

TALLINN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES
Department of Anthropology

Helga Johanna Leppoja

EXPLORING WOMEN AND FEMININITY IN WARFARE
Bachelor Thesis

Supervisor: PhD Eeva Kesküla

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Helga Johanna Leppoja

Abstract

This thesis explores women and femininity in warfare, gender dynamics between femininity and masculinity in the context of war and military. This exploration centres particularly around female soldiers and how they are perceived by society and cultural gender constructs. The objectives of this work are: to look at the boundaries of femininity and masculinity and how do they change; to investigate how a female soldier is constructed socially and culturally; and attempt to find out why does the notion of a female soldier seems unsettling and bother some groups of people. In approaching these questions, first a framework of reference is established based on the works of anthropologists, most notably feminist studies, and sociologists about gender and gender dynamics. Then. Then using this framework I examine two ethnographic cases about female soldiers. The case studies present the female soldier as inhabiting an intermediary position in relation to femininity and masculinity in military as well as in the dynamic between soldier and civilian.

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Introduction

For centuries the roles on men and women in society have been subject to cultural notions about gender. Their opportunities and restrictions determined largely by social constructs about gender, with them sometimes operating in completely separate societal spheres with separate duties deemed appropriate for their gender. One interesting area that is very often associated with only one gender is warfare. Warfare have been regarded throughout most of history and cross-culturally as a domain exclusive to men, one might even say a hypermasculine field. It is often seen as direct contradiction to deals with everything feminine as it deals with the likes of violence, aggression, and danger. From a man it requires bravery, discipline, and self-sacrifice, thus it is not surprising that war and becoming a soldier would be regarded as a “test of manhood”. Women are usually considered as passive actors in warfare, serving at most a symbolic purpose – both in terms of soldiers protecting their own women and conquering the women of the enemy.

Yet for a field seemingly so thoroughly masculine, the presence of women is still found. The notion of women in active roles in warfare as warriors dates back thousands of years and is found in all across the world. Ancient Greeks had numerous tales about the Amazons, a fierce tribe of all-female warrior tribe. Or in China the ballad of Hua Mulan about a legendary folk heroine. While many examples of female warriors originate from myths and legends, there is also archaeological and ethnographical evidence, such as about *onna-bugeisha* or female samurai in Japan or the so-called Dahomey Amazons in the pre-colonial African kingdom of Dahomey located in modern-day Benin. Even so women warriors are usually regard as more fictitious than factual.

In modern times we have seen the emergence of women in militaries and combat roles providing us with an unmediated opportunity to observe women as soldiers, a role that is still widely considered strange, in not inappropriate for them. To better understand their positioning in society I will be exploring three main questions. Firstly, what are boundaries of femininity and masculinity and how do they change during peace and wartime. Secondly, how is a female soldier socially and culturally constructed. And lastly, using data gathered from previous questions, why does the notion of a female soldier seem unsettling and bother some groups people.

As my methods I will be first establish a theoretic framework needed to approach these questions and then look at concrete ethnographic cases to search for answers to my questions and in hopes to find the underlying patterns about female soldiers.

Methods

For the providing of a theoretical framework, I have chosen several classic works in feminist anthropology to, as well as sociological works to aid me in laying down the basics about gender in socio-cultural context.

Having established my framework, I will be moving on to concrete ethnographic case studies. I have chosen two ethnographic cases from *War and Women across Continents: Autobiographical and Biographical Experienced* edited by Shirley Ardener, Fiona Armitage-Woodward and Lidia Dina Sciama, which consists of women's experiences with war from all over the world from World War II to modern day.

The first case I chose is "Rwandan Women at War: Fighting for the Rwandan Patriotic Front (1990–1994)" by Hannah Spens-Black. This case is an account about the experiences of a group of women who took part in Rwandan Civil War based on the interview the author conducted in 2013 in Rwanda.

The second case is "Military Masculinities and Counter-insurgency Theory and Practice in Afghanistan: An Uneasy Relationship?" by Major Rachel Grimes who served in Afghanistan in UK army. The case details NATO's activity in Afghanistan and examines the tensions between counter-insurgency and conventional warfare as well as masculinity and femininity based on the author's experiences and observations.

1. What is Femininity?

Before we can start investigating the dynamics of women and femininity in warfare and why femininity and war are seemingly mutually exclusive categories directly in contrast with each other, we need to lay down what exactly do we mean by *femininity*.

In order to understand how we should define *femininity*, we ought to first establish the framework within which this topic can be explored in a coherent manner. First and foremost, we need to differentiate between *sex* and *gender*. *Sex* refers to the biological specificities that allow us to categorize an individual as male or female and so, in short, sex is biology, something we are born with. It is important to note that in reality sex is not quite as binary as either male or female, however, since intersex is an extensive topic on its own, for brevity's sake I will not be delving into it in this paper. Now, as opposed to sex, gender is “the site where rudimentary bodily characteristics of sex [are] framed in cultural terms, endowed with meaning” (Lewin 2006: 12). Essentially, females are turned into women and males are turned into men by culture (the term “culture” is used to refer to an extra-individual sphere).

Femininity is defined by Cambridge English Dictionary as “the fact or quality of having characteristics that are traditionally thought to be typical of or suitable for a woman” and by Merriam-Webster as “the quality or nature of the female sex; the quality, state, or degree of being feminine or womanly.” Both of these definitions refer to specifying the essence of woman. Where they are lacking is in their failure to take into account cultural context, so I would suggest a more accurate (and anthropological) explanation with femininity referring to specifying the essence of woman *as perceived by culture*. Since each culture has their own version or even multiple versions of femininity, we cannot formulate a universally applicable description of these characteristics. There is, however, considerable overlap. I will also note that this paper will be examining the construct of gender mainly derived from Western ideas.

In order to properly investigate femininity, we need to also consider masculinity. Neither femininity nor masculinity exist in a vacuum where they can be fully explored and understood without examining how they relate to each other. Not only does culture determine the social characteristics and conduct based on gender, but also and perhaps more importantly the social dynamics between men and women in society, laying out the ideal relationship between genders. This is reflected in all of parts of society as well as responses in various states of affairs,

including warfare. And as such, gender asymmetry between men and women, masculinity and femininity becomes an aspect of that relationship which is simply impossible to ignore due to it manifesting cross-culturally and across history. Exploring this will hopefully help us in finding out why does the existence of women in warfare seem to upset cultural norms and boundaries almost universally.

1.1 Constructing Femininity and Gender Asymmetry

Having established that femininity is a cultural construct, it is time to examine *how* is it constructed and what is its relationship with masculinity. While every culture has their own ideas about feminine, as well as masculine ideals, there are certain core concepts about femininity that appear to be cross-cultural. One of these core concepts, and perhaps the most important one, would be motherhood – childbirth and child-rearing. There is no society where child-rearing is primarily considered to be the responsibility of men (Brown 1970/2006: 67). This, in turn, brings us to the division of labour, arguably the first and most clearly observable way that gender manifests and differentiates between men and women in society. According to Judith K. Brown the division of labour is universal, yet how that division manifests can vary significantly. Child-rearing relegates women primarily to the domestic sphere. Several explanations throughout history have been offered to explain division of labour, such as by those who argue that women are physiologically and mentally better suited for monotonous and less physically demanding chores than men. This is often attributed to women's perceived docility and bodily weakness compared to men, though such explanations are refuted by empirical data, as there are numerous examples of societies where women perform hard labour. In some societies, women provide most of subsistence, in others barely if any at all. (ibid: 66-67) Brown states that all this depends on the nature of major subsistence activity and how compatible is it with the demands of childcare (ibid: 68, 70) and I believe the same can be applied for any activity outside of childcare.

Simply examining division of labour to understand femininity and gender in general alone is not enough, however, as it is only one manifestation of gender and an external one at that. Investigating femininity and gender woven into the inner fabric of society requires delving

into cultural symbols. Again, we are approaching dangerous waters of generalization and oversimplifying as we are dealing in broad terms.

Sherry B. Ortner considers women's secondary status compared to their male counterparts to be a universal pan-cultural phenomenon, one of the few true universals, even if the ways this gender asymmetry manifests itself can vary enormously from culture to culture. (1974/2006: 72) Ortner attempts to expose the underlying logic of cultural thinking that presupposes women's inferiority. Ortner goes on to explain that at the core of this logic lies the belief that identifies women with something that is devalued in every culture. That something being "nature" in the most generalized sense. Speaking broadly, we can consider culture to be the notion of human consciousness or the products of human consciousness, that is systems of thought and technology, that are used by humanity in attempt to assert control over nature. The opposition between culture and nature differs from culture to culture, and in the case of indigenous (some or all) cultures, the distinction might not be made at all. But Ortner maintains that the universality still holds true because of rituals to exert control over nature/world by trying to influence and regulate natural phenomena (regulating or sustaining what they see as order). (ibid: 75) Ortner does not equate men to culture and women to nature as such a claim would be much too oversimplified. Instead, women are seen as being "closer" to nature or "less transcendental" of it (ibid: 76). Ortner breaks this reasoning down to three different aspects, all entwined with each other. The same underlying threads of logic of these aspects that Ortner presents can also be observed in discourses (both modern and historical) seeking to deny or at the very least restrict women's opportunity to take part in warfare.

First, the body and its functions: woman's physiology entails greater involvement in the natural functions of reproduction and makes her seemingly more part of nature than man is (ibid: 78). Second, social roles: woman's body and its functions place her place her social roles considered lower in cultural process. Women are much more confined to the domestic context due to, as Ortner puts it, her lactation process (which is directly linked with pregnancy and raising offspring of a species as new-born babies at that stage cannot survive without breast milk or some similar formula). A woman is supposed to look after children and most of her activities are connected to child-rearing (a situation that often serves to make her more childlike herself). Women are confined to the domestic sphere – "a woman's place is home" – therefore also creating the perceived opposition of domestic and public sphere, the latter being more associated

with being man's domain. (ibid: 78-79) Third, psychic structure: woman's traditional social roles, imposed of her body and its functions, in turn give her a different psychic structure. Emotionality and irrationality are often suggested to be the dominant and universal aspects of the female psyche. This notion is, however, confronted by the existence of various different traditions in different parts of the world in which women are both functionally and seen as being more pragmatic, practical, and this-worldly than men (ibid: 80). One relevant dimension that does seem pan-culturally applicable is that of relative concreteness vs. relative abstractness: the feminine personality tends to be involved with concrete feelings, things, and people, rather than with abstract entities; it tends toward personalism and particularism. (ibid: 80-81) All of this place women at a position of intermediacy between nature and culture, a sort of "middle status" in the hierarchy between the two. The mediation also accounts not only for her lower status but for the greater restrictions placed upon her activities – permissible sexual activities, smaller range of role choices, far more limited range of access to social institutions; she is also socialized to have a narrower and generally more conservative set of attitudes and views than man. (ibid: 82-83) Ortner concludes that all this is a construct of culture, not a fact of life or nature, as in reality, women are neither closer to nor further from nature than men (ibid: 84).

While Ortner paper has received plenty of criticism, and rightfully so, she does, however, provide a sound outline for the basic associations about women.

I am reminded of Rayna R. Reiter (now Rapp) laid out the basic problem of male bias in anthropology and the lack of ethnographic material that would properly document women's social and cultural contributions. She also cautioned against pitfalls of what she called "double male bias", meaning that the scholar's own culture conditions their ability to comprehend what they see in their research and which leads them to assume male dominance in the cultures they study (Lewin 2006: 11). If we look for some specific occurrence or correlation in our anthropological research, we will likely find it (or at least think we do). Not every gender difference needs necessarily to be framed in hierarchical manner which sees masculine traits as superior to feminine ones. In history as well as earlier ethnographies women were not in general considered to be particularly important or influential actors in society and did not receive much attention in documentation. And so, regarding war, as well as any other labour effort, women's contribution has often been neglected or not written about, as revealed, for example, in ethnographic studies revisiting sites of previous works.

1.2 A “Natural” Opposition?

Even though there is an average difference on a variety of traits between males and females, the range of variation of these traits shows substantial overlap. For example, while men are on average taller than women, but there will always be some women who are taller than some men. (Rubin 1975/2006: 94) Or another example, that men on average are considered to be more impulsive than women and women more cautious than men. Again, there will always be some women who are more impulsive than some men and some men who are more cautious than some women. So, the idea of men and women being two mutually exclusive categories must originate from something other than a “natural” opposition, as no such opposition exists in reality (ibid). Exclusive gender identity is not at all an expression of natural differences but the suppression of natural similarities because it requires repression: in men, of the local cultural version of “feminine” traits; and in women the local cultural variant of “masculine” traits. (ibid: 94-95) This sort of act of repression benefits no one, neither men nor women. Whatever differences there might be between males and females, I believe that they are vastly outweighed by the shared similitudes they have in common. Which is why it will be interesting to examine how these differences and similarities are approached in positioning men and women in the context of war.

Biology is not the source of gender differences or how they manifest in society such as division of labour. In fact, Lévi-Strauss suggests that the division on labour or rather the economic interdependence of the sexes as the basis for the conjugal (or nuclear) family. This interdependence does not so much originate from a biological specialization as from culturally imposed constraints that bar both sexes from doing tasks assigned to the other. The purpose of this is to ensure the union of men and women (in marriage) by making the smallest viable economic unit contain at least one man and one woman. (1956: 277; Rubin 1975/2006: 94) Essentially, the division of labour can be seen as a cultural device or mechanism to create mutual social and economic dependency between the sexes. This dependency in turn can be viewed as cultural means to insure and reproduce heterosexuality (Rubin 1975/2006: 94-95). In conclusion, gender and particular culturally specific ideals of femininity are culturally

constructed and inherent in every aspect of social life: such as the economy, politics and the division of labour and that affects also how women are seen as an uneasy or unfitting element, a “matter out of place” when it comes to war if we were to draw parallels with Mary Douglas’s *Purity and Danger* (1966: 36, 41).

1.3 Masculinity and Dominance

Like iterated before, as with regards to femininity, there is not one single and universal form of masculinity but rather multiple masculinities. A multitude of masculinities are commonly found in a single society forming a hierarchy of masculinities. This is where *hegemonic masculinity* comes to play. Hegemonic masculinity itself can be defined as the configuration of gender practices, the embodiment of which legitimates men’s dominance over women and also other masculinities in the context of its society and culture (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005: 832, 846; Schippers 2007: 87). One important part to remember is that hegemonic masculinity does not simply dominate by means of violence, although it could be supported by force; its position is achieved and maintained through culture, persuasion, institutions, and by the marginalization or delegitimation of alternatives. Nor is it necessarily the most common pattern of masculinity in society; only a minority of men needs to enact it, providing exemplars of masculinity, symbols that have authority, regardless of whether or not the majority of men and boys could ever fully live up to them. (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005: 832, 846)

Hegemonic masculinity requires a dualistic relationship with femininity which is seen as lesser or inferior. Gender relations are binary and mutually exclusive with masculinity being associated traits like strong, hard, active, dominant, rational, competitive etc and femininity, in contrast, with traits like weak, soft, passive, submissive, irrational, caring etc (Grimes 2016: 202-203). Man is the breadwinner and acts in public, while woman takes care for the home and family and is essentially dependent on the man. (ibid: 202, 204)

Another important part of hegemonic masculinity is that hegemonic masculinity is not a self-reproducing form as indicated by considerable evidence. It requires the exclusion or discrediting of women and the policing of men to sustain itself. (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005: 844) Hegemonic masculinity is in a perpetual symbolic war with femininity and other

masculinities and thus, is an excellent tool to examine how masculinity relates to warfare as well as to femininity in the context of an actual war.

1.4 Gender and War

While gender roles vary greatly across cultures, when it comes to areas in society most closely connected to war – such as political leadership, hunting, certain rites of passage etc. – these are the one that tend to be most constant across cultures and history (Goldstein 2001: 7, 11). Women are no strangers to war, even though war has always been considered a masculine domain. War impacts more than just the soldiers who fight in it; it affects society as a whole – economy, politics, social dynamics. The two world wars saw women en masse stepping out of their then primarily domestic roles and joining the workforce because there were not enough men to work these jobs and so, society needed to adapt.

But what about women in active roles in warfare itself? The notion of warrior women is by no means a new one, as already the ancient Greeks spoke about a mythical fierce tribe of all-female warriors called the Amazons. And that is how the idea of warrior women is usually regarded – mythical, more fictitious than factual. The concept of a woman warrior is deemed something out of the ordinary, extraordinary in fact. What has been the real role of women in warfare and how does it relate to concept of femininity? Must “warrior” and “feminine” necessarily be mutually exclusive? And how has that relationship between women and war changed as the notion of gender and gender roles are not as rigid as they used to be? In order to analyse these questions, I focus on examining the boundaries of femininity and masculinity and how they change, the social and cultural constructions of female soldiers, and also determining the reason why the idea of female soldiers unsettles and bothers some groups by studying to concrete ethnographic cases.

2. Case of Women the Rwandan Civil War

“Rwandan Women at War: Fighting for the Rwandan Patriotic Front (1990–1994)” by Hannah Spens-Black is an account about the experiences of a group of women who took part in Rwandan Civil War on side of Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) against the Rwandan government from 1990 to 1994. Spens-Black has an MSc in African studies from Oxford University and works as a Programme Manager for a charity that supports rural communities in Ethiopia, Sudan and South Sudan. The chapter is based on the interviews she conducted in Rwanda in 2013 with women (and also some men) about their wartime experiences.

In 2008 Rwanda made the news for having the highest percentage of female parliamentarians (56%) which may come as a surprise considering certain patriarchal and conservative attitudes and expectations in Rwandan society (Spens-Black 2016: 163). This involvement of women in politics is due to the current ruling party – RPF – having adopted and supported gender equality and involved women in integral roles since its inception, something that was unusual amongst RPF’s contemporary guerrilla movements. Although women played an essential part in the RPF from the start, little is recorded about the thousands who joined the movement’s ranks. They were soldiers, political *cadres* (a *cadre* was an individual working in the RPF’s political wing), nurses, secretaries, fundraisers etc. In fact, women are said to have taken part in almost any role in the movement. Women’s extensive participation in the RPF during the war is and has been common knowledge. However, Spens-Black notes observing that, in a way, their contribution was taken for granted. (ibid: 146-147) In order to fully understand the women’s roles, experiences and motives in the RPF during the war, we need to take a closer look at Rwandan history and society.

2.1 Historical and Cultural Background of Rwanda

Rwanda is often considered a patriarchal society with dominant men and submissive women but in precolonial times (that is up to 1884) women’s status was more nuanced than that. For centuries, the Kingdom of Rwanda was home to three wide groupings of people – Tutsi cattle herders, Hutu agriculturalists and Twa artisans. The kingdom was ruled a king and queen

mother. The queen mother was the king's most important advisor and ruled during his absence and in transitional periods in his name, thus wielding a great deal of power and influence. (ibid: 147) As for rest of society, there were strong divisions between public and private spheres when it came to gender, as well as strict cultural expectations and taboos. Men handled public duties and women managed the domestic domain. Only rarely did women take on in public roles, such as chiefs. Neither did they participate in war in both precolonial and colonial times, as killing of women and children was a taboo and utterly reckless. Rwandan society's gendered perception of soldiers is also illustrated by the legend of Ndabaga, a girl in the 18th century who secretly joined the army in his father's stead and proved herself more than capable in battle. Upon the discovery of her disguise, Ndabaga feared she would be killed, but interestingly she instead was generously rewarded by the king for her heroism. The legends suggests that in exceptional circumstances women overstepping their typical roles was accepted by society and this sentiment is echoed in women's participation in the RPF. (ibid: 147-148)

I find the Rwandan case quite the interesting paradox. Rwanda is a strongly patriarchal society by tradition where women normally did not take part in public duties, much less war, however, these rigid and separated gender roles saw much during the course of the Rwandan Civil War and the events leading up to it. As such this topic deserves some exploration, not in the least because it seems to have brought Rwandan women to the public arena more in general.

2.2 Origins of the Rwandan Civil War and the RPF

The conflict that led to the Rwandan Civil War has its roots in colonialism. Rwanda was first in 1884 colonized by the Germans and then in 1916 by the Belgians. With colonialism women lost their customary rights and influence. The Belgians designated and fixated ethnicity by introducing identity cards and by first supporting the Tutsi monarchy, then suddenly shifting their support to the Hutu majority in the late 1950s. The following revolution in 1959 which entailed the king's deposition and widespread violence that forced hundreds of thousands of Tutsi (and a small number of Hutu) to seek refuge mostly in neighbouring countries Uganda, Burundi, Tanzania and Zaire. This is seen as the starting point of the far-reaching conflict in Rwanda. Rwanda became independent in 1962 under the Hutu majority and new regime that

regarded the fled Tutsi with animosity. There were several violent conflicts (mostly) against the Tutsi in Rwanda. (ibid: 148-149)

The lives for the three generations of Rwandan refugees were not easy as they were met with persecution and injustice. This pertained especially to the refugees living in Uganda, some of whom were forced to hide their Rwandan identity and assume a Ugandan name (ibid: 149). The refugees felt excluded and disadvantaged by the restriction placed on them, for example in education (ibid: 150). At the same time Rwanda became a lost paradise to the refugees, “filled with milk and honey” (ibid: 150; Prunier 1995: 67) and they raised their children with stories about their native country. These children then grew up with a strong longing to return to Rwanda which to them was a promised land. (Spens-Black 2016: 149-150)

RPF as it is known now came to be in 1987 as a politico-military organisation based in Uganda. While Tutsi refugees were the most receptive to RPF ideology and message that sought to repatriate Rwandan refugees, Hutus were not at all excluded. The organisation purposely targeted a large cross-section of society and was the first movement to actively approach women. Neither were women recruited by force unlike in many contemporary civil wars in Africa. (ibid: 150-151) Spens-Black notes all the women she interviewed gave their desire to return to Rwanda, the homeland of their parents, as the fundamental reason for joining the RPF. Not all women who joined were approached but had actively sought out the RPF themselves. As clandestinity was particularly important in the RPF, many women and girls hid their involvement even from family members and the same applied for men. Separate groups were formed for women in many cells. Women participated as both full-time and part-time members. Most of the full-time members were young women without a family of their own (meaning husband and/or children), while married women usually supported the cause part-time. Many of the young women who joined full-time became political *cadres* who travelled around to different communities and lead meetings teaching about RPF’s cause, ideology and its background, a role that was quite dangerous. (ibid: 150-154)

Women’s involvement in the RPF also helped to change and overcome traditional gender stereotypes – for the women themselves, as well as for the men, members and non-members alike – that saw women as quiet and submissive who ought not to speak in public either at all or without their husband’s presence. (ibid: 150-154) Involvement in the RPF for women meant crossing over from private sphere to public one, previously a chiefly male

domain, an unfamiliar territory where they would need to learn to act and communicate in. On the other hand, those traditional gender stereotypes helped the female *cadres* to operate in secret (ibid: 154).

2.3 Woman Soldiers of the RPF

As the RPF prepared for invasion, the network of both political *cadres* and part-time members was vital in securing sufficient financial and material support. When the RPF first launched their attack against Rwanda in 1990, the number of female officers and soldiers was very small. The invasion turned out to be not as successful as RPF had hoped, and they suffered heavy losses since the Rwandan national army outnumbered theirs by far and was backed by Belgium, France, and Zaire. Following invasion many young men and women from across the region and further decided to join the RPF army which in the early years accepted almost anyone who was determined. (ibid: 154-155)

The idea of their daughters becoming soldiers was difficult for many families to reconcile with, even if they had supported their engagement in the RPF before. This was in direct conflict with the traditional views that women had to be protected and cared for. Most of the young women and men left in secret to avoid their families trying to stop them. For the women, this sometimes meant disregarding social and cultural conventions by defying their fathers and other family members, as well as their RPF superiors forbidding them to leave. (ibid: 155-156) In the RPF women were often urged to take on supporting roles, such as a political *cadre*, however, the ones who were determined and insisted on fighting could become soldiers. Several hundred women fought on the front lines, the majority of who had little to no military experience. Larger proportion of women in the war zone served as nurses or in supporting functions, while the dangers of war were constantly threatening them all. (ibid: 156-158)

When ask about their experiences as soldiers among their male peers, nearly all the women stated they felt they were treated equally and in general accepted and respected by the men. Women fought alongside men, they were expected to perform the same duties, do the same exercises – they received no special treatment. (ibid: 157-158)

The battlefield was not the only fight these women faced. They also fought to overcome their own feelings of vulnerability stemming from their actions that were so out of character with society's view about their gender. That and the perceptions men had. Some women were frustrated by assumptions of them being "weak" and not being able to handle certain physical tasks just because they were women. Others felt that in order to earn respect they needed to prove themselves more than their male counterparts. A woman making a mistake would be associated with her gender, but the same did not apply to men. (ibid: 158-159)

Women's part in the RPF army was re-evaluated during the ceasefire of 1992 which led to women being pulled from the front line. A special unit of female soldiers and commanders was created called the Yankee Division but never actually entered combat. The new tactics which were more akin to conventional war than guerrilla war and the ceasefire brought a flood of new young male recruits, eager to join the army. This consequently made having women fight on front line was no longer as necessary as before. RPF's underlying reasoning for this came down to the desire to protect women. While some women were relieved by this new development, others were furious to be separated from their fellow soldiers. A few battle-hardened women managed to return to the front line, most were assigned to non-combat supporting roles. (ibid: 158-159)

The RPF emerged as victors in July 1994 though that victory had a bitter taste to it. Not long before, on 6 April 1994 government-orchestrated reprisal killings took place against (mostly) Tutsi civilians which claimed up to one million lives. This became known as the Rwandan genocide. In addition to the slaughter, an estimated 250 000 to 500 000 women suffered extremely brutal sexual violence. For certain Hutu military forces rape was a tool and was used systematically, though the perpetrators included soldiers as well as civilians. Hutu civilians who took part in committing the massacre and brutalities were not only limited to men, but women also actively participated. President Habyarimana's wife, Agathe, is widely recognized as having been an architect of the genocide (ibid: 165). In that sense she is perhaps akin to Jiang Qing or Madame Mao (Mao Zedong's wife) who was one of the principal orchestrators of the Cultural Revolution in China.

The RPF was shocked and thrown off balance by the state of turmoil following the genocide. For the young women and men who grew up with the story of Rwanda as a promised land, instead of returning to a country of milk and honey, they found themselves in a county of

blood and tears (ibid: 160). Recovering from the deep and painful wounds inflicted by the war would take a long time.

Rwanda began its reconstruction and women were a crucial part in that enterprise, tackling tasks many Rwandans still considered impossible for their gender. This would be the first time in Rwanda's history that women were extensively partaking in public works. The genocide had left the country with a significant gender imbalance and the wartime experiences demonstrated to the RPF's leaders the capabilities of their female members and promptly provided them with new opportunities. (ibid: 161) While several women became prominent public figures, for most their futures were determined by their social status, education, experience and sometimes simply luck. Women in the army were gradually demobilized and many of them found trying to adapt to civilian life challenging, not just for themselves but for their families as well. Social pressure to marry remained and many did, as it was a pivotal course of action in reintegrating back into society. All who had participated (both men and women) were hailed as heroes. But women were simultaneously marginalized as their behaviour no longer conformed to their gender stereotypes, causing them to feel isolated, since society found it more difficult to accept them. A woman who was on the front or served as a soldier was scandalous and one of the consequences described was that men were afraid to talk to them. (ibid: 161-162)

Women soldiers and the RPF represented only a small portion of the Rwandan population and their activity was not enough to guarantee significant long-lasting change in how society viewed women (ibid: 162) And despite the opportunities the war had presented the RPF women, for the majority of Rwandan population the traditional views on women did not change much.

The case of women in RPF exemplifies both the state of flux regarding social conformity as well as the deep-rootedness of socio-cultural constructions in society. The boundaries of gender change in accordance with circumstances becoming more flexible during difficult times and more rigid during peaceful periods. Also, the story of Ndabaga suggests that a woman stepping out her traditional gender role into the role of soldier during times of need was accepted by society. While gender equality was an important part of RPF ideology, the involvement of women was also very much a practical choice. Despite their commitment to gender equality, RPF still retained some of traditional Rwandan concepts about gender as seen in their action of

withdrawing female soldiers from the front line as soon as it was no longer a vital necessity, succumbing to culturally rooted feeling of duty to protect women.

The RPF female soldiers felt they were treated as equals to the men, at least in general. Yet, despite performing the same duties and tasks together there were still differences the women observed, like assumptions from men that they were not able to handle hard physical tasks or a double standard when it came to making mistakes and earning respect. The standards were higher for female soldiers, more was expected from them and there was less room for error with mistakes attributed to them being women, whereas the same did not apply to men. However, aside from some of the deeply ingrained traditional gender conventions still persisting, the overall experience for women as well as men provided an opportunity for both parties to observe how much they had in common. This, in turn, brings me back to Rubin and just how much there is overlap in for men and women. Although the Rwandan society did not see immediate change, it did provide a crack for change to come forth.

After the war, traditional gender concepts about women became more rigid and less forgiving about transgressions of “proper” behaviour in women. Female soldiers had a sort of dual identity as being soldiers meant being celebrated as heroes, while simultaneously being ostracized as women. Their experiences in the war had a profound effect on them, making them unable to try to fit themselves back in the box of “proper” women. Also taking note of how they described men after the war being afraid to talk to them, one might look at female soldiers as an intermediary position, a sort of middle status between men and women. A badge of honour and shame simultaneously.

Reverting back to more traditional gender roles could also provide an explanation as to why the contribution of RPF women was taken for granted – being loyal and submissive to men might have been extended to being loyal and submissive to Rwanda and serve their homeland without question.

The Rwandan case is somewhat contradictory to Ortner’s gender relations system which is much too rigid. Society and culture are always in a continuous state of flux. External and internal circumstances, depending on their scope and gravity, can force even the most stringent social structures to occasionally to bend make concessions. Societal boundaries are constantly being renegotiated, as seen in women soldiers going from accepted and integrated into the RPF movement to being “out of place in society” but also in reworking the gendered division of

duties and labour. The RPF's experiences with women's contribution during the war, coupled with need to include women due to the devastation from the genocide, gave women the chance to establish a foothold in the public sphere and helped continue the trend towards gender equality in Rwanda.

3. Case of Counter-insurgency in Afghanistan

“Military Masculinities and Counter-insurgency Theory and Practice in Afghanistan: An Uneasy Relationship?” is by Major Rachel Grimes who in addition to serving with the British Army for over twenty years, has an MSc in International Relations and Gender. The chapter is based on her experiences and impressions between 2005 and 2012 regarding the part that gender roles played in military operations in Afghanistan. As it details NATO’s activity in Afghanistan with Western soldiers who, unlike the Rwandans, have no direct personal stakes in the conflict with insurgents as well as having to navigate a foreign cultural environment, I wanted to investigate this case to see how women in the military and femininity are situated when their presence is not derived circumstantial need or patriotism.

For the last decade, the UK and United States were engaged in countering Taliban’s return and thwarting the attempts of other insurgents to undermine the development of the Afghan government. In 2003 both countries joined NATO’s International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operation. ISAF differed from conventional warfare tactics by its approach being population-centric, rather than state-centric or enemy-centric. While ISAF’s operations included kinetic actions, the principal goal of gaining the support of the Afghan people was non-violent in nature.

Counter-insurgency a.k.a. COIN focuses on political, economic and development functions as well as military action. According to the principles of COIN, armed conflict should be politically motivated and thus, only as a means to a political end. It has been argued that only 20% of COIN is military action and the remaining 80% is political interaction (Grimes 2016: 208). Due to this, counter-insurgents must operate in accordance with the law in order to remain credible and legitimate. Gathering and integrating intelligence is also needed as information is often more effective than military action. Since COIN requires more than just military action, ideally counter-insurgents should work together with different (military and non-military) organizations and coordinate their activities. Being a population-centric endeavour, the people need to be secured and feel safe in order for the counter-insurgents and host nation government to gain and maintain their support. That support is crucial which is why it is important for counter-insurgents to understand the human terrain – that is the political, cultural and linguistic environment (ibid: 211). Lack of cultural understanding can lead to misunderstandings, friction

or even conflict with the local population, all of which are detrimental to the core mission. Insurgents need to be separated from the population and cut off their support systems. Force is urged to be used with consideration and only when absolutely necessary to keep civilian casualties as minimal as possible. Insurgents will also be constantly changing their operating tactics, so counter-insurgents need to be able learn and adapt fast to stay ahead. It is also important to remember that effective COIN takes time; hence consistency and coherence are essential, requiring clear long-term plans from the start. (ibid: 202, 208-209)

Grimes writes, noting the opinions of several academics, that COIN blurs the once distinct line between the military and the civilian, with the latter being perceived as an extension of femininity as opposed to the military masculinities. This distortion of boundaries is in a way at odds with the soldiers' basic and pre-deployment training. As a result, some soldiers feel constrained and unsure in COIN operations and find some aspects of it more difficult to embrace. According to Grimes' observation, units that do not recruit women, such as the Combat Arms, are more inclined to embody a heightened form of military masculinity and struggle more with adopting COIN tactics. (ibid: 201)

3.1 Counter-insurgency and Military Masculinities

This conflict between the doctrines of conventional warfare and counter-insurgency is tied to the way military masculinities are constructed from the start. To get better sense of military masculinities, at least those found in Afghanistan, we need to look at the constructed Western masculinities and femininities. These military masculinities are best exemplified by considering hegemonic masculinity which we covered in the first chapter. As hegemonic masculinity requires a dichotomy with femininity which is deemed inferior and subordinate, the relationship between genders is dualistic and mutually exclusive. As such, a similar binary view is attributed to "soldier" and "civilian". The "lesser" role of women is extended the roles of civilians into being the "Other" – the side that is devalued and associated with weakness, everything that does not conform hegemonic military masculinity. (ibid: 202). Hegemonic masculinity and how it relates to femininity, is comparable to Ortner's theory about gender asymmetry likening male to culture and female to nature, in a sense that there is a clear hierarchy at play. A hierarchy that

values some characteristics and traits, while devaluing others which, in turn, is used to fundamentally justify and, more importantly, legitimize the disproportionate power dynamic.

A soldier or a warrior epitomizes traditional male gender behaviour. A warrior is still considered to be perhaps the most integral symbol of masculinity, especially considering that military is sometimes said to be “the main remnant of traditional manhood” (ibid: 202, 205). A warrior therefore seen as not only masculine but hypermasculine, where there is no room for anything other.

Basic military training focuses specifically on transforming and re-shaping men from civilians to soldiers. Because of this it is deemed necessary for civilian men to be “broken down”, so that they could built up again as soldiers. Training requires physical fitness and camaraderie between soldiers. Soldiers are taught to be solutions-focused and retain initiative, action is always preferred to passivity, caution is seen as non-masculine/feminine, dominance in leaders is encouraged. Those who perform worse than their peers, behave differently or do not conform in some other way receive little sympathy and will be alienated. Contempt for the people failed to fit the standard extends beyond the military and can include civilians, women, and homosexuals. Civilian men are viewed as “weaker”. Being compared to, for example, women or homosexuals is an insult for soldiers. In order to be a true soldier, there needs to be an “Other” that would set soldiers apart from non-soldiers and thus, give meaning to soldiering. (ibid: 205-207, 214) The undertones or rather indications of hegemonic masculinity being used as building blocks for the construction of military masculinities is apparent. There is an attitude of self-perceived superiority over the “Other” and yet, for all their disdain they need the “Other”, much like hegemonic masculinity needs femininity (and other “subordinate” masculinities) to exert dominance over it. This is not to say that military and soldiers are all misogynistic brutes, as that would a rash oversimplification, but to direct attention to the traditional value system and procedure.

Grimes notes, that while soldiers’ conduct commendable during her time in Afghanistan, the inner conflict within caused by trying to adapt to a new, “softer” approach of COIN, was apparent (ibid: 203). To those who are used defining soldiers in such an opposing or even antagonistic way, COIN tactics might seem as weakening of the very idea of what it means to be a soldier.

The ISAF-operation ended in 2014 and was overall found lacking in substantial success. During its course, the conflict of military masculinities and counter-insurgency credo manifested most distinctly in NATO soldiers' difficulties in understanding the human terrain, securing the population and gaining the people's support. These efforts called for qualities like empathy, emotional intelligence, sophistication, subtlety, nuance and political prowess – characteristics a soldier who adheres strictly to ideas of traditional masculinity, would deem un-warrior like. (ibid: 210) Being a soldier, a warrior was also strongly associated with heroism in the military culture. Those who perform acts of bravery and aggression are bestowed with medals and celebrated. COIN's call for caution, restraint and avoidance of conflict and violence undermines the lessons these soldiers received in basic training. Many felt such a lack of action was "un-heroic" and made them look weak. Engagement with population required soldiers putting themselves in the role of an Afghan, the role of the "Other", something that was entirely new to the soldier of hegemonic, military masculinities. Soldiers found peacekeeping tactics frustrating, inferior and "less manly" than "real fighting." (ibid: 214-216) That idea of a soldier and war in general is all about action, real war is a battle, and a real soldier is the one who fights.

3.2 Integration of Female Soldiers in the Military and the Effect of Their Presence

When it comes to female soldiers, Grimes does not believe the military to be institutionally misogynistic but concurs that the presence of servicewomen might be contentious because of the traditional ideas attributed to their gender. In some way, they undermine the concept of what it means to be a soldier, as was the perception in Combat Arms, Grimes notes (ibid: 202) Most of British servicewomen are employed in regiments, logistics, and human resources of Combat Service Support (CSS), as well as being medics. The idea of Female Engagement Teams (FETs) was developed for the military to engage with and influence the female half of the population who had been long thought of as largely inconsequential, an inadequacy Western militaries now recognize. Still, being female was hardly the only thing required of a FET soldier. Physical fitness and an understanding of how influence and assist the local population were critical attributes. (ibid: 215-217)

The servicewomen are viewed as possessing traits and characteristics which render them more approachable and better suited in operations among locals. While this sentiment might easily be labelled gender essentialist, Grimes asks us to consider the unique position of the servicewomen. She believes servicewomen to be better equipped in the ability to empathize and understand the “Other” in Afghanistan (or any other host nation) because they themselves have been the “Other” since basic military training. (ibid: 217)

The role of FETs was not expanded as effectively as it could have in Afghanistan, mostly because of the narrow-minded attitude of military personnel. However, since servicewomen can perform roles that their male peers are unable to, they were patrolling and operating in what used be exclusively male areas. Servicewomen were perceived differently from their male colleagues by the Afghans. Moreover, the locals seemed to prefer interacting with female soldiers to male soldiers, which also meant more potentially valuable information for operations. The Afghans viewed servicewomen as a “third gender”, resulting in servicewomen being granted the advantages of both genders: they were shown the same respect as men while having access to spaces, such as family and home, which are typically reserved for women. (ibid: 216-217) This positioning of servicewomen as a “third gender” is proves again the rigidity of Ortner’s model with binary oppositions about gender constructs which does not see an individual being a part of both at once.

Grimes does not call for the dismantling of all military masculinities as they have their part to play in warfare. Instead, she argues it is time to recognize the implications of military masculinities, believing that there would have been less friction and conflict had soldiers been made aware of their hegemonic masculinity. (ibid: 218)

The way Combat Arms involved women in military activity is somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, one might call it empowering for women to gain access to this “male” domain. On the other hand, in a way this view of counter-insurgency and military action also reproduces the traditional Western notions of gender. The idea of a soldier is reconsidered, more specifically a soldier in the modern day and considering the changing form of warfare. Modern warfare is not as clearly defined as in the past when two armies would come together and engage in battle. Countering insurgency requires communication with the population. The insurgent is indistinguishable from the civilian and blends in with the local people (ibid: 207).

4. Analysing and Comparing the Two Cases

When examining the boundaries of femininity and masculinity and how do they change, both cases, especially the Rwandan case, demonstrated the fluidity of gender boundaries and how they are they are renegotiated, including gendered societal duties or divisions of labour. The changing of boundaries was also apparent when after the war the female soldiers were ostracized for their transgressions regarding traditional gender roles. Ortner's model while outlining the basic associations with women, is still much too rigid and binary. A rigid harsh separation between genders is artificial as argued by Ruben and also shown in the hegemonic masculinity's need to constantly impose itself to maintain its status. With war itself no longer quite as clear-cut as it used to be and the implantation of strategies such as COIN, the once distinct line between the military and the civilian is becoming blurred, with the latter being perceived as an extension of femininity as opposed to the military masculinities.

In social and cultural construction of a female soldier, she is perceived in society is subject to external as well as internal circumstances of society and depends on how gender boundaries are currently positioned. With both cases there was initial resistance of allowing women to participate in war directly and in active roles. In Rwandan case during the war female soldiers were accepted, when those determined proved themselves capable. However, when the war ended female soldiers who did not conform to traditional societal gender expectations in getting married and settling down, found themselves as "out of place" as being a soldier had become a badge of honour and shame simultaneously. In Afghanistan, a female soldier seems to, again, hold an intermediary position, a functioning as a sort of bridge between soldier and civilian. In Afghanistan this also meant reaching the fifty percent of civilians – the women – that male soldiers had no access to interact with. The perception of female soldiers as a "third gender" also suggests them as also middle status between men and women, as well as does Grimes' view of female soldiers being the or at least the representation of the "Other" within military itself – something that is both, yet neither.

Finally approaching the question about the discomfort, the notion of a female soldier can create, the unsettlement was present in both Rwandan Afghanistan case, although not quite for

the same reasons. With both cases there was initial resistance of allowing women to participate in war directly and in active roles. In Rwandan case it was explained by the cultural views that saw women as in need protection and care and men's duty to provide that. Even if misguided it come from a place of concern, rather than contempt. The same, however, cannot be said about the case in Afghanistan where the inclusion of women in military was seen as a threat – terms of in weakening the unit as a whole and disrupting the dynamic as well as undermining the core meaning of being a soldier, a warrior. The threat was not only perceived from service but also from the inclusion the “feminine” strategies of COIN which came into contradiction of the notions about “real” war and a “real” soldier.

The presence of the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity and gender preconceptions is by no means limited to warfare and military but pervades the society and culture. Their effect of our subjective outlook is undeniable but having awareness about their existence can help as with dealing with the problems they cause. War may (and probably will) always remain a sphere largely populated by men. This is not automatically negative. But regarding being a soldier as some sort of quintessential embodiment of unadulterated masculinity unsullied by femininity is neither useful in conflict nor beneficial to soldiers themselves.

With the changing tides of warfare, as well as gender perceptions, certain structures need be reconsidered to accommodate facing the circumstances. Militaries have already demonstrated having at least some capacity in willingness to recognize errors and bend if the situation so demands. Perhaps much like counter-insurgency itself or the gradual renegotiation of gender roles in Rwanda, time, consistency and cohesion is needed for change to take place in war and well as all areas of society.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the concept of warrior women or female soldiers is old, yet one that still causes tensions and unsettledness. This in part certainly because of warfare being considered a masculine, even hypermasculine domain and the image of a warrior still being one of the key symbols of masculinity cross-culturally. This is not to say that a woman soldier is automatically rejected but that her position required the certain renegotiations in terms of gender boundaries. Most often she is seen as intermediary between men and women, soldiers and civilians – “third gender”. This status might put into practice with beneficial outcomes, but it may also leave her ostracized. Woman in a civilised masculine domain is much like Douglas’ “matter out of place”.

Given the complex international landscape where politics, economies and cultures intertwine and clash, there is a need adopt a multi-level approach and this includes warfare. Socio-cultural conventions are not easily set aside in terms of the dynamics of femininity and masculinity in warfare, such as the society’s overprotective attitude towards women in armed conflict. Also, the military’s stubbornness against rethinking its core aspects is hardly surprising, since a warrior seen as a key symbol of masculinity. Not to mention, considering the hegemonic masculine attitude, “the last remnant of traditional masculinity” notion and the heroism aspect romanticizing a soldier that are so ingrained into military’s self-definition it is not surprising that a female soldier is seen as threat to not only the core concept of a soldier but also, by extension, to masculinity itself. However, with the changing tides of warfare, as well as gender perceptions, certain structures need be reconsidered to accommodate facing the circumstances. Militaries have already demonstrated having at least some capacity in willingness to recognize errors and bend if the situation so demands – an indication of the fluidity of gender constructs. Since the landscape of war has changed considerably so should the attitudes regarding what being soldier means in terms of gender as well as in relation to civilians. Perhaps women soldiers can help with this reform.

Kokkuvõte

NAISTE JA NAISELIKKUSE UURIMINE SÕJAPIDAMISES

See lõputöö uurib naisi ja naiselikkust sõjapidamises, naiselikkuse ja mehelikkuse dünaamikat sõjas ja sõjaväe kontekstis. See uurimus keskendub põhiliselt naissoost sõduritele ja kuidas neid tajuvad ühiskond ja kultuurilised sookonstruktsioonid. Eesmärgiks siin on: vaadelda naiselikkuse ja mehelikkuse soolisi piire ning kuidas need muutuvad; uurida kuidas naissõdurit sotsiaalsel ja kultuurilisel tasandil konstrueeritakse; ja püüda leida miks mõte naissoost sõduritest tundub ebamugavust tekitav ja miks see osasid gruppe nõnda häirib. Neile uurimusküsimustele lähenedes konstrueerin esmalt teoreetilise põhja, võttes aluseks feministlikke teemasid käsitlevate antropoloogide ja sotsioloogide tööd soo ja soolise dünaamika kohta. Sellele raamistikule toetudes uurin kahte etnograafilist juhtumit naissõdurite kohta. Need juhtumiuuringud viitavad naissõduri vahepealesele positsioonile seoses nii mehelikkuse ja naiselikkusega kui ka sõduri ja tsiviilisiku vahelise suhtega.

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