

Gender and Civil-Military Relations in Advanced Democracies

By Helena Carreiras

This article addresses the relevance of gender when it comes to understanding the transformations of civil-military relations in advanced democracies. It concentrates on women's integration in the armed forces, including both the normative dimension of discourses and debates around the topic and the material dimension of women's military participation and access to military roles in Western democracies.

In recent decades, gender issues have been at the heart of major changes and controversies regarding the role of the armed forces in democratic societies. The integration of women in the military and the proper role for them, which has fuelled some of the most heated discussions in the past¹ is still an ongoing debate. Although the representation of women has grown and opportunities expanded, integration problems persist and they are still underrepresented in many positions and occupational areas. After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, in the wake of what has been called “*a renaissance of ground combat in military operational thinking*” (Carreiras & Kümmel, 2008, p.30), the topic of women's access to military positions and specially combat roles has (again) been moving up the agenda, reinvigorating a debate that never faded away (*ibid.*).

Questions of sexual assault and violence inside the military have become a major source of tension, not only in the realm of civil-military relations but within the military institution itself. While sexuality has always been a crucial concern for military leadership and a central issue in discussions about military culture and values,² the rising number of sexual harassment and assault incidents has revived controversies over the effectiveness of policies to combat sexual misconduct. Recent developments in the US show that these issues have become an important battlefield for conflicts between a variety of actors in the administration, the armed services and civil society.³

Likewise, the presence of gays and lesbians in the military continued to feed a debate that had a peak in the US under the Clinton administration regarding the “Don't

¹ Cf. Harries-Jenkins, 1980; Goldman, 1982; [MW] Segal, 1983; Shields, 1988; D'Amico & Weinstein, 1999; Katzeinstein & Reppy, 1999.

² D'Amico & Weinstein, 1999 ; Hillman, 1999 ; Guenter-Schlesinger, 1999 ; [MW] Segal, 2003 ; Estrada & Berggren, 2009.

³ See, for instance, Molly O'Toole, “Military Sexual Assault Epidemic Continues To Claim Victims As Defense Department Fails Females”, *The World Post*, 10th June 2012 (available on the Internet at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/06/military-sexual-assault-defense-department_n_1834196.html), or the US Defense Department's report on sexual assault for 2011 (also available on line at the following address: http://servicewomen.org/SAPRO%20Reports/DoD_Fiscal_Year_2010_Annual_Report_on_Sexual_Assault_in_the_Military.pdf).

Ask, Don't Tell" policy,⁴ and gained new impetus when the end of the policy was announced in 2011.⁵

Perhaps even more strikingly, awareness of the gender dimension of armed conflicts and the need for gender mainstreaming into international peace support operations emerged during the last decade as a major requirement in the political agenda of international defence and security organizations. The brutal evidence of the disproportionate degree of sexual violence in conflicts⁶ as well as of peacekeepers' sexual misconduct and involvement in human trafficking and exploitation (Allred, 2006; Baaz & Stern, 2009) gave rise to what some called a new gender regime in international security (Carey, 2001).

Accompanying all these developments, debates on the so-called "feminization" of the military (Gutmann, 2000) or the "*remasculinization of warfare*" (Joachim & Schneiker, 2012) kept reminding us of the deeply gendered nature of military organizations as well as of defence and security discourses and practices, both at State level and on the international scene.

Finally, the gender gap in public views of the military and defence issues has gained salience, with some authors contending that a fourth wave in civil-military affairs has emerged in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 through a fusion of civil and military attitudes – one complicated by a gender-politics gap (Rohall, Ender & Matthews, 2006).

These are but a few indicators of how gender can be seen as a constitutive dimension of civil-military relations in democratic societies. The present article explores this assertion, making two interrelated claims: first, that gender is an issue area that has served as a battleground between different views on the relationship between the armed forces and societies; as such, it is also extremely useful when it comes to gauging the extent of armed forces/society convergence, and to examine the state of play of civil-military relations in a given polity or context. Second, it contends that both military effectiveness and congruence between the armed forces and democratic social values can better be achieved if gender issues are addressed and gender military integration is promoted.

After succinctly clarifying the theoretical basis for the analysis, the study will dwell on the debate about women's military roles. It will then probe empirical data on gender integration in the armed forces of Western democracies, and the trends that have affected it in recent decades. The comparative empirical focus will make it possible to examine rival explanations for the observed patterns and relate them to the broader military and social contexts. The article closes with a summary of the central argument and a few remarks on the contribution that an analysis of gender can make to exploring new avenues in the study of civil-military relations.

⁴ Cf. Scott & Stanley, 1994; Herek *et al.*, 1996; Benecke, Corbett & Osburn, 1999; Belkin & Bateman, 2003.

⁵ See, for example, "US Military Prepares for End of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'", *Washington Post*, 19 September 2011: http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-09-19/politics/35272998_1_gay-troops-repeal-day-military-ban.

⁶ Cf. IRIN, 2007 ; Skjelsbaek, 2001 ; Bastick, Grimm & Kunz, 2007.

Clarifying the Analytical Perspective

Inserting gender into the study of civil-military relations requires an analytical angle that departs from traditional approaches. Theories of civil-military relations place a major emphasis on the issue of democratic civilian control of the armed forces. While proposing different understandings of how best to ensure such control, classical perspectives of authors such as Huntington (1957) or Janowitz (1960) have focused their attention almost exclusively on this aspect. But even current scholarship has reproduced similar concerns, continuing explorations on the nature of civilian control (Burk, 2002; Feaver, 2003; Shields, 2006). Moreover, the existing literature has tended to conflate democratic and civilian control, as if they were the same, and to equate democratic control with control of the armed forces by the civilian political executive alone (Forster, 2002, p.5).

Alternative perspectives have underlined the need for broadening the scope of those traditional understandings to encompass new analytical dimensions. Burk called for the conceptualization of civil-military relations around a triad including not only military and political elites but also citizens, contending that in mature democracies the important question is whether civil-military relations effectively sustain and protect democratic values (Burk, 1998). Also calling for a more holistic approach to the issue of democratic civilian control of the armed forces, Forster proposed to focus analysis on the governance of the armed forces, “*at the heart of which stand the issues of how best to ensure accountability between the armed forces and the societies they serve*” (Forster, 2006). He assumes that the most pressing issues relate to the day-to-day nature of the relationship between civilians and the military, in the funding, organization and conduct of the armed forces, and not on a distorted assumption of a constitutive military ambition to intervene in politics. Avant (2005) extended the question of control to an inquiry into the complex issue of privatization, while Bruneau and Matei (2008, 2013) have proposed to extend the concern over control to include effectiveness and efficiency, two aspects deemed necessary to ensure legitimacy and effective civil-military relations.

In all cases, however, an underlying assumption and constitutive dilemma of theories of civil-military relations in democratic societies remains that these relations are subject to an inherent tension: on the one hand, the armed forces have to ensure military effectiveness⁷ in order to accomplish their missions and respond to changes in the strategic context; on the other, they must be responsive to wider social values and thus to the society in which they are embedded and which pays for them (Boëne, 1990; Dandeker, 1994, 1998). One central issue here has been the extent to which the military can be different from society. Does the need for effectiveness require the armed forces to keep a separate and autonomous cultural/organizational sphere, or is it fundamental for the armed forces in a democratic polity to comply with social norms and values to preserve legitimacy? The answers to this question have varied, based as much on actual empirical data as on

⁷ There is a large and controversial body of literature on the meaning and measure of military effectiveness, which it is outside the scope of this article to examine. It will use a broad definition of effectiveness as the military's ability to fulfil roles and missions ranging from war-fighting to peacekeeping.

normative assumptions regarding what should lead to effective and non-conflicted civil-military relations in democratic societies.

Some stressed the quest for legitimacy as a crucial element in this relationship. Pion-Berlin, for instance, noted that...

the armed forces cannot afford to ride roughshod over legitimately elected politicians or the institutions they serve. They risk losing resources to other competing groups in an era when politicians, minding their electoral fortunes and careers, care much less about defense than about economic development, poverty, or education” (Pion-Berlin, 2010, p. 528).

Others have drawn attention to the exceptionality and uniqueness of the armed forces’ ethos, duties and responsibilities, which necessarily set it apart from society, while having to remain “*in its orbit*” (Sarkesian & Connor, 2006). Still others stressed the fact that, especially in EU countries, the key political change in the debate on military uniqueness is that “*the burden of proof has shifted for social and legal reasons to those who wish to argue for the [military’s] need to be different*” (Dandeker, 2003).

This article argues that gender is an issue area where tensions around the so-called “rights vs. readiness”, or “business case vs. equity”, debate – an operationalized version of the above paradox – have become extremely visible, more so than in the past, in current controversies over women’s integration in the military. Debates about gender in the military clearly reflect the contradictions of that dual framework, constituting an arena where related disputes have been taking place (Schjølset, 2010). Therefore, examining the normative foundations and present developments of discussions on women’s presence in the military provides a first instance for analysis.

“Rights vs. Readiness”: The State of the Debate on Women’s Roles

Most of the discussions around the participation of women in the military or the roles and functions they should perform have been framed in terms of the opposition between citizenship and military effectiveness. In these debates, democratic values of equality and non-discrimination are weighed against those of military necessity and readiness, two sets of values considered to be incompatible, as if the choice of one option automatically cancelled out the other. A civil society discourse on equal rights is set in opposition to a discourse of military effectiveness and national security.

The *effectiveness* argument’s most extreme version assumes that the military is different from the rest of the society : its mission, to provide security, is singular and takes precedence over all others ; in this view, the role of the military is not to grant equal rights to all individuals, and the institution should not be transformed into a “laboratory for social experimentation”. The *civil rights* argument, on the contrary, emphasizes that the military in a democratic polity is (or should be) a reflection of the society and of the core values – citizenship and equality, chief among them – it is supposed to defend and protect.

The basic assumption shared by those who believe that women represent a danger to military readiness is that female presence jeopardizes the effectiveness of the forces. Either because of their physical and psychological characteristics or of the disruption of

cohesion it is apt to produce in military units, their access to combat functions, in particular, is considered a risk for the security of the nation (Mitchell, 1998; Gutmann, 2000; Van Creveld, 2001). At the other end of the ideological spectrum are those who believe that citizenship rights and responsibilities are paramount and should have priority. Defenders of this position contend that discrimination and inconsistent or even contradictory restrictions hurt efficiency (Fenner, 2000), and stress that arguments to exclude women from the military or limit their roles are reminiscent of those used in the past to exclude whole categories from certain occupations ([MW] Segal, 1983; [DR] Segal & Kestnbaum, 2002).

Between these two extreme perspectives, however, positions have varied and not always has the endorsement of one necessarily involved a full rejection of the other. In any case, there are two particularly puzzling aspects to this debate: first, the arguments do not seem to have changed significantly since the 1970s ([MW] Segal, 1983; Carreiras, 2006). With very few differences, value rationales in the policy debate over women in the military have been reproduced *ad nauseam*, often in terms that are insensitive to social transformations in the nature of war, the organizational format of military and major social trends concerning the status of women in society.⁸ Second, the arguments that have been used to oppose or limit women's access to the military, and to combat roles in particular, seem to disregard research results that consistently fail to establish a link between women's military participation and decreased effectiveness. In other words, there is a clear discrepancy between normative assertions and empirical evidence when it comes to the impact of gender integration on military readiness and performance. A close examination of some of the proposals put forward to counter the resistance to gender integration on the grounds of effectiveness will make it possible to bring out the presuppositions on which such a contention usually rests.

Behind the idea that the presence of women affects military effectiveness is the belief that effective or successful performance is the result of cohesion, which in turn is a result of social homogeneity (i.e. male bonding). By interfering in the unit cohesion of male-bonded groups, women would thus represent a threat to effectiveness, especially, in combat situations. This assertion has been challenged from a variety of viewpoints.

First, it has been argued that social homogeneity is not a necessary condition for group cohesion ([DR] Segal & Kestnbaum, 2002). Research has shown that the factors that affect the formation of primary group ties are diverse: membership stability, group size, frequency and duration of contact, the group's recent experience, the presence of a threat or crisis, the quality of leadership, the quality of training, and the sense of equity within the

⁸ Four main sets of arguments have been put forward on the conservative side of the 'rights vs. readiness' divide. First are concerns about women's individual characteristics, their bodies and psychological characteristics (physical strength, menstruation, pregnancy, emotionality, ability to perform under stress, etc.), which supposedly make them less effective combatants. Second are questions relating to the effects of women's presence on the cohesion and morale of military units (interpersonal processes bearing on performance; impact on 'male-bonding'); third, arguments regarding cost-effectiveness (attrition, job migration, lost duty time, personnel selection costs); last but not least, concerns were voiced over the consequences of women's military participation in both symbolic and real terms (preservation of male ideals, public opinion, perception of the military by allies and potential adversaries, etc.).

group all enter into the equation. Building in-group cohesion is thus something that can be achieved in many different ways, and shared values and attitudes can be created among disparate members. As Segal and Kestnbaum note, “*the assumption that people necessarily prefer to associate in small groups with those like themselves is simply unsupportable in the face of research performed on social integration in the armed forces since World War II*” ([DR] Segal & Kestnbaum, 2002, p.453). Even if male bonding may have been an operative element in cohesion in the past, it does not seem to be the dominant factor any longer. Recent research suggests that professional competence is replacing male bonding as a source of cohesion in combat units (King, 2013).

Second, various authors have stressed that there is no clear relationship between cohesion and performance. Contradicting intuitive ideas, research results in this field seem to be elusive. Elisabeth Kier has shown that cohesion is only one of multiple factors that may affect group performance and that its contribution may be both considerably less significant and more complex than is often assumed (Kier, 1999, p.44). According to her, there is little evidence of a causal relationship between cohesion and performance. Only a modest positive correlation has been identified and, even in this case, analysts seem to be more confident that successful performance leads to cohesion than the reverse (Kier, 1999, p.41). Moreover, cohesion can be beneficial or damaging to a group’s performance. Group cohesion can be dysfunctional to organizational performance whenever the group goals are contrary to those of the organization, or when the group develops a subculture that make acts of resistance feasible. A fundamental distinction here is that between two components of cohesion : social cohesion and task cohesion. Social cohesion refers to emotional personal bonds that unite people, such as friendship, caring or closeness ; task cohesion refers to a shared collective commitment to achieve goals. Again, research has shown that while the more instrumental nature of task cohesion seems to have a positive influence on performance, the same cannot be said about social cohesion (McCoun, 1993; Kier, 1999, p.43). Where a small correlation has been identified between cohesion and performance, task cohesion was found to be the critical component. Social cohesion based on homogeneity (such as the one most likely to derive from “male-bonding”) is the less likely to contribute to military effectiveness. Drawing on historical research on the US military since World War II, Segal and Kestnbaum concluded that...

neither the positive association between social cohesion and military performance nor the negative association between social integration and military effectiveness, has been strongly or uniformly supported in research (...) There is no causal link that can be demonstrated using rigorous methods between social cohesion and high levels of military performance, or between social integration and any reduction in military effectiveness” ([DR] Segal & Kestnbaum, 2002, p.453).

Third, the criteria used to measure effectiveness have also been addressed. Efficiency, the ability to fulfil assigned roles and missions at an optimum cost, has been frequently discussed in this light. Against the dominant representation of efficiency calculations as objective, some have highlighted the evidence of social/subjective elements

built into these apparently objective and neutral measures. The fact that standards of efficiency are subject to changes and routinely adjusted to both technological developments and the characteristics of the available personnel pool has been identified as a striking example of this less than reliable criterion's lack of relevance (Binkin & Bach, 1977, p.72).

Finally, it has been argued that discrimination itself might be detrimental to both cohesion and performance. Even admitting that social cohesion may under certain conditions improve military performance, there seems to be no reason to believe that building cohesion does depend on discrimination against certain groups. The fact that women are presently an active part of military forces and play an important role in terms of force stability, suggests that tolerating exclusionary attitudes is dysfunctional. Confining women to auxiliary positions deprived of equal status in combat units creates inequity that can itself damage cohesion.

Empirical data on women's military participation in operational, close-to-combat areas, or during deployments – the most extreme situations – has also been used to deconstruct the normative belief of a negative impact of women's presence on military effectiveness. Women's prominent role in terrorist and guerrilla groups, in which strong patterns of male bonding can be expected to exist (Binkin & Bach, 1977, p.91), provides a first instance of test. There is wide historical evidence that women have been effective combatants during revolutionary periods. When societies are faced with survival risks, as in the cases of invasion or conquest, women often join the military domain as combatants, and this participation is not only welcomed but also actively encouraged. In these cases, gender boundaries are disrupted and gender norms temporarily suspended. As Segal noted:

What has happened in the past in many nations is that when the armed forces need women, their prior military history is recalled to demonstrate that they can perform effectively in various positions. There is a process of cultural amnesia regarding the contributions women made during emergency situations, until a new emergency arises and then history is rediscovered" ([MW] Segal, 1993, p.84).

A wealth of research conducted on mixed-gender units in different field conditions and operations during the past four decades provides additional empirical support to challenge the link between women's presence and decreased effectiveness. In general, these studies have demonstrated that when task cohesion is achieved within a group, the presence of women does not damage performance. On the contrary, the distinction between in-group and out-group prevails over that of the sexes within the unit. As in historical precedents, gender boundaries and stereotypes seem to lose significance in the face or perceived common threats and common goals. The fact that male and female soldiers are sharing tasks and goals presumably makes integration easier and increases the possibility that people are seen as individuals more than as members of a group or sex category.⁹ Even if sometimes higher numbers of women have been associated with lower cohesion, gender differences in support for the mission and differences in deployment circumstances have

⁹ Devilbiss, 1985 ; Miller & Moskos, 1995 ; Harrel & Miller, 1997 ; Maniscaldo, 1997.

been suggested as plausible explanations.¹⁰ Recent experiences from women's involvement in the frontline in Iraq and Afghanistan also “*demonstrate that women can serve in a professional infantry unit which is united by its competences, not the social identities of its members*” (King, 2013, p.8). Likewise, it has been sustained that a greater proportion of women in international peacekeeping missions impacts positively on the success of missions (Bridges & Horsfall, 2009) and gender equality has been identified as a force multiplier, enhancing operational effectiveness (Dharmapuri, 2011).

To be sure, gender integration problems in the armed forces do persist and recent developments related to incidents of sexual harassment and assault are but one critical indicator of the challenge that it still represents. However, what empirical results show clearly is that *there is no evidence* of negative effects of women's military presence on the cohesion and effectiveness of military units. Most current debates and policy options, however, keep focusing on the concern that there might be. How can this help us make sense of the diversity of patterns of women's military involvement in western democracies?

Gender Integration in the Armed Forces

Historically, gender integration in the military has been a driver of convergence as it usually serves to undermine the separate character of the military. The need to enlarge the recruitment base in contexts of increased competition for human resources on a tight labour market as well as democratic and legal pressures for equality have prompted the armed forces to intensify women's participation over the past four decades. The growing number and diversification of women's military roles can be seen as both a symptom and one of the most visible consequences of change in the armed forces in most of the Western world during this period.¹¹

Similar pressures for increased convergence have been noted in a large group of countries, namely in Europe and North-America, and led their armed forces to take in more women (see table 1, next page). Females have progressively been allowed to enter military academies and given access to a wider variety of positions and functions. While the majority remains employed in support functions (Carreiras, 2006), many have already been accepted in operational slots or close-to-combat areas. Existing legal restrictions have progressively been lifted,¹² and today more positions than ever are formally open to them (Obradovic, 2014). In countries such as Norway, women have served aboard submarines and a woman has already occupied the position of submarine commander. Recent developments include Australia's lift of the ban on women in combat roles in September 2011,¹³ the US Defense Department's announcement that, from 2016, women will be

¹⁰ Rosen, Bliese, Wright & Gifford, 1999.

¹¹ Moskos, Williams & Segal, 2000.

¹² Dandeker & Segal, 1996 ; Winslow & Dunn, 2002 ; Harries-Jenkins, 2002.

¹³ “Australia Lifts Restrictions for Women in Combat Roles, *CNN Wire*, 30 September 2011 : see http://articles.cnn.com/2011-09-27/asia/world_asia_australia-women-combat_1_combat-roles-direct-combat-lory-manning?_s=PM:ASI.

allowed to serve in ground-combat roles,¹⁴ and the British Defence Secretary’s public statement, made in December 2014, in which he announced his intention to end the Army’s ban on women serving in frontline infantry roles.¹⁵

Table 1 : Percentage of Women in the Armed Forces of NATO countries, 1986-2012

Countries	Years	1986	2000	2004	2008	2012
Belgium		3.9	7.6	8.3		7.6
Bulgaria				4.2	10.3	14.4
Canada		9.2	11.4	12.3	11.0	14.0
Czech Republic		2.7	3.3	12.3	12.4	13.7
Denmark		3.0	4.2	5.0	5.8	6.3
France		3.7	8.5	12.8	14.2	15.1
Germany		0.0	1.4	5.2	7.6	9.7
Greece		1.0	3.8	4.2	11.7	
Hungary		5.7	6.8	10.0	20.0	20.0*
Italy				0.5	3.3	3.8
Latvia				13.5	16.5	16.3
Lithuania				6.0	12.2	10.9
Luxembourg		0.0	4.2			4.9**
Netherlands		1.5	8.0	8.6	9.0	9.0
Norway		1.4	3.2	6.3	7.5	8.6
Poland		0.0	0.1	0.5	1.2	2.5
Portugal		0.0	6.6	8.4	14.0	12.7
Romania				3.9	4.0	4.9
Slovakia				6.1		9.0
Slovenia				19.2	15.8	13.5
Spain		0.0	5.8	10.5	12.3	12.3
Turkey		0.0	0.1	3.9		
United Kingdom		5.1	8.1	8.8	10.2	9.7
United States		10.2	14.0	15.0	15.5	14.0

* Data for 2011 ; ** Data for 2010.

Sources : Data for 1986: Stanley & Segal, 1988, p.563 ; other years : *Annual Reports* of NATO’s Committee on Gender Perspectives (http://www.nato.int/issues/women_nato/index.html).

Some other countries, not least Canada, Germany or the UK, have experienced rather strong external pressures to achieve gender equality in the armed forces. Others, such as The Netherlands, embraced it from within the defence organization. In spite of a rather late start, Southern European States, such as Portugal or Spain, have also made significant progress in the integration of women in their militaries. Although based on somehow different rationales and responding to more functional pressures, Central and Eastern European countries have followed suit. In many places, traditional and previously

¹⁴ Cf. <http://www.defense.gov/News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=119098>.

¹⁵ “Women Could Get Combat Roles in British Army by 2016”, *The Guardian*, 19 December 2014 : <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/dec/19/women-combat-roles-british-army-infantry-armoured-units> (accessed March 1st 2015).

uncontested archetypes of military masculinity have been questioned¹⁶ and even if levels of success varied, integration policies have been designed and implemented.

However, despite this tendency to eliminate discrimination and equalize status between service members, occupational restrictions still exist and women are in practice, even if not formally, mostly excluded from combat-related areas and functions; they are also clearly underrepresented in higher ranks and power positions within the military system as well as in international operations; last but not least, they are not always accepted and often have to face hostile reactions. Empirical data show that even when formal/ legal integration has been accomplished, *real* social integration did not necessarily follow (Winslow & Dunn, 2002). The persistent and increasingly reported problem of sexual harassment and assault in the military, which led the US to engage in a deep policy review in recent years, is a good example of such dynamics. In addition, progress made in the past has not always shown a linear pattern. Women's military participation has been subject to cycles of expansion and contraction and tendencies to reinstate exclusionary policies have been observed ([MW] Segal, 1999). In the US, for instance, one indication of this trend has been the Center for Military Readiness campaign against gender-integrated basic training (CMR, 2003) and its continued opposition to women's access to combat functions.¹⁷

Country comparisons yield a variety of situations. While some have integrated women, granting them real (and not only formal) access to a wide range of positions and occupations, others keep women in little more than symbolic positions. As already noted in the past (Stanley & Segal, 1988), there is still great variation regarding the extent to which different countries have promoted female integration. Such variation ranges from a very limited numerical presence, rank limitations, segregated training and severe functional restrictions, to relatively open career patterns, fully integrated training and access to combat roles.

What are the factors that can explain this diversity? To what extent is it related to varying patterns of civil-military relations? Two main types of influence have been identified to account for policy orientations and the pace of change with regard to female military participation. On the one hand, social and cultural factors seem to frame the process and generally create the background conditions for female recruitment. Such factors arise from wider social change concerning patterns of women's social and political participation, their entry into the labour market, and democratic pressures towards more egalitarian gender values. On the other hand, a more direct influence is exerted within military organizations by transformations deriving from major shifts in international relations as well as from technological change: the inversion of the ratio between combat

¹⁶ Kümmel, 2002 ; Higate, 2003 ; Woodward & Winter, 2007.

¹⁷ See, for instance, Center for Military Readiness (CMR, a conservative advocacy organization specializing in military and social issues), Special Report: "Defense Department 'Diversity' Push for Women in Land Combat", January 2013: <http://cmrlink.org/data/sites/85/CMRDocuments/CMR%20Special%20Report%20-%20January2013.pdf>.

and support functions, organizational fragmentation and occupational specialization, the end of the mass armies and the bandwagon shifts to all-volunteer forces of recent years, not to mention size reduction and increasing professionalization, are cases in point. All these changes have generated a stronger need for more qualified personnel and underlined the dependence of military establishments on their parent societies. In Western countries, women usually constitute a more qualified personnel pool on the labour market than men. Further, if decreasing birth rates and the legitimacy crisis (Harries-Jenkins & Van Doorn, 1976) that has made military service unattractive to young generations in this part of the world are added to the list, the factors that affect women's military participation form a complex tangle of influences.

Comparative research has indeed shown that a variegated set of internal and external circumstances bear on the degree to which the armed forces differ from one society to the next with regard to the equality and diversity agenda in general, and to gender integration in particular. A 2000 study on the participation of women in the armed forces of NATO countries (Carreiras, 2006) highlighted three main conclusions in this respect.

The first regards the *effects of time* on inclusiveness. Findings revealed that, against existing expectations, a longer presence of women in the ranks did not imply a consistent increase in their relative numbers. Although time was positively correlated to the overall degree of gender inclusiveness, this was only true for the group of countries that scored higher in inclusiveness. Time seemed to be positively related to the integration process only when other conditions were met.

The study's second, evidence-based conclusion regarded the relation between the military's *organizational format* and its level of gender integration. The more a force relies on volunteer personnel, the higher the percentage of women in total force levels. Conversely, the closer a military remains to the mass-armed force model, the lower its degree of female representation. This pattern had already been identified in various studies on the end of mass armies, where women's military participation was even considered to be one of the best indicators of ongoing organizational format trends (Haltiner, 1998). A more limited pool of available eligible young men prepared to join made resort to the recruitment of women one common master trend among Western militaries.

The third conclusion referred to the impact of some external variables related to the *socio-economic and political structures*. It revealed that the more gender-equal the society,¹⁸ the higher the levels of gender inclusiveness in the armed forces.

In sum, the study strongly suggested that gender integration outcomes were clearly greater and more favourable in countries more exposed to the democratization of gender relations in society at large and to external political pressures to achieve gender equality in the military. Likewise, gender inclusiveness was higher where the military opened up to

¹⁸ The measure used was UNDP's Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), a composite index measuring gender inequality in three basic dimensions of empowerment – economic participation and decision-making, political participation and decision-making and power over economic resources.

society due to organizational shifts to all-volunteer recruitment, and where gender equality policies were implemented in the armed forces. Symmetrically, regardless of the moment when women joined the military, in countries where those external influences had not been felt with the same intensity, where the military remained closer to a mass-army format, and where women had not reached a more equal position in the social structure, there were lower levels of gender inclusiveness in the military.

Recognizing that these results pointed to potential spill-over effects from society into the military organization, it was then hypothesized that change towards greater gender equality in the armed forces would not occur automatically as a consequence of time or the increase in relative numbers. On the contrary, it would probably depend more on the extent to which women's presence and power in society at large might influence policy orientations and decision-making processes within the armed forces. However, a cautious note on the effect of policies was also made: without careful design and planning, policies aimed at *formal* integration can sometimes work against real *social* integration, especially if they are culturally devalued or perceived as a source of bias and inequity.

In the same vein, in a study focusing on diversity in the armed forces in Europe, Forster underlined two important aspects: that existing differences in gender integration are related to the type of military institution from the perspective of its overall degree of convergence with society, and that convergence patterns might develop for very different reasons (Forster, 2006). In States where civil-military convergence has taken place and the armed forces lost organizational autonomy in determining what internal changes are acceptable, pressures to change in this respect have mainly, although not exclusively, derived from external legal factors, with the European Court of Justice interfering in issues on which the armed forces held unquestioned monopoly in the past, such as combat effectiveness. In this group of countries, more women are likely to serve in the future, to hold senior and command positions, and experience greater work-place equality. In a second group of countries, mainly composed of Central and Eastern European countries, convergence on gender matters has taken place whereas in other areas the military remains strikingly different from society. The Czech Republic, where 13.6% of the regular armed forces in 2011 were women, is considered paradigmatic in this respect. Here, however, *“the motivation to recruit women has not been a normative commitment to equal opportunities but rather a pressing functional need to ensure the widest possible recruitment pool given generally low levels of esteem for the armed forces”* (Forster, 2006, p.121). But even acknowledging the functional rather than normative rationale to promote an equality agenda, the expectation is that these States will face challenges that will progressively undermine the gate-keeping power of their armed forces. Finally, in cases where the military's position as arbiter of internal change remains fundamentally unchallenged, poorly developed civil societies and weak economies mean that neither the legal structure and human rights advocacy groups nor military personnel themselves have enough power to impact significantly on the armed forces, or even on society more widely. The fact that the equality agenda has not been advanced in society at large is thus seen as

explaining the absence of military-society convergence: rather than resisting change, the armed forces simply reflect prevailing social trends.

In addition, an assessment of the role of women in NATO forces (Schjølset, 2010), showed the persistence of diverse situations across countries and stressed differences in recruitment and retention strategies among member-States. While in some West European and North American countries a strong emphasis on strategies for reducing the gender gap in the armed forces coincides with higher levels of female personnel, favourable numbers are not always preceded by distinct recruitment and retention strategies. The UK and France, for instance, seem to have been able to increase women's participation without many policy initiatives. Conversely, countries that have implemented strong policies towards recruiting and retaining women, did not always reach their quantitative goals. In Scandinavian countries, such as Norway, where a variety of enabling conditions exist, including active recruitment policies, a high level of female participation in public and political life and a strong public discourse on gender equality, have not been able to reach the desired recruitment objectives (Skjelsbæk & Tryggestad, 2010). Again, what this study underlines is that political efforts do not always lead to practical success: providing women with equal opportunities might not be enough to motivate them for military service. As accurately noted by Williams, if those States that have made formal commitments are more likely to carry out integration, especially when there are examples of countries embracing change without undermining operational effectiveness, "*de jure policies do not automatically translate into de facto opportunities, and domestic interest groups know they must use both legal and political instruments to ensure that they do*" (Williams, 2000, p.270).

Finally, two recent comparative studies bring in new variables into the equation. In a study on military gender integration in Germany, France and the UK, Eulriet underlined variation in patterns of women's participation in the military, tracing it back to differences in public cultures (Eulriet, 2012). Obradovic (2014), on the contrary, dismissed the role of culture and instead highlighted the increased pressures exerted by public international organizations (such as the United Nations' move to promote gender integration under UN Resolution 1325, or NATO's quest for standardization and consistency among member-countries), as well as by domestic women's movements, as major factors contributing to greater gender integration in the military.

Notwithstanding differences in focus, existing research has thus underlined three important aspects: first, that while gender integration in the armed forces is shaped by different societal processes and not by a single major factor, a strong correlation seems to exist between greater gender integration in the military and growing interpenetrability between the civilian and military spheres ; second, that integration seems to be a sensitive indicator of dominant patterns of civil-military relations ; third, that it is also contributing to a transformation of the relationship between military institutions and societies, with gender integration issues and challenges pushing for greater accountability at a time and in a part of the world where the major link between citizens and the military through conscription is fast becoming a thing of the past across the board.

Conclusion

This article has highlighted the connection between gender issues and civil-military relations in democratic societies, arguing that gender can be seen as both an arena where tensions over change in the relationship between armed forces and societies unfold, and a sensitive indicator of change in military-society relationships. It emphasized that such a perspective can only make sense in the framework of a broad conception of civil-military relations – one that encompasses new analytical dimensions beyond the problem of civilian control and the traditional focus on political and military elites. Exploring the gender issue area as simultaneously mirroring and inducing change in civil-military relations requires a theoretical approach where the question of legitimacy and accountability – ultimately, of the governance – of the armed forces in democratic societies becomes paramount.

Among the variety of topics bearing on gender that can be used to empirically test and illustrate the above framework, this article focused on the process of women's integration into the armed forces of Western democracies over the past four decades. It first examined the debate over women's military participation, which it presented as illustrative of how civil-military tensions have developed around the gender issue. Drawing on recent empirical research results, it deconstructed the rationale for sustaining women's exclusion from military roles on the basis of effectiveness.

Secondly, it reviewed research results on women's actual integration to show that variation in gender integration patterns closely parallels equally variable functional and cultural patterns of convergence and divergence between the armed forces and the wider society. While external pressures have served to erode the separate character of the armed forces, analysis also reveals the extent of variation across countries, unveiling the complex set of internal and external circumstances that seem to relate to different outcomes. Overall, this analysis, as well as the persistence of contradictory trends, points to the likelihood that tensions and controversies around gender will continue to inform debates and policies in the realm of civil-military relations. It can be expected that conflicting perspectives and fractiousness over gender topics inside the armed forces and among the various interest groups in society will endure or even become exacerbated. In any case, it is perhaps not without interest to remember, as Burk (1998) put it, that "*fractiousness is only disagreement over policy. Its lack may be a surer symptom than its presence that a democracy has fallen on hard times*".

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