Gender and Militarism

15 May – International Day on Conscientious Objection with a focus on Women Conscientious Objectors

Women and conscientious objection is the theme War Resisters’ International chose for 15 May 2010 – International Day on Conscientious Objection. To coincide with International CO Day, WRI also publishes an important new book on the issue: Women Conscientious Objectors — An Anthology (see more on page 8). As Howard Clark writes in his preface: “In several senses, an anthology such as this is long overdue. First in the sense of acknowledging this part of the relatively hidden history of antimilitarism. Second for War Resisters’ International organisationally. Founded in 1921, WRI has for much of its history been male-dominated, despite the prominent role of women in various affiliates and with certain exceptions at the international level such as long-serving WRI General Secretary Grace Beaton. Since 1972 conscious efforts have been made to change this — first the introduction of inclusive language (s/he, etc), and then, beginning in 1976, the organisation of special women’s gatherings, usually in conjunction with WRI’s “elder sister” the International Fellowship of Reconciliation. The second gathering in Scotland served as a prelude to the resurgence of an international women’s peace movement in the 1980s, and produced a forceful statement on Women as Total Resisters. The British women involved in these gatherings formed the Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group and WRI later co-published their book Piecing It Together (now online at http://wri-irg.org/pubs/Feminism_and_Nonviolence). Then in 1986 the WRI Women’s Working Group was formed to take this work forward and to provide a welcoming entry point for women activists, while WRI’s 1987 seminar on Refusing War Preparations: Non-cooperation and Conscientious Objection was a response to feminist prompting to look at ‘the wider implications of conscientious objection’. That seminar reflected new interest in the Anti-War Plan presented to WRI in 1934 by Bart de Ligt, but it took a decidedly more feminist approach. Activities central to war refusal — war tax resistance, refusing war work and opposing cultural preparations for war — are all areas where women have been and remain at the forefront.

With this publication, and a focus on women and conscientious objection for 15 May 2010, War Resisters’ International stresses its understanding “that to omit gender from any explanation how militarisation occurs, is not only to risk a flawed political analysis; it is to risk, too, a perpetually unsuccessful campaign to roll back that militarisation” (Cynthia Enloe). Consequently, agendered perspective on war and militarism — and on antimilitarism — is at the core of WRI’s work in support of conscientious objectors, and to remove all causes of war.

15 February 2010: Blockade at AWE Aldermaston in Britain. Nobel Peace Prize winner Mairead Maguire being removed from the blockade by police. Photo: Cynthia Cockburn

Editorial

Gender and militarism is the theme of this issue of the Broken Rifle, coinciding not only with International Day on Conscientious Objection – 15 May 2010 – but also with the newest WRI publication “Women Conscientious Objectors – An Anthology”, edited by Ellen Elster and Majken Jul Sørensen. Although the theme of gender and militarism is not new to WRI, and neither are women conscientious objectors, this is the first issue of The Broken Rifle dedicated to it — long overdue, it can be argued (and rightly so).

In 2007, War Resisters International and its Israeli affiliate New Profile jointly organised a seminar on the same theme, with many interesting presentations and discussions. Unfortunately, we were never able to publish a documentation of the seminar — the every-day workload of both organisers and most of the presenters was too high to allow for the time to write up what had been discussed, and to prepare it for publication. Only very few presentations are now available on WRI’s website at http://wri-irg.org/news/2007/council2007-en.htm.

Originally, it was hoped that the book Women Conscientious Objectors – An Anthology could be presented during the 2007 seminar. However, as often is the case when activists are asked to reflect on their work, and everything is done by volunteers, things took much much longer. Now, three years later the book is being published, and we hope that it will contribute to the debate on gender and militarism, but also that it will make the voices of women conscientious objectors more visible.

This issue of The Broken Rifle has a broader theme. We look not only at women conscientious objectors, but also at women’s activism against nuclear bases, and at the links between militarisation and masculinities.

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Women, men and nuclear weapons

On Monday 15 February, at the Big Blockade of the Atomic Weapons Establishment in Aldermaston, Berkshire, one of the seven gates was blockaded uniquely by women. A planning group of around ten women had got together to organise the ‘women’s gate’. They were members of the Aldermaston Women’s Peace Campaign, the London group of Women in Black against War, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, the electronic network Women against NATO, the London Feminist Network, and other groups.

Why a women’s gate? There is a long tradition of women organising against the Bomb. On the 1 March 1954 the United States tested a nuclear weapon on Bikini Atoll in the Pacific Ocean. Japanese fishermen in their boat The Lucky Dragon, were caught in the radioactive fallout. The incident caused a wave of anti-nuclear activism in Japan. It began in Suginami, an electoral district of Tokyo. And it was mainly the women of Suginami neighbourhood who organized a petition for the ban on nuclear weapons that raised just short of 30 million signatures in two months.

Those French and US atmospheric nuclear tests also sparked off another response, at the opposite end of the Pacific Ocean: the movement for a Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific. An important part of that was WNP – Women for a Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific. One reason women organised was because so many of the children to which they gave birth after they were irradiated by the nuclear tests had terrible birth defects.

Later, in the 1980s, there was a huge movement of women in the UK against the introduction here of US cruise and Pershing nuclear missiles. British peace movement readers will hardly need reminding – it centred on the RAF base at Greenham Common, where a substantial arsenal of nuclear missiles was to be stationed. One day a group of women set out from Cardiff in Wales and walked a hundred miles to Greenham. When they arrived, on 5 September 1981, four of them chained themselves to the fence and demanded a televised debate with the Secretary of State for Defence. This was the start of a spontaneous women’s peace camp that soon had more than a hundred women living under plastic and canvas, and thousands more coming at weekends from Greenham support groups that sprang up around the country. On 12 December 1982 an estimated 30,000 women came to protest at Greenham Common, enough to completely ‘embrace the base’ around its 14 kilometre fence. The camp persisted till after the last missile had been returned to the USA in 1991.

Greenham was a place where women made links with each other worldwide around the nuclear issue. One of the women who came to Greenham from Australia was Zohl de Ishtar, who had helped organize, and has since written books about, Women for a Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific. The women resisting the arrival in Britain of cruise missiles were in touch with others organizing against the same weapon at Comiso in Sicily, Pine Gap in Australia and Seneca Falls, New York.

Women who camped at Greenham went on to contribute hugely to anti-nuclear work elsewhere. To name just three: Helen John founded another women’s peace camp in 1993 at the missile-warning station at Menwith Hill; Rebecca Johnson (who was ‘gate support’ person at the women’s gate on 15 February) set up the Women’s Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy and travels continuously worldwide as a respected specialist in nuclear weapons control. She was one of the founders of the Aldermaston Women’s Peace Camp in 1985. And Sian Jones, who later helped mobilize the Aldermaston Women’s Peace Campaign, has been tracking and publicizing developments at the Atomic Weapons Establishment for almost two decades.

What is it that brings women out as women against nuclear weapons, or against war, or against militarism itself? My work is research. For twelve years now I have been researching feminist antiwar organizing. In the course of fact-finding in a score of countries I have found that women usually have three reasons for organizing separately as women. The first is that women have an experience of militarism and war that is specific to their gender. Birthing babies with birth defects, as did the Pacific women, is just one of these experiences. Rape of women on an epidemic scale, as in the Bosnian war and in the Congo and Sudan now – that is another. Then again, women often feel special anger about military expenditure because it reduces the budget available for the public and social services on which so many women, who do the majority of domestic, health and care work, paid and unpaid, specially depend. Women organise as women to make women’s particular experience in peace and war visible and understood.

The second reason behind women-only antiwar activism is simply for effectiveness, for women to be able to exercise choice. Often in mixed groups it is men who take a lead. They may not mean to dominate, but somehow their voices carry more weight. It is not the case in all groups. There are some in the peace movement that are very careful in the way they conduct gender relations. But some women in the not-so-wonderful groups sometimes get to think, they have told me, ‘I can’t waste my time with this “double militancy” – having to struggle in the group in order to struggle out there in the world. Let’s do it on our own.’ That makes women’s voices more audible, and women can make choices, choose styles and strategies of organization and action, that feel comfortable to them as women, and are different from those of some mixed groups.

So – first, getting women’s experience visible; second, doing things in a particular way. But there is a third reason some women choose to organize as women, and it may be more significant than the other two. It is because there is a feminist analysis of militarism and war that is...
lacking in the thinking of the mainstream movement.

Militarism and war are products of systems of power. The two main war-sustaining systems are (1) capitalism – the class power of money and property; and (2) nationalism – the racist power of the state, white rule, ethnic hatred. Both are systems of oppression and exploitation and are thus essentially, necessarily violent. The antiwar movement mobilizes against both those systems of power. Feminists say, ‘Hold on...there’s another system of power intertwined with those two. It too is oppressive, exploitative and violent. It too predisposes society to militarism and war. It’s called patriarchy’. What feminists mean by patriarchy is the millennia-old, world-wide, almost universal form of gender order in which men exercise power over women, and which fosters a kind of masculinity that thrives on domination and force.

So, some women say, the antiwar movement needs to address, yes, capitalist exploitation, and, yes, racist, nationalist impulses, but also systemic male power. All three, not just less. Struggle for a transformation of gender relations has to be recognized as peace work. In our very own antiwar, antimilitarist and peace movements, just as we try not to behave like little capitalists, and just as we do not tolerate racism, so we should not tolerate sexism. Our activism has to reflect the world we want to create. Totally. Prefigurative struggle, it’s called. Coherencia entre fines y medios.

I want to end by stressing that we are not talking here about men and women as such, let alone about individual men and women. We are talking about cultures – cultures that thrive and multiply everywhere from bank boardrooms, to the pub on a Saturday night, from TV commercials to computer games, cultures that set up masculinity and femininity as caricatures of human ‘being’, that create a whole symbolic system in which particular qualities are ascribed to masculinity, and given supremacy. What is a ‘real man’? Being authoritative, combative, defended, controlling, hard, always ready to use violence to defend honour. It is clear that these qualities are deeply implicated in militarism and war. And women make a connection here: actual men either find the courage to refuse this model or they act it out. And when they act it out, they do so not only in the military, but also in everyday life, in ways that are very costly to women. So women can hardly avoid seeing violence as a continuum, one that stretches from the school playground, bedroom and back street to the battlefield, from their own bodies to the body politic. It may be that our movement is something more than an antiwar movement, more even than a peace movement. It may be a movement for a nonviolent world.

To come back to nuclear weapons... One day in the summer of 2005, two women came to Stockholm to address a meeting of the prestigious Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission. It was chaired by Hans Blix. He had invited them to speak on ‘the relevance of gender for eliminating weapons of mass destruction’. This whole idea was no doubt surprising to most members of the Commission. But these women were well respected. Carol Cohn was Director of the Boston Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights and a senior scholar at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. Felicity Hill was Greenpeace International political adviser on nuclear and disarmament issues, and had been a security adviser at UNIFEM and director of the WILPF office in New York. They received a careful hearing. And they spoke about how ideas about gender – what is deemed masculine or feminine, powerful or impotent, affect our efforts towards halting the proliferation of WMD. They drew on detailed research. For instance, insider research that revealed the laddish, boys’-own, culture of a certain nuclear policy institute. Research that had analysed and revealed how the fear of being seen as ‘soft’ or ‘wimpish’ had influenced actual political decisions to go to war in recent times. They also cited research that shows the tight link between masculine identity, men’s sense of self, and the ownership of a gun (or a knife or a pit-bull terrier). The man-gun affinity is something that has been found in many countries to hinder demobilization after war. The two women told the Commissioners: There’s now general recognition that there are significant gender dimensions to the possession of small arms and light weapons. It would be naive to assume that this association suddenly becomes meaningless when we’re talking about large scale, passively destructive weapons. And it’s more naive still to think it doesn’t matter.

So, at the Women’s Gate during the Big Blockade of the AWE nuclear weapons factory on 15 February 2010 women were holding banners and placards with messages similar to those I have heard spoken by Suzuu Takazato in Japan, by Kim Sook-im in Korea and Stasa Zajovic in Serbia. They might have been written by women in countries as far apart as Colombia and Spain, India and the Philippines. They said: ‘Spend money on services not nuclear weapons’, ‘Security for women? Disarm masculinity. Disarm militaries’, and ‘No fists, no knives, no guns, no bombs – no to all violence’.

Nonviolent Life...
Women’s Conscientious Objection as a Strategy Against Militarism

By Ellen Elster and Majken Jul Sørensen, War Resisters’ International

Many women have been active in peace work, both in women-only and mixed groups. Very little attention has been given to the women who have become conscientious objectors as a protest against militarism. War Resisters’ International (WRI) decided to publish “Women Conscientious Objectors – An Anthology” to give the women who declare themselves conscientious objectors a voice. Most of the texts in this book are written by women from different places in the world, and who have made a public declaration of conscientious objection. Together the contributions cover a wide span when it comes to both geography and time, ranging from pre WWII Sweden and WWII Britain to Turkey, Korea, Israel, Eritrea, Colombia and Paraguay and the US today. Also the themes the women have chosen to focus on varies a lot.

Resisting on feminist grounds

Most of the women contributors argue for a broad understanding of conscientious objection. They see militarism as a contrast to feminist values and a contradiction to women’s interests in society. Idan Halli was the first woman in Israel openly refusing on feminist grounds, which led to a prison-sentence. Her argument was that the feminist approach clashes with violent ways of solving problems. The military system harms women both within the army and in the society at large. She claims that enlistment means agreeing to be part of a system that is based on relations of power and control. It systematically perpetuates the exclusion of women from the public sphere and constructs their place in society as secondary to men. She doesn’t want to serve “just like a man,” since she is not looking for a kind of equality which reinforces the privileges enjoyed by men.

The other contributors argue in the same way, even if their background and situation vary. They link the military culture with the current hierarchical power structure and patriarchy. They take a broad stand against militarism, pointing at the damage it does to women and society as a whole. In Turkey, Ferda Ulker describes the traditional view of women in relation to the military as mothers, sisters, wives, and girlfriends of the soldiers. Hilal Demir, also from Turkey, adds that there’s a risk of becoming “masculinised”, with the effect that the feminist perspective is overlooked in the mixed conscientious objection movement. This has to be seen in the context of the Turkish society which is highly militarised, and where women are marginalised. Likewise the Paraguayan and Colombian women declare themselves as conscientious objectors, seeing the armed forces as promoting a violent culture. The military uphold the structures of injustice, human rights abuse and exploitation of resources that result in poverty for the majority of the people.

Conscription and radical feminism

The women’s stories prove why conscription of women is incompatible with radical feminism. The Israeli contributions raise this question when they mention Alice Miller, a woman soldier who was the first to demand the same rights for women as men in the military when she wanted to become a fighter pilot. She argued that access to the most important combat roles, is often a precondition for other high rank positions in the military, and would give women access to other influential positions in society, which again would reduce oppression of women. The stories of Ruta Yosel-Turda and Bisrat Hailte Micael from Eritrea discredit arguments that military service endows a high degree of liberation for women, although women became involved in the army in the name of gender equality.

In the anthology women are also pointing to sexual harassment as the norm in the military. Both the stories from the US and Eritrea tell of sexual abuse. In the US, women have openly reported sexual harassment and rape by their...
male colleagues. Introducing the US section, Joanne Sheehan notes that, while many women have had traumatic experiences of sexual assault, only very few want to talk about this — it is just too painful.

**Why women conscientious objectors?**

The question of why women declare themselves conscientious objectors when they are not subject to conscription is central to the anthology. We think that the answer lies both within the women’s own organisations, their effort to confront militarism, and their understanding of the wider society they are part of. The stories indicate that it is women in mixed peace groups who primarily declare themselves conscientious objectors, not women who are active in women-only organisations. They choose other ways than conscientious objection to express their resistance to militarism.

The women in mixed groups have had a need to find their own place as women, based on their understanding of militarism and their experiences. A declaration as a conscientious objector became one of the answers. WRI was mostly based on men’s conscientious objection and total resistance. Women wanted to be part of the peace movement in their own right. From this ground women in WRI declared themselves as total resisters in 1980. The women were active at international WRI meetings, insisting that women’s work and women’s resistance to war were not only about helping the conscientious objectors. Many women have experienced militarism as a man’s war. Their need for a space of their own and for raising issues from women’s perspectives have in many cases, not been respected. The feminist analysis shows that war and militarism affects women in a variety of ways, and often is different from men’s experiences.

Hilal Demir says that many think that the term “objector” is invented for legal situations created by compulsory military service. It follows from this reasoning that, if women don’t have to do military service, they cannot object to it. She distinguishes between a legal framework and a broader understanding of conscientious objection. As Hilal says, women can change the meaning of terms by developing them. The question is whether the conscientious objection platform is the right place.

**A strategy against militarism**

As we have seen, reactions within the movements where women participate vary a great deal. But internal dynamics is only one explanation for why women decide to become conscientious objectors. It is primarily a strategy of action directed towards the wider society. This raises the question of whether conscientious objection is a good strategy for women’s confrontation with militarism. Is this an effective method of reaching out to other people to explain what antimilitarism is all about? Or do the resisters run the risk that the lack of comprehension will remain? Are the opportunities for communication lost because

the women distance themselves from the mainstream peace movement? The contributors to this anthology obviously have found stronger arguments in favor of declarations than against. The Turkish women have argued that the questions that women’s conscientious objection raise, has been a good opportunity to enter into dialogue about antimilitarism. Korean women say that people outside the conscientious objector movement don’t understand why women engage in military issues. They are not declaring themselves as conscientious objects, but have chosen a strategy together with the men to show the suffering, not only to the conscientious objector, but also to the network around him, including the women.

We find that the contributors make strong arguments as to why they declare themselves conscientious objectors. Cynthia Enloe in her preface points at how women are openly investigating patriarchy’s daily operations within national and international conscientious objection movements. These movements have helped to persuade many women considering conscientious objection to seriously confront their own behaviour in particular forms of patriarchal masculinity.

Most of the examples of women declaring themselves conscientious objectors seem to happen in highly militarised societies. Does this reflect the fact that it is “easier” to take a stand against militarism when it is visible, than when its effects are more subtle? Or is it just a coincidence? We don’t know, but we suspect this might be the case. Since militarisation of our societies is damaging to both men and women, we hope that this book will inspire more women to become conscientious objectors as part of a strategy to confront militarism.

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**Asunción Trans antimilitarism Connections and discourses: antimilitarism, feminism, women, conscientious objection and contra-hegemonic sexualities – 10/11 May 2010**

As part of the activities for 15 May 2010, an international seminar will take place in Asunción, Paraguay, on 10 and 11 May 2010, organised by La Comuna de Emma, Chana Y Todas las Demas in cooperation with a range of other groups from Paraguay and Latin America.

The seminar will explore themes such as “antimilitarism and contra-hegemonic sexualities”, “feminism, antimilitarism, and popular education”, “antimilitarism, forced sexualities, and environment”, “health, identity and resistance”, “conscientious objection to all things military and forced sexualities”, “social movements and a critical focus on gender in the struggle”, “nonviolence, sexism and social organisations”.

The seminar is followed by a three-day nonviolence training with a critical gender perspective, followed by some public activity in Asuncion on 15 May 2010.

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Women blocking one of the gates to AWE Aldermaston in Britain on 15 February 2010. Photo: Cynthia Cockburn
Militarization and masculinities
Refusing militarism is not possible without refusing hegemonic masculinity
Andreas Speck, War Resisters’ International

“Questioning the militarist value system and its practices which are identified with military service, one is also obliged to question the hegemonic understanding of masculinity. In Turkey, military service is a laboratory in which masculinity is reproduced. The patriarchal system is solidified through military service. I objected to military service, because I am also against this laboratory manufactured masculinity. The struggle against militarism defined in heterosexist terms through sexist structures finds its fundamental expression in anti-militarism. This refers to freedom of sexual orientation, gender equality and total and unrestricted freedom”[1]

Halil Savda, Turkish conscientious objector, repeatedly imprisoned for his conscientious objection to military service

I can easily relate to what Halil Savda writes above. When I was about 13 or 14 – and the army still a long way ahead – I was quite fascinated with technology, as many young boys are. I even remember during one holiday going to a Navy open day, looking at the different Navy ships, helicopters, etc... I could be fascinated by this technology, but I didn’t think much about myself in a uniform, and being part of the Navy. At that time these two things were quite separate issues.

Once I got a bit older, the reality of having to serve in the military got closer. And increasingly I could not see myself running around in the uniform, being shouted at, and being part of an all-male and very macho environment. I was at that time in an almost all-male environment doing my apprenticeship as an electrician, and could never relate to the sexist talk and macho posture. Not that I was consciously much of an anti-sexist at that time, but I just could not relate to it. This was just for eight hours a day, five days a week, but thinking about something like this 24/7, without any space to escape, felt more like horror to me. I wasn’t aware of being gay at that time, but had already experienced quite a bit of peer harassment for not taking part in dirty sexist talks, and other macho posture, in my last years at school. Again, military service just felt like exponentially worse.

So, when the time came, I opted for conscientious objection. Of course, there were also political reasons for the objection, but I think on a different level my deeply felt aversion against this masculine environment might have been more important at that time. My unwillingness to serve was deeply connected to the images of masculinity linked with the military, which I felt very uncomfortable with [2].

Militarism & masculinities – the links
Jeff Hearn writes: “It is an underestimate to say that men, militarism, and the military are historically, profoundly, and blatantly interconnected” (Hearn 2003). But he also points out: “The exact nature of the connections between men and the military are themselves various and plural – thus there are military masculinities, and not just military masculinity”[3]. And Raewyn Connell adds: “There are many causes of violence, including dispossession, poverty, greed, nationalism, racism, and other forms of inequality, bigotry and desire. Gender dynamics are by no means the whole story. Yet given the concentration of weapons and the practices of violence among men, gender patterns appear to be strategic. Masculinities are the forms in which many dynamics of violence take shape”[4].

For men, especially in countries with compulsory military service, serving in the military is an important part of “becoming a man”. As Turkish gay conscientious objector Mehmet Tarhan puts it: “Military service creates a definition of normality for itself through the exclusion of women, gays, disabled persons and children and generalizes this definition to the rest of the society. The heterosexual man becomes the norm that the regime prefers and identifies with. The rest are considered as either surplus/excess or property to be protected” [5].

This link between militarism, violence, and masculinity is not at all “natural” – it had to be constructed, and what has been constructed can also be undone. In fact, it is historically a quite recent development. Joanne Nagel shows that for the United States the connection between militarised forms of masculinity – the ideal of soldiering – goes back to the late 19th and early 20th century [6]. In Germany, this process happened in the early 19th century – German bourgeois masculinity, which was not convinced of military service, had to be reshaped and militarised. At that time, as Ute Frevert points out, “the male gender character more and more incorporated soldier-like elements. Military values and assumptions about order ... thus more and more became the general ideal for the male nation” [7].

Similar arguments can be made for the construction of Jewish masculinities through the Zionist project.

Research on why young men perform military service points to a very close link with masculinity. Hanne-Margaret Birkenbach, a German peace researcher, did some extensive research, involving a range of interviews, on the subject of “willingness to serve among youths” [8]. To put this research into context: Germany is a country with obligatory military service, where the right to conscientious objection is recognised but conditioned upon performing substitute civilian service.

In her conclusions, she writes: “Those willing to serve expect that military service would help them to become adult men. Serving in the military is connected to the expectation that this provides masculinity and with it the right and power to play a natural dominant role. However, the image of masculinity of these youth is in no way directed towards proving themselves in military combat, but rather towards meeting challenges in everyday civilian life, especially in the field of employment” (ibid., p. 230). In short: “Under the guise of ‘no to killing vs. yes to killing for the purpose of defence’ conscientious objectors and those willing to perform military service argue not only about military violence, but also — without being aware of this — about ideals of masculinity” [9].

Ayşe Gül Altınav comes to similar conclusions in relation to Turkey. She quotes a young man, Ibrahim, as saying: “You do not become a man until you serve in the military. It is a sacred obligation. And people make fun of those who have not served. I, for one, did it just because I would feel a lack without it. I am flat-footed. If I had wanted, I could have been excused from military service. But I did not want to be excused. So I did it” [10]. Altınav concludes, very much like Birkenbach did in the German context 20 years earlier: “In this context, military service is not only or perhaps not even primarily, seen as a service to the state, but one that defines proper masculinity. It is a rite of passage to manhood”.

Women and masculinities

“As a woman, I am a consumer of masculinities, but I am not more so than men are; and, like men, I as a woman am also a producer of masculinities and a performer of them”[11], writes E.K. Sedgwick. A quote from an Israeli woman makes this very clear: “I know that I prefer men who are combat soldiers to others who are just jobnicks” [12]. This was also true for German women in the 1980s, where girls generally preferred boys who had done their military service [13]. Thus, through women’s expectations of what it means to be a man, they contribute to the creation of certain forms of masculinity.

Changing masculinities

It is important to be aware that hegemonic masculinity is changing, away from the “warrior” image, towards a more professional business masculinity. This is not to say that traditional masculinities, oriented toward physical strength, no longer exist – they certainly do – but they are losing their status as the hegemonic form of masculinity.

As Melissa T. Brown points out, the Army “has offered men several versions of masculinity: the soldier firing high-tech weapons, the professional who makes important decisions under tough conditions and saves lives, the caring surrogate father and provider of relief and protection, the bearer of marketable skills, and, of course, the guy...
who successfully gets into his girlfriend’s bedroom” [14].

Of course, masculinity is only one aspect when men or boys make their decision about whether to perform military service, mandatory or voluntary. Economic aspects should not be underestimated – military service is often a prerequisite for a career in civilian life, and leads to the connections needed quickly into positions of power. Signing up voluntarily is seen in many places as the only way to get out of poverty, or to get higher education.

However, I don’t think we can afford the luxury of continuing to ignore issues of gender in our antimilitarist work. As Cynthia Enloe writes: “As we have accumulated more and more evidence from more and more societies, we have become increasingly confident in this assertion that to omit gender from any explanation how militarization occurs, is not only to risk a flawed political analysis; it is to risk, too, a perpetually unsuccessful campaign to roll back that militarization” [15].

“A strategy for peace must include a strategy of change in masculinities”, writes Raewyn Connell. “This is the new dimension in peace work which studies of men suggest: contesting the hegemony of masculinities which emphasises violence, confrontation and domination, replacing them with patterns of masculinity more open to negotiation, cooperation and equality”.

Notes

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Gender & militarism books

The books below are available from the WRI webshop at http://wnr-irg.org/webshop.

The Myth of the Military-Nation. Militarism, Gender, and Education in Turkey

By Ayse Gu¨l Altinay

Palgrave Macmillan, 2005


£16.99

"With all the news about Turkish politics due to the Cyprus, Iraq and EU debates, now is exactly the time for all of us to read this smart feminist investigation of the Turkish political interplay between masculinity, men, statist nationalism and soldiering. Altinay is one of the most insightful political anthropologists I know.”

Cynthia Enloe, author of Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women’s Lives.

Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women’s Lives

By Cynthia Enloe

University of California Press, 2000

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Enloe outlines the dilemmas feminists around the globe face in trying to craft theories and strategies that support militarised women, locally and internationally, without unwittingly being militarised themselves. She explores the complicated militarised experiences of women as prostitutes, as rape victims, as mothers, as wives, as nurses, and as feminist activists, and she uncovers the “maneuvers” that military officials and their civilian supporters have made in order to ensure that each of these groups of women feel special and separate.

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The Broken Rifle Nr 85, April 2010
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This anthology includes contributions by women conscientious objectors and activists from Britain, Colombia, Eritrea, Israel, Paraguay, South Korea, Turkey, and the USA, plus documents and statements.

“For what we see here is women, at different moments, in one country after another, creating for themselves the concept, analysis and practice of a distinctive feminist antimilitarism.”

Cynthia Cockburn, Women in Black London

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Ayse Gul Altinay, Sabanci University, Turkey

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