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# Service within the Extremely Gendered Organization of NATO: The Civil and Military Personnel's Approaches to Gender Equality Focused Policies

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## **Abstract:**

The paper emphasizes the challenges in implementation of gender equality focused policies in military missions and demonstrates the backlash these policies can create in the everyday social interaction in military mission. A qualitative method of thematic analysis was used to study 17 in-depth interviews with former civilian and military personnel in the ISAF and RSM missions in Afghanistan. The discursive exploratory analysis displayed that the normative masculine constructions foster environment in which women are perceived as a threat for the unit she is part of; as disruptive to the male bonding in the unit; as an objectified body; and as an essential part of the successful mission in Afghanistan. Gender equality focused policies in NATO face resistance in implementation because they threat resources perceived greatly important in the organization - normative masculine constructions. The military fails in the attempts to manage diversity and the military culture further values and reinforces sameness.

## **Key words:**

women's and men's perspectives; women in military; NATO; gender equality policy

## **Word count:**

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### **Key messages:**

- The research offers an overview of perceptions on gender equality focused policies within a military environment.
- The normative masculine constructions foster environment where women are perceived as a threat for their unit.
- Female personnel in the Afghan mission are viewed as disruptive to the male bonding in the unit.
- Perceptions of the civilian personnel towards the gender equality are more diverse compared to military personnel.

## **INTRODUCTION**

To successfully react to security challenges like hybrid warfare, insurgency or guerrilla war, NATO aims to consider a variety of new policy approaches in training, intelligence collection management, recruitment and public diplomacy. New approaches have been committed so as to enhance the resilience of the organization (NATO, 2020) and, among those, is the implementation of gender equality focused policies linked to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda (NATO 1325, 2016).

We will focus on male and female perceptions of their involvement in military missions and the challenges these perceptions can create when seeking to implement gender equality focused policies. The perceptions illustrate the backlash gender equality focused policies face within a military environment. We aim to acknowledge the power of gender as an organizing principle of social interaction in military missions and to analyse gender dynamics in military mission work, while also addressing the aspects of rank and nationality. Of particular importance to the analysis is how do military and

civilian personnel perceive womanhood and manhood within the organisational environment of military mission? And how do they illustrate normative masculine constructions within the military organization? What aspects play role in their positioning on gender equality focused policies? Additionally, we concentrate on the reception of the integration of women in military missions among the interviewees. We will apply the conservation of resources (COR) theory and the concept of life scripts to point out what a crucial importance values of the personnel play when they consider gender equality focused policies implementation.

Previous research focused on the bodily nature of how male soldiers perceived female colleagues (Cohn, 2000) and how the masculine identity of soldiers functions inside the military (Do, Samuels, 2020). The article is based on a thematic analysis of seventeen interviews with NATO personnel serving in both military and civilian positions in Afghanistan, who come from various NATO member states. The thematic analysis suggests that men perceive their female colleagues in the military and on military missions as being women first and colleagues second. Women are therefore forced to cope with experiences of not belonging within the military. We conducted interviews with civilians and military personnel deployed to Afghanistan because this specific working environment subjects the personnel to a wider array of everyday workplace challenges related to the combat environment as well as to various cultural differences.

# 1. NATO AND GENDER EQUALITY FOCUSED POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The NATO policy Women, Peace and Security aims to set the agenda on issues related to gender in the military, gender mainstreaming and women in armed conflict. The objective of the WPS policy is to create a relevant and visible presence of women in the security sector. It aims to facilitate an effective response to challenges women face, including those affected by war and armed conflict. NATO aims to outline its approach to gender equality policy on the WPS agenda, which is predominantly informed by UNSCR 1325 (UN Security Council, 31 October 2000; Ní Aoláin, 2016). The international community is also bounded by the resolution to ensure greater participation of women in decision-making institutions (Basu, Kirby, Shepherd, 2020). Wright(2016) explains NATO and its relation to the UNSCR 1325 as a 'teaching machine'.. Hereof, NATO actively encourages member and other partner states to adopt the WPS agenda, to become the 'teaching machine' and to share the lessons learned with other member and partner countries. However, it is an example of how much the WPS agenda can be contradictory. An organisation which has been extensively criticized by the feminist peace movement during and after the Cold War, is now a major exponent of the WPS policy (Kirby, Shepherd, 2021: 6).

There are crucial differences in the intensity of how much importance do the different NATO states see in the UNSCR 1325 and the consequent gender-equality oriented policies. These differences can be identified by focusing on how much resources do

different NATO member and partner countries invest into sponsoring the advancement of the agenda financially or through human resources. The countries furthering the agenda within NATO are mostly those which adopted the feminist foreign policy also in their domestic politics. Still, the adoption of feminist foreign policies does not prevent practises that bring necessary trade-offs from ethical feminist ideals (Aggestam, Bergman Rosamond, Kronsell, 2018).

A step forward in the advancement of feminist policy within NATO was the creation of the post of Secretary General's Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security in 2012 (Wright, 2016). Since then, the post was held by diplomats from Norway, the Netherlands and Canada. It serves two important purposes, first, it is a high-level gender focal point in NATO, second, it is a representation of a commitment to the WPS agenda. UNSCR 1325 and the associated objective of integrating gender perspectives into the NATO Command Structure launched an ambitious programme to implement gender mainstreaming throughout the organization.

The implementation process of gender equality policies is often criticized for being primarily dependent on gender advisors and setting only minimum standards for NATO overall (Prescott, 2013: 60). Prøgl (2004: 69) identifies feminists in bureaucracies who work to advance the cause of women in international relations as "femocrats". They stand at the intersection of institution and feminist movement. We can describe gender advisors as femocrats who were positioned by the institution to further the feminist foreign agenda. Gender advisors on military missions have the crucial responsibility of providing guidance, coordination, reports and analysis as regards the WPS agenda (Bastick, Duncanson, 2018), they often mutually cooperate with feminist researchers

and create critical friendships with academia (Holvikivi, 2019). Nevertheless, they are given only the minimum level of power necessary to execute these tasks and responsibilities. Paradoxically enough, NATO often emphasizes its goal of implementing gender equality policies externally, hitherto a necessity in obtaining its mission objectives, but it experiences vast challenges in doing so internally as well.

## 2. AFGHANISTAN AND NATO MISSIONS

In October 2001, the United States launched the Operation Enduring Freedom to destroy the Taliban in retaliation for the September 11 terrorist attacks. (Crews, Tarzi, 2009: 3). The actions were part of the United States' War on Terror. After the Taliban's elimination in 2001, a new government with foreign assistance promised to rid the country of these armed men and the poppy fields and, through development programmes, to reconstruct the state (Crews, Tarzi, 2009: 3). However, by 2007, the Taliban had shown signs of resurgence and had started to destabilize the southern, central and eastern provinces again. The government and the forces were only able to quasi-control the cities, whereas rural areas were once again dominated by the Taliban.

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was deployed to Afghanistan in 2001, and was initially under the direction of individual NATO allies, but NATO took command of the force in 2003 (NATO, 2012: 3–11). The ISAF mission deliberately shifted from a combat-centric role to a focus on providing training, advice and assistance to the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF). The ISAF

mission ended in 2014, and ANDSF was expected to assume full security responsibilities for the country. A NATO presence in Afghanistan, though diminished, was maintained, and the mission was renamed Resolute Support (RSM) (NATO, 2012: 3–11). All respondents participated in at least one of these missions. The RSM mission officially ended in September 2021 as NATO troops withdrew from the country. The withdrawal was accompanied by a very chaotic and turbulent evacuation of NATO member countries' citizens, third-country citizens and vulnerable Afghans. The Taliban, meanwhile, has seized power in the state (Ward, Ward, 30.8.2021).

### 3. GENDER FOCUSED EQUALITY POLICIES AS A THREAT TO THE MASCULINE CAMARADERIE

To fully analyse the connections between the interpersonal, organizational and overall cultural environment when implementing organizational change like gender equality focused policy in military, we applied the conservation of resources (COR) theory and the theory of life scripts. The COR theory considers both environmental and internal processes (Hobfoll, 2001) and is a resource-based theory of stress that suggests that 'the fit of personal, social, economic, and environmental resources with external demands determines the direction of stress responding and resultant outcomes' (Hobfoll, 2001: 339). Resources can take the form of 'objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued in their own right' (Hobfoll, 2001: 339). An organizational system cannot work without resources. If these resources are threatened, lost, perceived as unstable or cannot be protected, stress occurs as a

result. 'The basic tenet of COR theory is that individuals strive to obtain, retain, protect, and foster those things that they value' (Hobfoll, 2001: 341).

Organizational change like implementing gender equality focused policy, in this regard, poses a threat (of loss) to the organization's resources. The approach of the COR theory is reactive in the sense that the defence of the organisational values and resources is activated after the external threat is apparent. Schwarz and Bilsky (1990) describe that values and importance of the resources are established by the culture of the environment. How does the culture get established? There is a system of positive incentives to participate and replicate the established behaviour patterns. According to Eric Berne's (2016) theory, values arise from life scripts, as of systems of behavioural patterns which get recognized, verified and endorsed by communities. Life scripts lead to a replication, rewarding and further strengthening of the community values and become stable discursive scripts (Hanitzsch, Vos, 2017). Even though the scripts are not exactly learned, the members of the community participate in their preservation and further replication. The replication is rewarded and endorsed within the community. By living according to the discursive script, the individuals lose a part of their autonomy, but it also enables them to reduce the ambiguousness and uncertainty of their decision making (Erskine, 2009).

The rejection of stable discursive script leads to a creation of counter script. Undermining and doubting the discursive script exposes its promoters to a counter script and can lead to a refusal of the initially stable discursive script (Lebel, Masad, 2021).

The leadership and organizational culture of NATO favours normative masculine cultural constructions. It is based primarily on a male, hierarchical, top-down, protective organizational structure with command and control styles of leadership, fostering values of brotherhood and bravery (Calás, Smircich, 2014; Sjoberg, 2014). The normative masculine practices of the organizational structure are valued as the more significant, effective and important aspects of the workplace practice (Witmer, 2019) and represent discursive script in the NATO militaries.

The male body is accepted as a neutral and normalized form. Deviations from this norm are perceived as unnatural and represent an undue or irrelevant advantage or a compromise to the established discursive script. When women are not able to achieve what is established as an objective criterion, they fail to meet a subjectively set standard which renders them as Other—those not suitable for military.

Sjoberg (2014: 29) suggests that men are socially expected to fill, or aspire to, a citizen-warrior role. The role of protector is highly gendered as there is an understanding that men have a sex-specific obligation to fight. Moreover, militaries like to articulate their role in transitioning soldiers from boyhood to manhood (Handley-Cousins, 2017). These gendered structures are further fostered by state, for example making the education of young men reliant upon military institutions (Eichler, 2014: 89).

Masculine privilege to protect and conquer was also instrumentalized in portraying and legitimizing the Operation Enduring Freedom as a rescue mission, the intention being to liberate the victims, among those women, from Al Qaeda and the Taliban terror (Gregory, 2012: 30; Denike, 2008).

Moreover, Basham (2016: 34) emphasized that 'women have been characterized as potentially disruptive to male bonding, by introducing sexual tensions and cultural otherness into all-male units, or as distracting to male soldiers, who, it is assumed, may react more emotionally to the injury or death of a woman soldier than that of a man'. Within militarized communities, there are perceptions of a possible negative impact of women's presence on male bonding and unit cohesion. Normative masculine constructions are perceived as an important resource. The threat of losing this resource creates resistance to organizational change, as the individuals in the organization are afraid of the effect.

## 4. METHODS

The qualitative research design was based on an analysis of seventeen semi-structured interviews with civilian and military NATO employees who were all deployed in Afghanistan during the ISAF or the RSM. We used thematic analysis with a focus on subjective experiences and perceptions of practices within the two NATO missions of both male and female personnel who served in the area. We used snowball sampling because of the character of the organisation. The process of sampling was initiated during the lead author's internship at NATO headquarters (HQ) in Brussels. The interviews were conducted between November 2016 and May 2017 based on contacts made through networking within NATO HQ and the Czech military. Snowball sampling was an ideal choice due to the level of inaccessibility and strict hierarchy of the organisation. We had to inquire new respondents through colleagues and building

networks in the organisation. Approaching helpful senior colleagues was crucial for finding the personnel of the NATO HQ to volunteer for the study as interviewees, because it was not endorsed by the organisation. However, this method has adversely affected the sample diversity. Most interviews were conducted in person in Brussels; others took place in Czechia or online. The lead author's internship established a space of unique opportunity to compile experiences and attitudes of specific military and foreign policy professionals in quite closed working community. Since the respondents tended to look at the interviewer as a colleague working within a NATO organisational environment, we believe it has added a sense of trust between the interviewee and the interviewer. Nevertheless, this fact could potentially lead to an issue of bias. None of the respondents were a direct superior of the lead author. However, all the respondents were senior in a rank to the lead author. We aimed to diminish the possible issue of bias by not revealing the goal of the study. We phrased the questions to be general and open-ended to avoid any suggestions for the answers. They were asked to describe their job and their typical working day during the mission. After discussing their work responsibilities and work routine in the mission, they were asked to describe the most common problems, challenges, and security threats they faced during their position in the mission. Among others, we then discussed: what are their associations with gender equality-oriented policies in military? What do these policies mean to their work in the mission in Afghanistan? And what do these policies mean personally to them?

The interviews were analysed using thematic analysis and inductive approach. This is a method 'for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data'

(Braun, Clarke, 2006: 79) in which coding and theme development is directed by the interview content. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) , it is “[...] a useful method for examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights.” (Nowell et al., 2017: 2). We applied the Braun’s and Clarke’s (2006) linear six-phased method which consists of familiarizing ourselves with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally producing the report. Thematic analysis is often contradictory, and the development of the themes involves interpretative work. The application of a thematic analysis is therefore not descriptive, it is already theorised.

Some of the interviews were audio recorded; however, interviews which took place directly in NATO HQ could not be as unapproved audio-visual devices brought into the building. This data therefore took only the form of written notes. The interviewer continued making notes and generated ideas based on the interviews directly after they finished without the presence of the respondents. The thematic analysis demands transcription of the verbal data. The transcription is a crucial phase of the research because it is the interpretative step to create meanings (Braun, Clarke, 2006; Bird, 2005; Lapadat, Lindsay, 1999).

During the first reading of the transcribed text, the lead author made notes and created a bullet-point summary for each of the interviews. The data, including audio transcriptions and researcher written notes, was coded to identify similar statements and themes shared by the participants. The coding of the complete interview transcripts allowed the theme generation. The process helped us to gain a rich

overview of the main points, patterns and common meanings that occurred throughout the interviews. The presentation of the results includes numerous quotes to illustrate the range of interpretations about experiences on missions.

The concrete interview sample can be seen in table 1.

Three of the women respondents served as civilian gender advisors (GENAD) in the ISAF and the RSM. The majority of the respondents was trained at the Training Command - Military Academy, Foreign Mission Preparation Centre in Vyškov in Czechia. Civilian respondents went through a NATO pre-deployment training for civilian employees which part is also a gender training consisting of a theoretical and a practical part. The military respondents also took part on the gender training in Vyškov or they went through e-learning course on gender perspective by the NATO Allied Command Transformation (ACT). Trainings on gender perspectives are in the organisation perceived as a development of a crucial competence of the personnel, especially in the context of a counterinsurgency warfare. However, the emphasis on gender trainings in the multinational institutions has been a target of criticism for “framing gender as a discrete operational problem” (Holvikivi, 2021: 193) and limiting gender equality to a technical skill that can be gained through training.

Despite the limited sample size, the study offers an overview of how much can the perspectives on gender equality focused policy of individuals differ even in the same organisational environment among professionals with shared mission’s objectives. It aims to give the reader a sense of views of how similar and diverse, often contradictory positions on gender equality focused policies emerge within the same multinational institution. The paper has principally exploratory character and makes a discursive

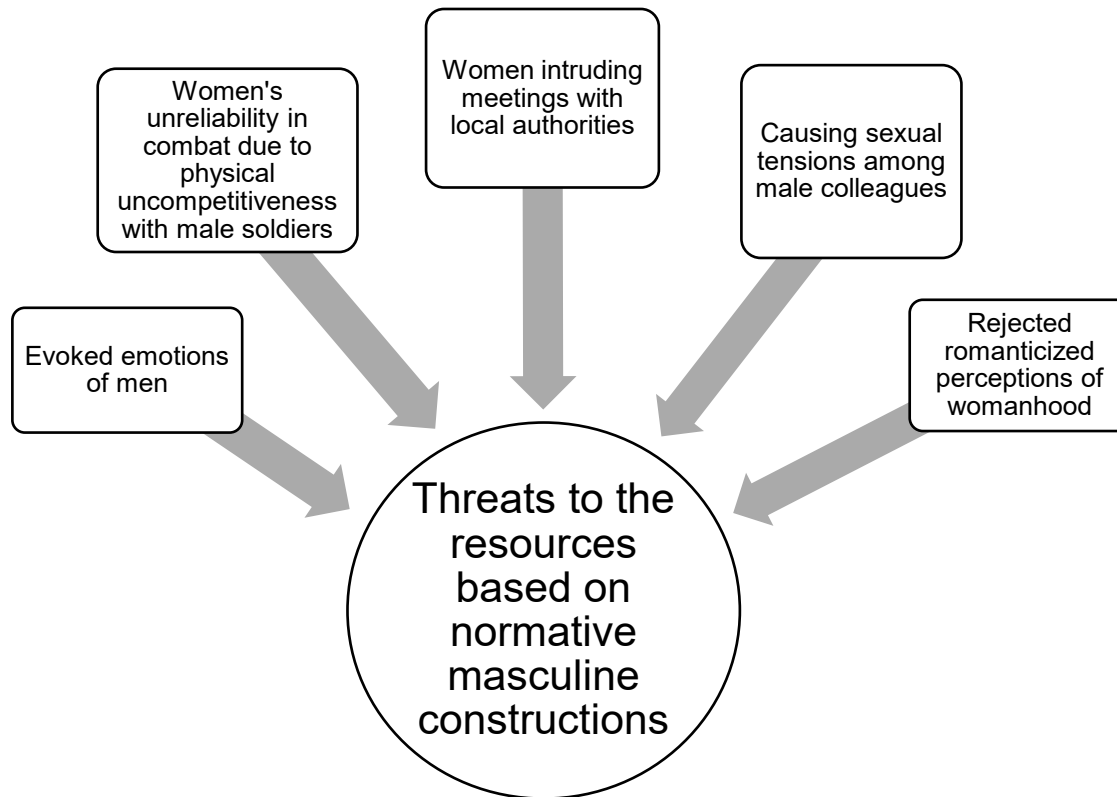
contribution by bringing the reception of the integration of women in military mission among the interviewees.

Female respondents sometimes perceived taking part in the interview as helping to advance the gender equality focused policy. Men approached to take part in the interview, often perceived the initiative as an opportunity to 'say what they thought about the gender equality focused policy'. Some of them vocalized before the interview took place that they will probably not say 'what we want to hear'. Their assumption of what information we may seek arose from their knowledge of the interviewer's intern position at the NATO WPS Office. They assumed beforehand that her position as a researcher would be feminist oriented. We aimed to diminish this approach of the respondents by pointing out the position of researcher and emphasizing the affiliation to the university. Even though a higher number of women than men were asked to participate, the response rate among military men was higher. This in particular is a limitation of the research as men's military perceptions are more represented in the study and it adversely affected the diversity of respondents' views in this study. The views of military female personnel lack in this study as we bring views of civilian female personnel, civilian male, and military male personnel. One can only assume the reason for the lower willingness of military women to participate in the research. It is possible they did not want to be associated with the NATO WPS Office. Women constituted 11.1% of the armed forces personnel of NATO member states (NATO, 2017b: 15). This also makes the nature of access to female military respondents challenging. Civilian female personnel constituted 39% of the civilian employees at NATO HQ (NATO, 2019) and thus, were more accessible.

## 5. RESULTS

NATO, an organizational environment dominated by masculine organizational culture, poses specific challenges to female personnel. The thematic analysis investigating the perceptions of military and civilian personnel who have served on a NATO military mission shows that women face specific perceptions of their bodies within a military environment that men do not experience. Gender equality focused policies in NATO military missions were perceived by the male military personnel as threats to the security of the people involved in the mission and disruptive of male bonding. The military organization is bounded to a normative masculine construction of organization even though it is often portrayed as gender neutral. It has become such a valued and important characteristic that gender equality focused policies face resistance in their implementation. They are viewed as a threat and hazard to the connecting resource of normative masculine constructions, perceived of as greatly important within the organization. Threats to the resources based on normative masculine constructions are summarized in the diagram 1.

# <sup>1</sup>Diagram 1: Threats to the Resources Based on Normative Masculine Constructions



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<sup>1</sup> Alt text for the diagram 1: "Diagram 1 showing the aspects which threaten the resources based on normative masculine constructions. The diagram is divided into two main sections, arrows indicate which aspects occur as threats to the resources based on normative masculine constructions. The labels describe the perceived threats that occur, such as evoked emotions of men, women's unreliability in combat due to physical uncompetitiveness with male soldiers, women intruding meetings with local authorities, causing sexual tensions among male colleagues, and rejected romanticized perceptions of womanhood."

The resources of military organisation are based on the devoir to achieve bravery, adopting values of brotherhood as a core social cohesion power, a solely male privilege to protect and conquer, and generally emphasizing bodily oriented competences. The masculine construction of military organization is further reinforced by a lack of male military personnel willingness to take part in the implementation of gender equality focused policies. Support for these policies differs according to the gender, nationality and ranks of the respondents. Women on the NATO missions were often subjected to scepticism about their own physical and psychological capabilities and competences by their male colleagues. Men in this study tended to perceive their female colleagues first as women, then as colleagues. This means women need to be especially resilient to cope with such a working environment since it is reluctant to accept them. The suppression of sexuality in a working environment like a military puts the male body on a pedestal of normality. The military environment values and reinforces sameness and fails in its attempts to manage diversity. These two phenomena also constitute the two life scripts in the community. The stable discursive script embraces and rewards sameness. While the counter script emphasises diversity. A woman in an armed conflict is consistently viewed as the Other and her presence evokes feelings of threat to the security of those involved. The suppression of sexuality in a working environment dominated by norms of heteronormativity then tends to perceive the female element as ultimately sexual and tends to portray a woman as a sexual object.

There are also aspects of work which are pointed out as productive and beneficial as regards women's work and their involvement in reaching the mission objective. Essentialist perspectives of beneficial female embodiment in military are advocated for

on basis of the increasingly civilian-centric operational environment being applied to counterinsurgency warfare (Heyman, Giles, 2006; Prescott, 2013). Women soldiers' engagement is perceived important in terms of the collection of intelligence among local women (Bergman Rosamond, Agius, 2018). The promoters of the stable discursive script even adopt some essentialist narratives of the counter script to further stabilize their position. First, the discursive script acknowledges relevance of women's presence in the military missions by emphasizing the roles where they are irreplaceable (doctors, nurses, and security in the Afghan mission). Second, they utilize feminist approaches in the discursive script. The discursive narrative points out that women in Afghanistan were to be liberated by the military missions so that they can emancipate. While at the same time, female officers of the military missions were prevented from participating in decision making when interacting with Afghan authorities.

Civilian personnel from Iceland, Canada and the USA assigned higher degree of support to the gender equality focused policies compare to their military colleagues from Czechia and Slovakia. The Governments of Iceland, Canada and the USA are visibly committed to the feminist foreign policy in a long term, compared to Czechia or Slovakia. The respondents from Iceland, Canada and the USA can incline to the idea of feminist foreign policy because it is also a direction and a trademark of their country they want to embrace as well. However, in the life scripts feminist foreign policy and gender equality focused policies represent the counter scripts. The rank played a role because civilians with a high rank position in the NATO HQ presented the position of NATO as theirs and did not distinguish the personal and institutional position on the

gender equality focused policies. Soldiers and civilians with a lower rank position, clearly distinguished their personal and institutional position on the agenda.

The thematic analysis generated **four main themes that depict perceptions of female involvement in military missions**. Even though the themes may seem contradictory, they intertwine and exemplify the spectrum of challenges these perceptions and the implementation of gender equality focused policies create for female NATO personnel:

- **woman as a threat within the unit;**
- **woman as disruptive to male bonding within the unit;**
- **woman as an objectified body; and**
- **woman as an essential part of the successful mission in Afghanistan.**

In the table 1, the readers can see an overview of the respondents, their gender, affiliation in the military and nationality. The table also shows how the four main themes are dispersed among the interviewers' gender, affiliation in the military and nationality. It shows whose views, statements and evaluations were included in which themes.

Table 1: Overview of the respondents and the types of their responses

Respondent	F- female M- male	C- civilian M- military	Nationality	Themes			
				Woman as a threat within the unit	Woman as disruptive to male bonding within the unit	Woman as an objectified body	Woman as an essential part of the successful mission in Afghanistan
1	F	C	ISL				
2	F	C	ISL				
3	F	C	ISL				
4	F	C	CAN				
5	M	C	SK				
6	M	M	CZ				
7	M	C	CZ				
8	F	C	CAN				
9	M	M	SK				
10	M	C	CZ				
11	F	C	TUR				
12	M	M	CZ				
13	M	M	CZ				
14	M	M	CZ				
15	M	M	CZ				
16	M	M	CZ				
17	M	C	US				

## 5.1 Woman as a threat within the unit

The first theme that we developed was the perception that women in the military are a threat to the units they are members of or are portrayed as dangerous and unreliable colleagues in combat. The following statement from Respondent 7, a male Czech civilian, illustrates the position of female combatants in the eyes of some male colleagues. He is concerned about women being among his closest colleagues on the battlefield because her presence could be a threat to his own security and the security of his team. He expressed the need to be a part of a team where all the soldiers have similarly strong physical capacities. Respondent 7 states:

*'One considers whether it is advisable to deploy a female member or a male member of the team in terms of safety in more sophisticated patrols or missions. With a bulletproof vest weighing 16 kg, a man can escape easier than a woman.'*

The respondent is concerned with the abilities of women to carry out the same physical tasks as men on the team and that her incapability can threaten him and others. As Basham (2016: 41) states, 'It flies in the face of popular culture and personal accounts of war that characterize infantrymen as bands of brothers who leave no man behind.' A woman's presence in this regard is something threatening. In the eyes of her colleague, she disrupts the code of conduct due to her physical inability or by asking for special treatment. The concerns of male military respondents about losing security provided by their counterparts is substantiated by the fact that women are often recruited according to different physical test scores compared to men (Cohn, 2000). According to Respondent 6, a male Czech soldier, the mission can have greater

security and efficiency when women execute army positions in the administrative and health sector:

*'Women are more careful, responsible, hard-working, patient and empathetic than men.'*

This approach is highly essentialist as 'when individuals reason about social categories, they assume that group differences reflect inherently different natures' (Heyman, Giles, 2006: 293). This strategy is applied when respondents articulate reasons for women to join the military, and when reasoning about why women do not belong in the military. According to the approach of Respondent 6, women are best qualified for jobs that value these competences, and therefore their involvement in combat is not desirable. The essentialist approach is used only instrumentally to present a woman's characteristics, whereas men's characteristics are represented as the norm. In these terms, the men's position in the working environment is stable and not questioned.

## 5.2 Woman as disruptive to male bonding within the unit

A second developed theme expresses the perception of woman as disruptive to male bonding within the unit or an obstacle to cooperation. Male military respondents articulated concern about the impact a woman has on work effectiveness and a change in team atmosphere when a woman is part of it. The narrative of male military respondents who were in combat describes women in the military as disruptive and disordering to the status quo. Respondent 2, a female civilian, concluded:

*'International leadership sometimes avoided women, even high-ranking officials in the Afghan government, because they were worried that they would insult them in some way by sitting in an office with them, shaking hands with them.'*

In the face of such perceptions, it must be extremely challenging for female personnel to deal with all the difficulties they experience. They need to be resilient when confronted with signs and assertions of non-belonging. Respondent 14, male soldier, points out in his perspective problematic aspects of everyday organisation:

*"Women must have a secured accommodation standard. There is a problem with accommodation for women on small bases [regarding facility capacities], on small army checkpoints for Afghan army training."*

Female civilian respondents recounted situations where being a woman ultimately stopped them from doing their work or being a member of the team. Respondent 3, a female civilian, evaluates her work in the following way:

*'I think that if you deliver a message on gender, especially in the military, it is received better when done by a man; it has a bigger impact. But it also depends on the crowd.'*

Even though the responsibility of Respondent 3 was primarily the implementation of gender equality policies, in praxis, she concludes that her job would be better received if promoted by a man. The social ecology here was able to create feelings of inadequacy and an inability to do her job properly within the male dominated environment. As Prescott (2013: 60) argues, implementation of the WPS policy in NATO missions heavily relies on the shoulders of gender advisors. These positions are often occupied by women, which can create for them a sort of schizophrenic feeling of functioning in a highly masculinized environment while being an important advocate for women's interests. Theoretically, they could be the promoters of the counter script

in the organisation. However, they do not dispose of sufficient power in the organisation. Conversely, we can also interpret Respondent 3's statement as a form of femininity that supports militarized masculinity (Eichler, 2014: 89) even to the extent that advocating for women's policy interests requires masculinized skills. Respondent 15, a male soldier, spoke of his concerns of having a female in his special forces unit. He described women working in the military with a list of attributes connected to femininity:

*'The presence of women on the team creates an environment of tension between men and women. [...] A woman can break a whole team of hard men, whether we think it or not. I don't exclude exceptions—they bring a good spirit to the work—but better to work in the general staff, for example, not in combat.'*

Women's need for a certain level of resilience to be able to work successfully and cope in the environment is affected by romanticized perceptions of womanhood. A woman in this view needs to be protected, taken care of. Male colleagues seem unable to distance themselves from the romanticized views of themselves bravely saving women in danger. This normative masculine construction, based on the devoir to achieve bravery and capacity to identify yourself with the role of saviour, overtakes the soldier's ability to see a fellow female soldier primarily as a colleague. The value of the warrior role and competition in the military is a stronger resource for the organization in its perception than the value of equality or inclusion. Respondent 15, a male soldier, referred to men's need to protect women before other men within a team. He stated the following:

*'Soldiers are not used to seeing women suffer. It is about the natural role of men and women. Males tend to protect females even though it poses a risk to them.'*

UNSCR 1325 is based on the idea of difference and emphasizes the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, values diversity, and a variety of competences. Paradoxically, from the military perspective, it is unity and unifying bonds that play the key role in organizational resilience.

### 5.3 Woman as an objectified body

The sexual objectification and sexual harassment can occur in any social ecology. However, we argue that the social ecology of a military mission is explicitly vulnerable to sexual objectification and harassment behaviour. Females on military missions are subjected to objectification from two sides. The first source comes from fellow colleagues of the military mission. The second source comes from the external communities.

Male military respondents were asked about the advantages and disadvantages of having mixed teams. Two men articulated the opportunity to satisfy sexual needs as an advantage of having a woman in the team. One articulated a disadvantage directly connected to her appearance. Respondent 7, a male civilian, pointed out:

*'A mixed team allows for the fulfilment of emotional and sexual needs, but sometimes these relationships have caused problems.'*

These statements reflect the heteronormativity of thinking in the military environment when the respondents reflected upon sexual desires. They also demonstrate the attitude that women are perceived first as females and after that as colleagues.

Female respondents also reflected upon the possible security threat from local civilians. Three female respondents indicated street harassment as a security threat to NATO female personnel. This was a security threat that male military respondents did not identify. Together six male respondents stated that the security situation of NATO personnel did not differ according to gender. Given the different experience of male and female NATO personnel, female respondents reflected upon a wider variety of possible security threats than male respondents.

#### 5.4 Woman as an essential part of the successful mission in Afghanistan

An essentialist approach is applied in the reasoning for and against women in military. In this section, we reflect upon what kinds of challenges female NATO personnel face when interacting with the local population. Additionally, we will consider the relation between female involvement in military missions and local populations, NATO gender equality focused policies and the role of women in combat. Respondent 12, a male soldier, reflected upon the local social customs of Afghanistan in everyday life:

*'In order to medically examine an Afghan female, a female physician or nurse was required to do that. In addition, women could not perform a medical examination on Afghan men.'*

This factored into the reasoning to hire more female medical personnel to react to mission demands and provide considerate medical care to civilians in need. However, according to Duncanson (2013: 119) this approach illustrates the inability to perceive the Afghan population and culture as fluid, dynamic and internally contested; instead it is seen

more as rigid, static and monolithic. Respondent 2, a female civilian, commented on the importance of implementing UNSCR 1325:

*'Women in army and police positions were needed to search women or men dressed like women [...]. There were also issues when men, who intended to commit a suicide bombing attack, dressed like women.'*

The narratives centred on the need to employ women within NATO militaries or within the ANDSF. This was due to the needs of the mission's everyday tasks, like searching women to prevent security threats, training female members of the ANDSF or treating and examining local women in medical facilities. The counterinsurgency nature of warfare created external pressure on NATO to employ more female personnel on the missions. Paradoxically, it was the external environment that pressured the organization to further implement gender equality focused policies rather than internal organizational motivation. The argumentation of some respondents disregards the internal application of gendering policies, but they take it into consideration when describing the external challenges of the Afghan missions. The international community in Afghanistan, NATO included, has introduced various gendering policies externally, but somehow, they are reluctant to point the same lenses at themselves.

## 6. CONCLUSION

UNSCR 1325 aims to enhance women's positions within security forces. It is based on the idea of difference and emphasizes the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts. It furthermore values diversity and a wide range of

competences. Paradoxically enough, from the military perspective, it is, most importantly, unity, unifying bonds and sameness which play key roles in the mission as a military environment, and these represent an important aspect of organizational values and resilience.

We conclude that the threat of losing resources based on concrete values endorsed by the organization evokes stress and meets resistance. Military organizations are based on normative masculine constructions; bravery, unity, unifying bonds and sameness, where the male body is the neutral form, are valued and endorsed as important resources. In contrast, gender equality focused policies are often perceived as a threat to the organization's resilience because their values are based on different ideals and principles. They are ideally based on values endorsing multiplicity in competences, diversity and honest sexualized approaches to the human body, a body which has diverse capabilities and needs, can menstruate, procreate and is not only heterosexual.

However, the implementation of the gender equality focused policies in NATO often does not emphasise the values and the moral appeal. They are reluctant to do it because they foresee the backlash it could create. Gender equality is then often reduced to a technical skill which can be easily acquired by training and is framed as a discrete operational problem. A shift from presentation of gender equality focused policies as purely operational task to a moral ideal with openly normative positions could substitute the values based on normative masculine constructions and offer a wider spectrum of values to the personnel and embrace their support to the policies. So far, this is the counter script to what the policies currently mean. We argue that

unless the resource of normative masculine construction is substituted for a different set of resources, preferably those addressing the gender equality as a moral ideal within the organization, it will be further perceived as a threat to organizational resilience. After all, such shift would also mean undermining and consequently refusing the stable discursive script.

In addition, the nature of the responses from the personnel is often essentialist and used to support or undermine women's engagement in military. While men's characteristics are represented as normative, female characteristics are differentiated from those of males and are instrumentalized to disregard or justify their role in the military organization. The interviews revealed different types of work challenges for women and men. Military male interviewees elaborated on security challenges which emerge in their working environment while females are present. In comparison, civilian women elaborated on the extent to which they are exempted from working environments. Women on these missions need to constantly convince colleagues in the working environment about their belonging. It is viewed as challenging enough for men in the military to be accepted by their comrades and create a cohesive unit. For women in the military, there is additional hardship in the process of becoming part of the unit. They are often perceived as the Other—non-belonging and disruptive.

Our research offers a wider exploratory and descriptive overview of how similar and diverse, often contradictory positions on gender equality focused policies emerge within an operation military environment. We inductively developed themes that illustrate normative masculine constructions which constitute the dominant script in the military organisation. We developed the following four main themes: woman as a threat

to the unit she is part of; woman as disruptive of the male bonding of the unit; woman as an objectified body; and woman as an essential part of the successful mission in Afghanistan.

Additionally, civilian military personnel expressed wider spectrum of opinions and perceptions towards the gender equality policies compare to military personnel. Their views were more critical and reflective of their own actions. Nationality of the respondents played an important role because the civilian personnel from Iceland, Canada, and the USA express higher levels of support to the implementation of the UNSCR 1325 compared to their military colleagues from Czechia and Slovakia. As NATO expands, takes in new member states and plans to enlarge, future research can focus on the commonalities and differences emerging from the domestic foreign policies and nationalities of the NATO personnel and their demonstrated support for the gender equality focused policies. The possible new NATO member countries can mean a shift in the value orientation towards the gender equality focused policies in the organisation.

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