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"Masculinities perspectives": advancing a radical Women, Peace and Security agenda?

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ABSTRACT
Feminist scholars have long explored the relationships between masculinities, femininities, and war, yet men are rarely named in Women, Peace and Security (WPS) policies, and masculinities even less commonly. Some activists in favor of bringing analysis of masculinities into WPS policies propose that a focus on reshaping masculinities and femininities as a strategy for resisting militarism is necessary to return the agenda to what they perceive as its "original" purpose of preventing war. Drawing on my personal experiences as an NGO advocate, and on participant observation and interviews with UK government officials, this article explores what we can learn from efforts to integrate a "masculinities perspective" into WPS policies. I argue that, while some language concerning men and boys and, to a lesser degree, masculinity/ies has been incorporated into these policies, this is usually done in ways that subvert the intentions of civil society actors who have advocated for this shift. As a result, these concepts have been assimilated in ways that do not challenge militarism, and indeed at times serve to normalize it. I argue that this demonstrates the limitations of WPS policies as a vehicle for pursuing feminist anti-militarist goals.

Introduction

Women, Peace and Security (WPS) is a political agenda based on foundational tensions, and whose aims, origins, and strategies are highly contested. Its accompanying international policy framework, including UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and eight subsequent resolutions,[1] calls for increased representation of women in decision making at all levels in institutions for the prevention, management, and resolution of (armed) conflict; protection of women's human rights in conflict; and provision of humanitarian assistance, security, and justice services to meet their needs. However, WPS

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can be understood as a political agenda with a life beyond the UNSCRs: advocates have sought to link its principles to issues not covered by the resolutions, such as LGBT+ rights, migration, and climate change (Hagen 2016; Holvikivi and Reeves 2017; Kronsell 2019). The NGOs, activists, and UN staff who advocated for the adoption of UNSCR 1325 in 2000 held varying conceptualizations of WPS and its purpose. Some, such as the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), linked it to a feminist anti-militarist position, advocating for the resolution to make connections between militarism and constructions of masculinity and femininity, though this was a minority view (Cohn 2008; Klot 2015). Others, including Amnesty International, did not share this analysis of militarism, but prioritized protecting women's rights in conflict settings and promoting their participation in conflict resolution (Cohn 2008; Klot 2015) – concerns more strongly reflected in UNSCR 1325. Feminist activists and academics taking a more anti-militarist stance have critiqued what might be described as the liberal vision of WPS enshrined in the UNSCRs as focusing on adding women into militarized structures rather than transforming how they understand and pursue international security (Otto 2006; Cohn 2008; Pratt and Richter-Devroe 2011; Cockburn 2012a), and on "making war safe for women" rather than preventing it (Weiss 2011). Conflict prevention has received little attention in WPS policies relative to the prevention of violence against women *within* conflict situations (Shepherd 2016; Basu and Confortini 2017; Basu and Shepherd 2018). Recent years have seen a resurgence of advocacy by NGOs such as WILPF, Women Peacemakers Program (WPP), and Saferworld arguing for WPS policies to address the social construction of masculinities as a driver of conflict, in order to advance an anti-militarist WPS agenda with greater focus on conflict prevention (WILPF 2015; WPP 2015; Saferworld 2015).

As a civil society activist who has advocated for WPS policies to challenge constructions of masculinities due to their implication in (re)producing militarism, in this article I draw on my own experiences, alongside those of other activists and policymakers, to explore what we can learn from these efforts. Using the UK as a case study, I argue that, while some language concerning men and boys and, to a lesser degree, masculinity/ies has been incorporated into WPS policies, this is usually done in ways that subvert the intentions of NGOs such as WILPF and WPP who have advocated for this shift as part of a strategy for realizing a more radical, anti-militarist WPS agenda. As a result, the assimilation of these concepts does not challenge militarism, and indeed at times normalizes it. I argue that, given the investment of powerful states such as the UK in militarism and the marginality of WPS to their national security policies, there is limited potential for references to masculinities in WPS policies to effectively challenge militarism.

Throughout this article, I use the term "masculinities perspectives" to refer to analytical approaches that attend to constructions of masculinities as they

relate to conflict and peacebuilding. This is usually promoted as part of a "gender-relational approach" that acknowledges the role of people of all genders in (de)constructing masculinities and femininities. While arguably all gender discourse is (at least implicitly) "relational" given its concern with relations between different gendered categories, within WPS policy debates the term has taken on a specific meaning, referring to an analytical stance that deliberately avoids the all-too-common conflation of "gender" with "women," or the use of "gender" to describe categories of actors, rather than gendered norms, discourses, and structures of power (e.g., El-Bushra 2012, 18; Myrttinen, Naujoks, and El-Bushra 2014, 8; Schilling, Froese, and Naujoks 2018, 175). Such advocacy messages frequently emphasize widening discussions of gender to include sexual orientation and gender identity, and the importance of analyzing gender in relation to intersecting oppressions (e.g., Myrttinen, Naujoks, and El-Bushra 2014; Tielemans 2015; Watson, Wright, and Groenewald 2016). While feminist scholarship highlights that not only men and boys perform masculinities (Halberstam 1998; Zalewski 2000), and that the cultural coding of institutions, policies, and worldviews as masculine has profound implications for peace and security (Tickner 1992; Cohn 1993; Williams 2002; Hutchings 2008), NGO advocates of a "masculinities perspective" in WPS have focused primarily on masculinities as they are associated with putatively male bodies (e.g., Vess et al. 2013, 2–3; Wright 2014, 4; Tielemans 2015, 8; WPP 2015, 2). In this article, I use the terms "gender-relational approach" and "masculinities perspective" interchangeably because, while a gender-relational approach to WPS is usually taken to be broader than adding analysis of men and masculinity/ies, the latter is often the aspect of this approach emphasized in advocacy messages.

Men and masculinities in WPS: a present absence

While feminist academic inquiries in conflict and security studies have long explored the multifaceted relationships between masculinities, femininities, and security (e.g., Connell 2002; Whitworth 2004; Hutchings 2008; Kirby and Henry 2012; Duncanson 2013; Myrttinen, Khattab, and Naujoks 2017; Durie-smith 2017a), men are rarely explicitly referenced in WPS policies, and masculinities even less commonly. In the international policy framework on WPS, men, boys, and masculinities are notable by their absence (Cohn, Kinsella, and Gibbings 2004, 137; Otto 2006, 168; Shepherd 2008, 116–117; Cockburn 2012a, 55; Myrttinen 2019b, 89–91). Of the nine UNSCRs on WPS, only UNSCRs 2106, 2242, and 2467 mention men or boys explicitly. Resolution 2106 references them as victims of sexual violence and as partners to be enlisted in preventing violence against women and girls, while Resolution 2242 recommends their engagement in efforts to promote women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution. The latest resolution, UNSCR

2467, goes further, urging states to "challenge cultural assumptions about male invulnerability to [sexual] violence" (UN Security Council 2019), perhaps indicating an emerging willingness to broach the topic of masculinities. Of course, men and boys have always been present in the agenda, both literally (as policymakers, diplomats, etc.) and implicitly in policy discourses (usually as perpetrators of violence), with attendant assumptions about masculinities. Yet in policy documents they are usually invisible: an unmarked category.

WPS policies such as UNSCRs and National Action Plans (NAPs) – the primary policy tool for codifying states' plans for implementing WPS commitments – largely treat "men" and "women" as fixed, biological categories that are given, not produced (Otto 2006, 160; Shepherd 2008, 117–121).[2] The 2015 UN Global Study on Women, Peace and Security (Coomaraswamy 2015), based on extensive global consultations with governments and civil society, contains just nine references to masculinity/ies in 417 pages, and none to femininities.[3] Arguably, the many policy statements advocating the development and expansion of available socially acceptable roles for women – such as by increasing participation in legislatures, peace negotiations, or peacekeeping missions – invoke a desire to reshape femininities, without naming them. While references to reconstructing masculinities are also sometimes implicit, they occur less frequently.

Why does the invisibility of masculinities in WPS policies matter? Feminist activists and academics have demonstrated how patriarchal constructions of masculinities and femininities sustain militarism (Enloe 1983, 1993; Reardon 1985; Cohn 1993; Goldstein 2001; Cohn and Ruddick 2004; Theidon 2009; Barry 2011), understood here as a system of beliefs and practices that regard (preparation for) war as normal and inevitable (Mann 1987).[4] These arguments typically implicate the valorization of particular constructions of masculinity, such as those that link manliness to violence and domination, and hierarchies of value elevating some masculinities over others and over all femininities (Cohn 1993; Connell 2002; Hutchings 2008; Messerschmidt 2010; Duncanson 2013). Feminists have argued that patriarchal gender norms, combined with other global structures such as capitalism, racism, and coloniality, play a role in causing, or at least normalizing and legitimizing, militarism and war (Reardon 1985; Cockburn 2010; Duriesmith 2017a). Based on this understanding, feminist scholars and activists have advocated for changing the content of what is considered to be masculine, and/or eradicating hierarchies of value between and among masculinities and femininities, as a means of undermining militarism and contributing to conflict prevention (e.g., Connell 2002; Otto 2006; Duncanson 2013; Wright 2014; WPP 2015), and propose various visions for an alternative, feminist approach to international politics based on equality, empathy, and solidarity (e.g., Tickner 1992, 127–144; Sylvester 1994; WILPF 2015; Aggestam, Bergman Rosamond,

and Kronsell 2019). Not all of those who support increased attention to masculinities in WPS policies and activities hold an anti-militarist position, and I will go on to discuss other arguments that have been made; however, the central concern of this article is what governments' responses to this advocacy tell us about the potential for WPS policies to advance an anti-militarist agenda.

Explicitly feminist, anti-militarist WPS advocates such as WILPF have long advocated for the transformation of masculinities to be part of the WPS agenda. However, others have more recently started or stepped up lobbying in this area. The Netherlands-based international NGO (INGO) WPP, for example, worked with partners around the world to implement programs challenging patriarchal masculinities as a peacebuilding endeavor (see WPP 2010, 2014, 2015). International peacebuilding NGOs such as Conciliation Resources, International Alert, and Saferworld have also made the promotion of a relational approach core to their gender advocacy (see WPP, Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, Conciliation Resources, and Government of the Netherlands 2013; Myrttinen, Naujoks, and El-Bushra 2014; Wright 2014). Meanwhile, NGOs working under the "engaging men and boys for gender equality" rubric, traditionally focused on engaging men in advocacy and programs on women's rights issues such as domestic violence and reproductive rights, have begun addressing armed conflict and peacebuilding (e.g., MenEngage Alliance 2015; WILPF 2015; Keedi, Yaghi, and Barker 2017). Calls for a gender-relational approach have resulted in the adoption of the "Gender, Peace and Security" (GPS) label by some NGOs (e.g., Conciliation Resources, International Alert, and Saferworld 2015), calls for a combined "WPS + GPS" agenda (De Jonge Oudraat and Brown 2017), and even discussion of a new "Men, Peace and Security" agenda (US Institute of Peace 2013).[5]

Little has been written about how these messages have been received by policymakers, or how efforts to integrate a masculinities perspective into WPS policies have fared. NGOs have published extensive guidance on incorporating questions about masculinities, femininities, and intersectionality into practical methodologies for conflict analysis (Tielemans 2015; Watson, Wright, and Groenewald 2016; Wright and Close 2019). Important work has also been done to document what it means to adopt a gender-relational approach in on-the-ground programming (El-Bushra 2012; Myrttinen, Naujoks, and El-Bushra 2014; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] 2019). While it is difficult to identify documented peacebuilding programs that have explicitly sought to reshape masculinities as a strategy for resisting militarism, some analysis has been done on how existing programming models might be adapted for such a purpose, including educational and consciousness-raising work with people of all genders to change attitudes and behaviors relating to masculine norms, and advocacy work to address societal structures that hold gender norms in place (Wright 2014).

David Duriesmith (2017b) highlights some pitfalls of introducing a masculinities perspective to WPS programming via the neoliberal "good men industry." I aim to build on this (largely programming-focused) work by contributing reflections on efforts to introduce a gender-relational approach into policy, using the development of the UK NAP 2018–2022 as a case study.

NGOs employ a variety of arguments in favor of a gender-relational approach to WPS policy. I organize them into four broad categories: (1) "men as allies" arguments, which emphasize the need to leverage men's power in order to achieve gender equality; (2) "male vulnerabilities" arguments, which highlight how patriarchal gender norms harm men and boys in conflict; (3) strategic arguments, which promote relational approaches as a means to move WPS up the international policy agenda; and (4) anti-militarist arguments, which promote the transformation of masculinities as a means to prevent violent conflict. These arguments interlink, and advocates usually employ them in combination. Taking each of them in turn, I examine what the responses to this advocacy tell us about the prospects of integrating gender-relational approaches in WPS policy and what this may mean for actors seeking to use those policies to promote an anti-militarist feminist agenda.

Methods

This article draws upon three sources: (1) personal experience doing advocacy with governments to promote a masculinities perspective in WPS; (2) participant observation and semi-structured interviews with UK government officials; and (3) close reading of NGO advocacy briefings and policy reports.

In my previous role at an INGO, I spent considerable time advocating for a gender-relational approach to the WPS agenda, with both NGOs and policymakers. My colleagues and I published policy reports and organized advocacy events promoting the message that policy and programming on WPS should challenge masculinities that sustain militarism. This article draws on my experiences discussing the topic with policymakers from a variety of governments and multilateral organizations, and delivering training across a range of contexts to NGOs, activists, and government officials on masculinities and peacebuilding. Furthermore, as part of a study examining organizational cultures in policymaking spaces, I spent three months in 2017 doing participant observation at the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) while assisting with the development of the UK NAP on WPS 2018–2022. I conducted semi-structured interviews with civil servants from the FCO, the Department for International Development (DFID), and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) who work on WPS, in which I asked them about the place of masculinities within the agenda. Some quotations from these conversations are included below.[6]

I use the UK context as a case study, then, to explore how conversations about adopting a gender-relational approach to WPS have played out, and how they have shaped policy development. While I do not suggest that UK policy processes and discussions are representative of those taking place in other contexts, my experiences doing advocacy in Europe and the US, and conversations with other advocates, suggest that similar issues have arisen elsewhere.

Four arguments for a masculinities perspective

The typology I present in this section is not exhaustive, but aims to describe how some of the more prevalent lines of argument have been received by policymakers and policy influencers. I explore how each argument is framed, how it has been incorporated (or not) into WPS policy language, and the forms of resistance it has encountered. I do not wish to trace a simple causal link between the deployment of a certain argument and the emergence of a specific form of resistance; as my analysis will show, advocates presenting one argument often find it elicits counter-arguments that seem to respond to another. By structuring the discussion in this way, I hope to shed light on the multiple, interlinked conversations taking place between and among policymakers and NGOs.

"Men as allies" arguments

Given the centrality of women's human rights to the WPS agenda, arguments for considering masculinities in its implementation are, unsurprisingly, often made on the basis that men's engagement is necessary for fulfilling women's rights. This argument starts from the position that (some) men's positions of structural power in society must be leveraged by enlisting them as allies in the struggle for gender equality. For example, the US Institute of Peace (USIP) frames men as an "untapped resource in promoting gender equality, peace, and stability," calling on policymakers to "identify concrete ways that men can be allies in the Women, Peace, and Security agenda" (USIP 2013, 2, 10). Similarly, Women for Women International explains its decision to launch programs working with men and boys on the basis that the charity's work on women's empowerment would be ineffective unless male leaders began to advocate for women's rights (Schmidt 2017).

Where men are explicitly named in WPS policies, it is often in this capacity as allies, and in this respect this argument is perhaps one of the most successful in its aims. As noted earlier, UNSCRs 2106 and 2242 both frame them in this way. However, this language has been criticized as not going far enough; "engaging men and boys" does not necessarily entail an interrogation or revision of masculinities or men's relationships with them (WPP 2015; Wright

2015; Duriesmith 2017b). It is possible to engage men and boys in gender equality work in ways that ultimately shore up their privilege, through language that constructs men as protectors of women, or by rewarding men for small acts of solidarity that do not involve giving up power over women, often entailing work that women have been doing for years with little recognition or recompense (de Vries 2010; Flood 2015; Duriesmith 2017b; Pierotti, Lake, and Lewis 2018; Myrttinen 2019a). Given these risks, advocates have pushed for explicit mention of *masculinities,* and not only of men and boys as a category of actors.

Experience from the UK context is instructive in demonstrating how this mismatch can come about. Some UK-based NGOs have advocated for the government to include language in successive UK NAPs that addresses the construction of masculinities (Saferworld 2011, 2013; Gender Action for Peace and Security [GAPS] UK 2013). During the development of the UK NAP 2014–2017, the idea received agreeable responses from some government officials, yet the final document contained only a paragraph affirming that "we recognize men and boys as crucial allies and partners" (HM Government 2014, 2). Similarly, while references to masculinity/ies were included in draft versions of the UK NAP 2018–2022, these did not appear in the final version, though it maintained a reference to "the need to work with men and boys" (HM Government 2018, 5). When interviewed, UK officials described the concept of masculinities as "too complicated," "too academic," and "too esoteric, too high-level." Even those who supported addressing masculinities more explicitly suggested that "people aren't ready" and that it was "more than the bureaucracy can take."

I observed that this reluctance to talk about masculinities was symptomatic of a wider resistance to concepts perceived as academic or complex. The organizational culture of the UK civil service values brevity and simplicity in communication, linked to time pressure and the fact that most officials are generalists, moving roles and policy areas every two to three years. However, it is important to examine what gets constructed as "complex" and why; the meanings of "masculinities" or "femininities" are arguably no more complex than those of "women," "peace," or "security" – all highly contested ideas in both academic and policy debates, with far-reaching consequences for public policy. In training sessions, generalist policymakers can usually grasp the ideas well enough to gain insight into why thinking about masculinities and femininities matters for their work. Some officials identified that a gradual process of education was needed. As one put it:

> So we definitely need to do more on that, but I do feel like it's a bit of a journey, so if first of all people want to talk about women and girls then that's something, and you've just got to bag that … There's an education piece to get people to understand that before you then try and apply any kind of thinking about femininities and masculinities.

Perhaps, then, the construction of a gender-relational approach as complex and difficult may simply reflect its newness to many WPS policymakers. However, I suggest that there may be another reason. When I pushed interviewees on whether "too complex" signaled only a lack of familiarity or perhaps more substantive objections, some acknowledged the latter. As one put it:

> There are parts of [the UK government] that fundamentally reject the idea that we're trying to produce gender equality. Changing masculinity is not something that they would accept.

This question of substantive objections to de/re-constructing masculinities is crucial, and I return to it later in my discussion of anti-militarist arguments. At this point I also note another objection to the focus on engaging men and boys as allies, which concerns the potential for such programs to draw funding away from work led by and focusing on women (e.g., UN Commission on the Status of Women 2004; de Vries 2010; WPP 2015; Duriesmith 2017b). For the most part – though not without exception – this fear is explicitly amplified by NGO advocates of a gender-relational approach, who emphasize that this should enhance, not detract from, efforts to implement more traditional WPS commitments (e.g., Myrttinen, Naujoks, and El-Bushra 2014, 12; Wright 2014, 16; WPP 2015, 4). There is no guarantee that this call will be heard, and so these concerns warrant serious attention. Similar objections are raised in relation to arguments about men's vulnerabilities in conflict, which I discuss further in the next section.

"Male vulnerabilities" arguments

These arguments typically challenge the tendency in WPS, and broader peacebuilding, development, and humanitarian policy discourses, to conflate "woman" with "victim" and "man" with "perpetrator," so as to render men's vulnerability to violence in conflict situations invisible (Shepherd 2008, 94; Dolan 2014b; Myrttinen, Khattab, and Naujoks 2017, 8–10). They argue that understandings of power relations should be based on situational analysis of each context and not preconceived assumptions about gender, creating space for understanding how patriarchy and intersecting systems of oppression render men vulnerable in a variety of ways (Myrttinen, Naujoks, and El-Bushra 2014; Dolan 2014a). Advocates highlight, for example, how the impacts of conflict-related displacement, disability, economic decline, and changes in women's roles can lead to a loss of livelihoods and other factors often central to masculine identity (Vess et al. 2013; International Rescue Committee 2016). However, this argument has perhaps surfaced most frequently in advocacy around the prevention of, and response to, sexual violence against men and boys in conflict, which is sometimes argued to derive its potency from its effects on masculine identity (Carpenter 2006, 94; Dolan 2014a, 492; Schulz 2018).

Like the "men as allies" argument, this one has begun to make some headway with policymakers, through the acknowledgment of men and boys as victims/survivors of sexual violence (Kirby 2015). After several UNSCRs treating sexual violence as a crime committed solely against women and girls, both UNSCR 2106 and UNSCR 2467 draw attention to its perpetration against men and boys. The UK government, through its Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) launched in 2012, has sought to bring wider acknowledgment of the issue to international policy frameworks – for example, in its drafting of the G8 Declaration on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, which calls for comprehensive services for victims, "be they women, girls, men or boys" (FCO 2013, 2).

This shift toward bringing men into the WPS agenda as victims/survivors of sexual violence has sparked legitimate concerns among some women's rights advocates. That male victims/survivors require specialist services with adequate funding is not in dispute; rather, critics question whether this should be part of the *Women*, Peace and Security agenda, and raise concerns that, if it comes from the same small pots of funding, it will divert existing, hard-won, but inadequate funding from services for female victims/survivors (e.g., Ward 2016, 285). They point out that the trend toward commissioning gender-neutral services can force specialist providers working with women and girls to choose between widening their focus or losing their funding (Coalition of Feminists for Social Change 2017).

In his discussion of the evidence surrounding this issue, David Duriesmith (2017b) concludes that it is unclear whether or to what extent work with men and boys diverts resources from services for women and girls. A detailed examination of this debate is beyond the scope of this article, and, rather than assess the relative merits of each argument, I instead outline the implications of tensions around this issue for broader advocacy on gender-relational approaches to WPS. In particular, for many WPS advocates, any mention of the word "masculinities" quickly invokes these anxieties. One UK NGO advocate explained to me why their organization rarely uses the term "masculinities":

> "Masculinities" – I mean it still definitely alarms some people, because for those working on women's rights … that still to them translates to "programming on men and boys" … which is not something that women's rights advocates are against, I think it just comes down to the funding and the resource and the attention.

Similarly, conversations took place among UK government officials about whether the NAP 2018–2022 should employ what they called a "women and girls" approach or a "gender equality" approach (which, I came to understand, was the term used to refer to a gender-relational approach). However, these were dominated by a discussion of whether it should refer to "violence

against women and girls" or "gender-based violence" (the latter taken to be inclusive of sexual violence against men and boys), with different government departments taking strong stances on either side.[7] While occasional passing reference was made to, for example, the importance of thinking about masculinities and femininities in conflict analysis, discussions on whether to adopt a "gender equality" approach usually returned to which type of violence the NAP should address. Thus, frictions surrounding this question have acted as a barrier to discussing the wider implications of a gender-relational approach, among both NGOs and government officials. My intention here is not to downplay the seriousness of this debate, which has important material consequences for the lives of victims/survivors. Rather, it is to note that this tension is one of several that tend to foreclose wider conversations about integrating masculinities perspectives.

Strategic arguments

While the idea that making masculinities visible in WPS will appeal to the masculinist priorities of policymakers rings alarm bells for some, for others is it is a positive argument. Thus, a gender-relational approach has been promoted on the basis that policymakers are more likely to take it seriously. The Washington-based global network Women in International Security, for example, argues that the WPS agenda's focus on women, while important, has contributed to its marginality (de Jonge Oudraat and Brown 2017). To remedy this, they contend that an expanded "women and gender" approach would be less easily dismissed by mostly male national security communities. It is hypothesized that a relational approach makes the agenda more appealing to (particularly male) policymakers. One UK government official echoed this sentiment, describing the decision to frame training for the military around "gender" rather than "women":

> When they put together their training package and they tried a few different things but they ultimately didn't call their training serial "Women, Peace and Security," they call it … "Gender in Conflict and Sexual Violence" or something, it's not something that explicitly references women. … They clearly think that if you tell them that they're working on women, they will not get it, or they will not take it as seriously as if you couch it in "gender."

Experiences of advocacy with policymakers suggest that this is sometimes the case. When conducting training on gender with both policymakers and NGO colleagues, often the designated session on men and masculinities marks a turning point for male participants, where certain things start to fall into place. For some, the idea of gender as a social construct becomes intelligible once they are able to apply it to their own experiences, and conversations about masculinities open up a space where men can reflect on how social pressures to conform to masculine stereotypes shape their lives. In many

cases, men have explained that conversations about gender became less threatening to them once they could deconstruct how gender operates as a system of power and connect it to their experiences.

However, in the masculinist context of international politics, where that which is coded masculine is generally seen as more serious and important than that which is coded feminine (Cohn 1993; Hooper 2001; Cohn and Enloe 2003), using masculinities to bring men on board with the agenda raises considerable risks. It is perhaps not surprising that some officials participating in WPS training have taken sessions on masculinities as an opportunity to raise questions such as "Why do we always talk about women so much?," sometimes arguing that gender equality agendas perpetrate injustices against men. With increased talk about masculinities in WPS policy discourses in recent years, Cynthia Enloe (2015) has posed the question, "Is masculinities now going to trump any genuine interest in taking women seriously? … [D]o you have to show that you are doing work on masculinities in order to be … taken seriously in the field and corridors of policymaking?" In light of the tendency among some in the policy world toward embracing new fads at the expense of existing commitments, these concerns suggest that cloaking women's rights in the "more serious" mantle of a gender-relational approach as a means of moving them up the policy agenda has the potential to backfire, invoking all of the concerns mentioned above in relation to resource allocation.

Thus far, the lack of uptake of masculinities perspectives in WPS policies suggests that this eventuality has not (yet) materialized. Yet, these experiences show that the risk is present, whether or not the argument for a gender-relational approach is explicitly framed in these terms.

Anti-militarist arguments

I outlined the key features of the anti-militarist argument for a masculinities perspective on WPS earlier in this article. While this perspective is more apparent in the academic literature on WPS, it also appears in NGO advocacy messages. WPP, for example, argued that "Integrating a masculinities perspective in the WPS agenda helps to uncover the gendered roots of armed conflict, and to redefine peace and security from a holistic gender perspective" (2015, 3). Similarly, the US Institute of Peace argues that "long-term peace and stability can only be achieved by understanding how militarized male identities are constructed and how they can be deconstructed" (Vess et al. 2013, 10).

Of the four arguments considered here, this one has been perhaps the least well received by policymakers. When asked why the concept of masculinities had not been referenced in the UK NAP, some of the officials I interviewed framed their objections as a response to the anti-militarist argument. One

UK official, for example, immediately linked the idea of masculinities to the role of the military:

> I've heard a lot about negative masculinities in the armed forces of countries. But it's *meant* to be terrifying. They're soldiers … it's all part of defeating the enemy. … So I think if you take away aggression, which is a necessary part of what the armed forces do, what is negative masculinity? I don't know.

The objection here, then, is less to including the concept of masculinities per se, and more to the critique of militarism it might imply. For these policy-makers, militarism is not a problem to be solved, but an inevitable facet of security governance. However, whether or not this objection is raised and how strongly often depends on how the topic is framed. In conversations I have had with UK government officials, participants are often comfortable with the notion of challenging "violent" or "militarized" masculinities when the discussion pertains to, for example, preventing men in conflict contexts from joining non-state armed groups. The examples of masculinities driving men's involvement in armed violence that seem to recur most frequently in policy discourses come from low-income, majority-world contexts, such as an oft-repeated narrative about bride prices and cattle-raiding in South Sudan (e.g., OECD 2013, 40; Vess et al. 2013, 4; Wright 2014, 7). However, when I have highlighted to policymakers the need to consider how gender norms in minority-world contexts (including the UK) may serve to normalize militarized approaches to national security, there is usually discomfort in the room. One UK official characterized the general reaction of colleagues to the mention of "militarized masculinities" as follows: "Militarization is positive, we're a military nation. … And so demilitarizing Great Britain is imposs-ible, and not valued."

Postcolonial and feminist scholars have highlighted how colonialism has relied on narratives about hypermasculinized (or sometimes feminized) racial-ized men who need to be "civilized" by white men, and sometimes women (e.g., Spivak 1988; Sinha 1995; Stoler 2010), and there is a danger that dis-courses around masculinities and WPS may serve to reproduce such construc-tions, substituting colonial administrators and missionaries with modern-day aid workers (Wright 2014, 37; Duriesmith 2017b, 6, 10; Myrttinen 2019a, 6). In some instances, NGOs advocating for a masculinities perspective in WPS acknowledge this risk in their advocacy messages, and/or highlight the need to think about intersections of gender, race, and class, and address the relationships between gender norms and militarism in the minority world (e.g., Vess et al. 2013, 7; Wright 2014, 37). The frosty reception with which that message is met, however, raises the risk that policymakers either reject the call to consider masculinities altogether or adopt a colonial approach to integrating masculinities into WPS policy. This would reinforce the wider trend of minority-world WPS policies framing the world as

though, in Laura Shepherd's words, "problems occur 'elsewhere,' but solutions can be found 'here'" (2016, 325). Indeed, it has been argued that the ordering of masculinities into racialized hierarchies is already implicit in WPS discourses which reinforce logics of white masculinist protection (Pratt 2013; Parashar 2019). Perhaps, then, efforts to make masculinities visible in WPS policies may just make those meanings (slightly) more explicit. In the context of the UK NAP, officials chose not to include direct references to masculinity/ies, but the experiences outlined here demonstrate how this tendency is present in policy discourses, if not always in policy documents.

This implicit distinction between "legitimate" militarism and other "illegitimate" forms is evident in how analysis of masculinities is applied to some types of violence and not others. It is notable that where governments have gone beyond a call to "engage men and boys" and explicitly invoked a need to address masculinity/ies in WPS policy, it is almost always in reference to preventing sexual and gender-based violence and not in relation to other forms of violence that are more accepted as legitimate wartime practices (e.g., FCO 2014). This implicit distinction may explain why, while the (conflict-focused) UK NAP only goes so far as to "work with men and boys," the UK's (development-focused) Strategic Vision for Gender Equality allows one mention of masculinity, by way of explaining men's "sexual behaviour or violence" (DFID 2018, 8). Similarly, UNSCR 2467 critiques "cultural assumptions" about men's invulnerability to sexual violence, but does not address how the same constructions of masculinity may help to produce wartime violence, sexual or otherwise.

Considering these experiences, do advocates of a gender-relational approach face a choice between outright refusal by policymakers or a colonial version that problematizes masculinities "over there" and not "here," or when they are weaponized in the form of sexual violence but not through high-tech military equipment? Thus far, it would appear so. If bringing a masculinities perspective to WPS was intended by organizations such as WILPF, WPP, and Saferworld as a means of introducing anti-militarist ideas by the back door, its success in the policy sphere has been limited. I now turn to the question of what this means for the competing conceptualizations of WPS I outlined earlier.

Discussion and conclusions

While a masculinities perspective has been advocated as an antidote to militarism, the experiences outlined here show that it can be incorporated in ways wholly compatible with militarism, including by translating it into an "engaging men and boys" frame that fails to challenge structural inequality or reshape masculine norms, or applying it selectively to reinforce a discursive distinction between (what are implicitly framed as) "progressive" masculinities exhibited by minority-world governments championing WPS and aberrant masculinities of racialized men joining non-state armed groups or "hostile"

state militaries. Just as WPS policy discourses already implicitly cite hierarchies of masculinities inflected with raced and classed meanings, they can do so more explicitly by making "masculinities" visible. This resonates with Anna Stavrianakis' analysis of "liberal militarism" in the context of the arms trade, which highlights how, by constructing liberal forms of militarism as moral, responsible, and legitimate compared with "illiberal" forms, policymakers in the UK and US are able to "see the problem of armed violence as separate from the types of arms transfers and war making they are engaged in" (2016, 853). Any trend toward integrating masculinities perspectives into WPS policy in ways that reinforce this discourse would serve to legitimate, rather than undermine, liberal militarism.

Thus, advocacy (partially) animated by anti-militarist critiques of the liberal conception of WPS can fall prey to the same problems it seeks to redress in that version. These challenges are not unique to efforts to promote gender-relational approaches; rather, they confirm known tensions constitutive of the WPS agenda (Kirby and Shepherd 2016, 392). These findings raise a further question: are WPS policies an effective vehicle for pursuing an anti-militarist feminist agenda? While a comprehensive answer is beyond the scope of this article, I suggest that their potential is limited.

The version of WPS proposed by anti-militarist feminists implies a paradigm shift in the way in which security is understood and realized. In her analysis of WPS advocacy within the UN system, Jennifer Klot (2015) argues that civil society actors have laid too much of the blame for the agenda's failings on the content of the UNSCRs and their discursive effects, paying insufficient attention to institutional impediments (cf. Otto 2006, 2; Cockburn 2012a, 55). This critique resonates in the UK context, where the potential for WPS policies to effect radical changes to the government's approach to security are hampered by the relatively marginal position of WPS actors[8] within the foreign policy architecture, as well as the state's political and economic investment in militarism. This echoes recent suggestions that feminist anti-militarist scholarship may underestimate the extent to which militarism is inherent to liberal democracy, and therefore overestimate the possibilities of demilitarization in such contexts (Millar 2016; Howell 2018). With this in mind, advocacy that focuses on changing the wording of WPS policies to reflect a masculinities perspective risks overestimating those policies' effectiveness as a mechanism for challenging militarism at the heart of national security policies.

This is not to suggest that seeking changes to policy language is unimportant. One UK official indicated that a colleague's proposal to fund a project focused on masculinities in conflict had been rejected on the grounds that UK WPS policy focuses on women and girls. International aid is not the only driver of change, but remains a major source of funds for peacebuilding work, and policy language has real power to dictate how resources are allocated. However, the pursuit of a political agenda that calls for the

reconstruction of masculinities and femininities not only among racialized men in combat fatigues but also among white men and women in business suits in Westminster or Washington, DC calls for additional avenues of activism. Further work is needed to identify how this might be done effectively, but it could include, for example, an increased emphasis on making links with wider feminist, anti-militarist, and decolonial social movements, as some WPS advocates already have done (Cockburn 2007, 2012b), as well as increasing advocacy aimed at changing core national security strategies, without necessarily using the WPS framework as a medium. While my findings perhaps lend credence to the idea that, as Paul Kirby and Laura Shepherd (2016, 391) put it, "the revival of a radical WPS [is] practically impossible" in light of bureaucratic obstacles, I suggest that thinking of advocacy on WPS as one part of a wider feminist anti-militarist project may offer a useful way forward.

Finally, I contend that even if the prospects of using WPS policies to further a more radical agenda are slim, the WPS policy framework remains valuable. The UNSCRs' focus on women may not do the work that feminist anti-militarists would like, but they allow women in conflict situations to claim entitlements to services, protections, and representation, where otherwise needs may go unmet. Furthermore, as I have suggested, gender-relational approaches to WPS policies have value beyond their utility to anti-militarist agendas. While there is every reason to be wary of masculinized institutions operationalizing these concepts in ways that do not support feminist goals, there is much to be gained from designing security policies based on a contextual understanding of masculinities and femininities, and their intersections with other structures of oppression. The aforementioned consciousness-raising approaches that seek to change attitudes and behaviors relating to masculinities and femininities, already implemented by some development and peacebuilding organizations, provide a starting point for thinking about the kinds of activities WPS policies could support (see WPP 2010; Wright 2014; Duriesmith 2017b). While resistance is likely to be strong, to help to avoid reproducing the colonial logics critiqued here, such approaches should be used to challenge gender norms not only among marginalized communities but – perhaps especially – among those with race, class, and other privileges, and not only in "conflict-affected" contexts but also in economically and militarily powerful states, including among policymakers themselves. Beyond attitudinal and behavioral change, policymakers must take steps to reform the legal, political, social, and economic systems that reinforce patriarchal gender norms, including the neoliberal economic model that peacebuilding policies often take as given (see Duncanson 2016). In this sense, WPS cannot be treated as separate from wider emancipatory projects. Further, expanding upon understandings of masculinities as solely attached to male-assigned bodies, policymaking processes should aim to challenge the habitual prioritization of masculine-coded

worldviews by policymakers of all genders, which can cast more just and sustainable policy options aside without due consideration (see Tickner 1992; Cohn 1993; Duncanson 2016). Even if WPS policy discussions are limited in their capacity to reshape wider approaches to security, they create spaces for critical conversations about contradictions between (certain readings of) WPS commitments and militarist practices. Indeed, those of us who have advocated for masculinities perspectives in WPS policies maintain a responsibility to hold policymakers to account for the problematic and oppressive ways in which this demand is sometimes taken up.

Notes

1. These are UNSCRs 1820 (2009), 1888 (2010), 1889 (2010), 1960 (2011), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015), and 2467 (2019).
2. There are some exceptions: the Netherlands National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2016–2019, for example, commits to integrating analysis of gender norms and masculinities into country strategies and programs.
3. For a discussion of this, see Myrttinen (2019b).
4. While the centrality of "militarism" in feminist IR scholarship has more recently been called into question (see Millar 2016; Howell 2018), I use it throughout this article because it continues to animate the particular strand of WPS advocacy with which my argument is concerned.
5. For a critique of the "Men, Peace and Security" agenda, see Ward (2016, 287).
6. The opinions expressed in these interviews are those of individuals and do not represent an official UK government or UK civil service view. All identifying information has been removed to protect the anonymity of research participants.
7. The final wording of the NAP's third Strategic Outcome, referring to "gender-based violence, particularly violence against women and girls which is the most prevalent form of gender-based violence," is a compromise between these differing departmental positions.
8. These include WPS focal points within the FCO, the DFID, and the MOD.

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