Militarisation as diffusion: the politics of gender, space and the everyday

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Militarisation as Diffusion: The Politics of Gender, Space and the Everyday

Marsha Henry

Gender institute, The London School of Economics and Political Science

Columbia House,

Houghton St

London

WC2A 2AE

m.g.henry@lse.ac.uk

Katherine Natanel

Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter

30A Wingford Road

London

SW2 4DS

United Kingdom

katherinenatanel@gmail.com

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Abstract

Drawing together the work of five feminist scholars whose research spans diverse socio-political contexts, this themed section questions militarisation as a fixed condition. By using feminist methodologies to explore the spatialised networks and social mechanisms through which militarisation is sustained and resisted, 'gendering' militarisation reveals a complex politics of diffusion at work in a range of everyday power relations. However, diffusion acts not as a uni-directional movement across a border, but as the very contingency which makes militarisation – and transformation – possible. Through connecting the empirical and theoretical work on militarisation with feminist geographies, the authors in this collection highlight the influence of military thinking and institutions, not as static structures, but instead as productive sites.

Keywords: militarisation, diffusion, gender, race, everyday life, feminist geopolitics, critical military studies

'Militarisation as Diffusion: The Politics of Gender, Space and the Everyday' consists of five papers by feminist scholars whose work spans diverse socio-political contexts. Based on a panel at the International Studies Association (ISA) annual convention in April 2013, our themed section begins by questioning militarisation as a fixed condition. Militarisation is understood not as a homogenous and complete exercise of spatial power, but rather as a process which is constantly in flux as well as continually negotiated, reiterated and resisted by those subjects both inside and outside of the military (Lutz 2002; Bernazzoli and Flint 2009). By approaching militarisation as an unfinished process, the authors in this collection highlight the influence of military thinking and institutions, not as static structures, but instead as productive sites. These sites are made visible through the investigation of five key themes: the social construction of gender; transgressions of borders and boundaries; militarised

subjectivities; public and private spaces; and the micropolitics of everyday life.

Our collection takes root in the argument that the construction of gender is an inherently social and spatial process, which shapes and is shaped by militarisation. Recent scholarship in critical military studies and feminist geographies draws attention to ways in which gender is constructed in and through socio-spatial power relations (Staeheli and Kofman 2004; Woodward 2004; Dowler 2012; Fluri 2014; Massaro and Williams 2013; Tyner and Henkin 2015). Adding nuance to broader analyses, the authors in the collection are concerned precisely with how spatialised experiences of militarisation draw gender together with nation, class and 'race' across a variety of locations. Each of the authors examines differing constructions of gender in diverse geopolitical, socio-spatial militarised settings such as Guahan/Guam, Britain, and Israel-Palestine, and pays attention to sites, discourses and experiences that are often devalued or ignored because they represent the margin, the domestic, the popular or the private and therefore constitute the *everyday*.

Through their focus on the everyday, the authors in this collection highlight how militarisation ties the social construction of gender to the production, navigation and transgression of spatialised borders and boundaries. As Ronni Alexander and Katherine Natanel demonstrate, the production of borders and boundaries within processes of militarisation both reinforces and challenges subjective experiences. By considering lines of geopolitical and social division, these authors shed light on how gendered and racialised subjects are produced and reproduced in multiple geopolitical locations and imaginaries. Alexander uses the metaphor of the fence to understand the complex and contradictory positioning of Chamoru people in the highly militarised context of Guahan/Guam. Alexander shows how Chamoru depend upon the US military for the economic, social and cultural livelihoods, but that this very

dependence also means a continuing loss of their traditional, indigenous way of life. The fence, in this article, is both a real material construction, that spans and intersects island life and a domesticated imaginary, which reinforces the colonial legacies that make Guahan/Guam and its people forever subject to US sovereign military power. While men and women must acquiesce to such macro demands, Chamoru communities also resist capitulation to colonial masters. Yet, it is not just the routines of social reproduction and the 'hidden' and 'soft' interior of military life that require examination. In her study of domestic practices on the island of Guahan/Guam, Alexander demonstrates that boundary symbols such as the fence serve to challenge contemporary boundaries between the cultural past and present for indigenous islanders. Gendered/racialised subjects are engaged in complex geopolitical *quotidian* – and boundary-making symbols such as the fence reveal the way in which Chamoru people continue to rely upon US military recruitment for livelihoods, at the same time as Chamoru families attempt to resist the legacies of US colonialism and preserve indigenous ways of life.

Katherine Natanel takes the discussion of borders and boundaries to another context when she writes about the dual consequences of the militarisation of everyday life in Israel-Palestine. Natanel shows how the pervasiveness of military practices and culture results in blurred lines between civilian and military, public and private and home front and battlefield. In her account, militarisation has a unifying effect on gender relations among Jewish Israelis, due to mandatory conscription for both women and men. However, while militarisation is made seamless as a cultural force across time and space in Israel, it simultaneously works to entrench and solidify boundaries and markers of difference across Israel/Palestine borders. While militarisation might smooth differences in one imagined nation, it demarcates

otherness in another material territory. Through exploring the political effects of border collapse and boundary maintenance, Natanel's research demonstrates how the everyday navigation, regulation and transgression of militarised space sustains domination on a national level. As Jewish Israeli women and men construct and traverse gendered and racialised micro-geographies of violence, their movements bolster the conditions of *total militarism* that drive ongoing practices of control, occupation, and colonisation.

Through connecting the empirical and theoretical work on militarisation with feminist geographies, the authors in this collection also focus attention on the very subjects who construct and cross border zones and boundary lines. As the post-9/11 operations of Western military and UN forces continues to generate academic debate on the socio-spatial impact of global and hegemonic forms of power, scholars of militarisation, in particular, have not always paid attention to the unique experiences of gendered subjects within militarised scapes (Woodward 2004). By tracing the diffusion of militarisation from the everyday to the geopolitical and back again, the collection reveals how gendered subjects are culturally made in, through and against militarisation amongst other powerful socio-spatial processes and projects. In this way, all militarised men and women participate in both a shoring up and a breaking down of military values – there is a constant contradictory valorisation and contestation of military culture, and a promotion and rejection of military institutions. In her analysis of a British Army garrison town in Germany, Alexandra Hyde draws attention to how the success of bargaining with militarisation and military institutions is dependent upon which subjects are interpellated and where they are geopolitically and socially situated. Hyde illustrates how the work of British military wives to simultaneously uphold militarisation as an industry, and to denounce violence and

emphasise a need for civilianisation through engaging in emotional and intimate labour on the base means that militarisation is never simply present in purely spatial terms. Hyde reveals the intricate interconnections between the everyday spatiality of base life abroad, with satellite soldiers posted further afield with the temporalities of militarisation or the daily schedules of base families in harmony (sometimes) with official military time (tours, rest and relaxation). Like Hyde, the collected authors recognise that the military and its effects are neither bad nor good – instead, militarisation emerges as a more adaptable process that shapes time, space and subjects.

The authors consider the division of space and the subjects within, and encourage readers to turn their gaze to a realm often relegated to the margins of geography: the domestic sphere or private space. Much geopolitics has focussed (obviously so) on the ways in which militarisation can be seen to be creeping both spatially and temporally across the globe. However, the primary focus of conventional studies of militarisation, security and space have been on those sites of power occupied by privileged men—the Security Council, the Oval Office, and the (all-male) peace table. Meanwhile, the ordinary, domestic and intimate spaces so often occupied by women, have remained understudied except within the growing subfields of feminist geopolitics and military geographies (see Enloe 1989; Hyndman 2004; Sharp 2004; Staeheli, Kofman and Peake 2004; Woodward 2004, 2014 Koopman 2011). But what about the work that takes place in those ordinary and innocuous spaces of domesticity? It is precisely here – in the everydayness of private space – that the spatial and temporal side effects of militarisation can be seen. Following Cynthia Enloe, "militarization does not occur simply in the obvious places but can transform the meanings and uses of people, things, and ideas located far from bombs

or camouflaged fatigues" (2000: 289). As Harriet Gray shows, militarisation can have contradictory effects on the family when violence occurs in the private and intimate sphere. Gray's research focuses on partners of British armed forces personnel who have experienced interpersonal violence and links this, like Natanel, with the blurring of public and private spheres in militarised contexts. This blurring of space, gives rise to a 'total' institution, where wives of service personnel seek help inside the military, facing dilemmas about how to challenge militarisation (in particular military hierarchies) while seeking assistance and support from the military itself. Gray examines the narratives of women survivors of interpersonal violence in order to better understand how militarised culture reproduces hegemonic forms of masculinity, and relegates intimate spaces such as the domestic to the margins and renders them no-go areas for the disciplining of soldiers. Intimate spaces, as Gray reveals, become secondary to the military impetus and provide little in the way of protection for those precariously tied to the military institution.

By understanding militarisation as a process of diffusion with distinctly *gendered* implications, the authors in this collection aim to unmask power as it emerges and circulates at the level of micropolitics – shaping borders, boundaries, subjects and spheres. A focus on everyday life reveals the spatial and temporal depth to which military interests and agendas are woven into diverse lives, practices, discourses and desires (Enloe 1989, 2000; Lutz 2002; Higate and Henry 2009; Kuus 2009; Dowler 2012; Bernazzoli and Flint 2010). At the same time, tying the analyses to the ideological, political and social process of militarisation enables critical insights into the power of martial institutions, and the values such institutions promote in the media, policy and practice. As Victoria Basham's article demonstrates, this dual approach might offer points of interruption, resistance and mediation. By invoking the

iconic red poppy, a symbol of remembrance, war and peace, Basham's article shifts the focus to how emotive symbols of militarisation appear and operate within the everyday. Basham reveals how the poppy, and debate surrounding its cultural value in the UK, can mask the ongoing violence perpetuated by British forces elsewhere, outside the borders of the UK. The (simple) poppy becomes an item of fashion and patriotism as it attaches itself to gendered subjects who embody an especially civilian lifestyle (celebrities or sports icons), or a martyred and martial one (veterans, active-duty soldiers). Basham shows how the mobility of the ordinary and intimate poppy from spaces of war and peace, and from those corporeally enabled or disabled by service serves to draw attention away from those spaces where 'other' bodies are being wounded and killed.

Together, the authors throughout this collection interrogate militarisation as a project in-the-making that diffuses geopolitical power through its manifestation in everyday spatial and temporal practices. Yet diffusion acts not as a uni-directional movement across a border, but as the very contingency which makes militarisation – and transformation – possible. While current debates increasingly recognise interdependency of space, social relations and militarisation, our themed section intervenes by bringing into focus the everyday of gender relations in militarised settings, and analysing the micropolitics of empire (Lutz 2002) back out towards the macropolitics of the global military-industry complex. From the role of fences in practices of resistance and processes of identity formation in Guahan/Guam; to the complex gendered spatialities of borders and boundaries in Israel-Palestine; to the material, discursive and emotional labour undertaken by military wives married to British servicemen in Germany; to the fluid constructions of public and private made visible through accounts of intimate partner abuse in the British military; to the ways

in which popular practices of remembrance animate the geopolitical through performances of gender, nation and war in Britain, militarisation emerges as a gendered project rooted in diverse social practices and beliefs, which simultaneously unfold within and give rise to particular spaces, places and cultures.

By viewing a range of practices of acquiescence or resistance to gender and racial subordination, our themed section argues for a dual engagement with the militarisation of everyday lives and spaces – exploring how militarised subjects may reproduce and celebrate symbols and practices associated with war (or even the cessation of war) and martial values more generally (see Enloe 2000; Lutz 2002), and how they may actively contest them, refusing to let military time and space dominate their own social landscapes and biographies (see Bernazzoli and Flint 2010). Providing an emphasis on temporality, and therefore a recognition of history (Massey 1994), the everyday sheds light on the repetitive, ritualistic performance of subjectivities through mundane activities such as donning a uniform, maintaining the military home and the homefront, and wearing a red poppy in public. Yet at the same time, the private sphere acts as a significant site of negotiation and contestation. In taking seriously the everyday work of social reproduction, the assembled authors expose 'hidden transcripts' of violence through which military aims and values become embedded within the ordinary, and show how everyday life acts as an important domain for militarisation as a “process of inscription” (Lutz 2002). By using feminist methodologies to reveal the spatialised networks and social mechanisms through which militarisation is sustained and resisted, ‘gendering’ militarisation reveals a complex politics of diffusion at work in a range of everyday power relations – a politics that is spatially and discursively produced by military presence.

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Notes on contributor

Marsha Henry is Associate Professor in the Gender Institute and Deputy Director of the Centre for Women, Peace and Security at LSE. Dr Henry's research interests focus on three main research areas: gender and militarisation; gender and development and qualitative methodologies. Over the past 10 years, her research interests have been concentrated on documenting the social experiences of living and working in peacekeeping missions. Her recent research focusses on female peacekeepers from the Global South. Her work has been published in International Peacekeeping, Women's Studies International Forum and Globalizations.

Katherine Natanel is a Lecturer in Gender Studies at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter. Her recent research focuses on the gendered production of political apathy among Jewish Israelis, and will be published by University of California Press in 2016 under the title *Sustaining Conflict: Apathy and Domination in Israel-Palestine.* Her research interests include political participation and mobilisation, feminist and gender theory, conflict and political violence, political emotion, and gender in the Middle East.

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