Poland whose militaries are 99% male and the best are Hungary and Latvia with 80% and 83% respectively, illustrating just how far there is to left travel to achieve gender parity within militaries. The gender gap increases further when militaries take on missions abroad. Kronsell is critical of a Council of Europe Report from 2008 which states that this is because women are reluctant to leave home. In drawing attention to the case of Sweden, which bucks this trend (women make up 4.5% of national armed forces and 10% in missions abroad), it is clear that systemic forces are holding women back, not their own desire to stay at home. This gender imbalance within EU member states national militaries explains the gender gap in EU missions. Further than this NATO's statistics show that it is not possible for women to become generals or serve on submarines in certain member states and that others (including France and Britain) exclude women from active combat. This impacts on the opportunities for women to pursue careers in the militaries and drastically reduces the likelihood that they will be appointed as High Commanders or representatives in the EUMC. ESDP has not been able to enact transformative change on member states militaries because the gender order was not questioned when ESDP was created, the result is that ESDP reproduces established gender hierarchies. Security and defence and gender studies have long assumed that gender parity is more attainable than gender mainstreaming. Kronsell contradicts established literature by arguing that gender mainstreaming is a more achievable goal than gender parity.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

Throughout this book Kronsell provides a thorough and indepth analysis, as such there are only two very minor areas which would have benefited from further analysis. The first is that although the book draws attention to the increase in the gender gap when militaries engage in missions abroad, Kronsell does not seek to address why states may be more reluctant to send women on international missions and to explicitly examine why Sweden bucks this trend. This would have been an interesting issue to unpack further in this section. The second is in the analysis of gender and peacekeeping, although the section does outline a multitude of reasons why sexual misconduct continues to hinder peacekeeping efforts, Kronsell does not touch on the fact that the states which provide the most peacekeeping

## Review - Gender, Sex and the Postnational Defence

Written by Katharine Wright

troops to the UN have not signed up to UN SCR 1325. This would have added an additional dimension to the analysis and drawn attention to the question over the effectiveness of UN SCR 1325 as transformative tool.

This book makes a valuable contribution to the seminal literature on gender and the military by unpacking how hegemonic masculinity becomes embedded in military organisations and the difficulties in enacting transformative change on such organisations. In this respect Kronsell's decision to focus on the case of Sweden is particularly important because although Sweden is pursuing a cosmopolitan postnational agenda under which it has actively implemented UN SCR 1325, the Swedish military has struggled to transform military processes and has failed to relinquish itself from the grasp of hegemonic masculinity. Kronsell identifies why it is so difficult to achieve gender parity at the EU level and this is because of the historically embedded gender dichotomies within member states. ESDP had the potential to overcome the association of hegemonic masculinity with military organisations but because gender was not considered from the outset, member states practices have trickled up and this opportunity has been lost. Transformative change is an ongoing process which requires that gender mainstreaming accompanies moves towards gender parity. Gender mainstreaming poses a direct challenges to hegemonic masculinity found in military organisations and this is central to Kronsell's contention that gender parity is more achievable than gender mainstreaming in military organisations.

—

**Katharine Wright** is a Doctoral Candidate in the School of Politics, University of Surrey. She is currently working on her PhD Thesis entitled 'NATO's Implementation of UN SCR 1325: For Effect or Effectiveness?'. Her research interests include Gender, Security and Feminist approaches to IR.

---

### About the author:

Dr Katharine A. M. Wright is a Senior Lecturer in International Politics at Newcastle University and Chair of the International Studies Association (ISA) Committee on the Status of Women. Her research centres broadly around gender and security in institutional settings including NATO and the EU. She is co-author of *NATO, Gender and the Military: Women Organising from Within*. She has also published (with Dr Toni Haastrup and Professor Roberta Guerrina) on the gendered and racialised impact of Covid-19 on Politics and International Relations in *Gender, Work and Organisation* [Open Access]. She tweets @KAMWright.