

UNSCR 1325 & THE PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN: THE SUCCESSES, GAPS AND CHALLENGES

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Good morning everybody it is a great pleasure to be here today to discuss Ireland's commitment to 1325 and successes, gaps and challenges relating to our National Action Plan to date.

Today I am going to share with you some of the highlights from my PHD research titled **'Equal but Different: Gender Discourses in the Social Relations of Irish Peacekeepers & Possibilities for Transformation'**. I will mainly be focusing on the challenges to including women in peacekeeping. In essence my research is providing baseline data for the Defence Forces on how women are positioned within missions.

In the course of my research I visited the Irish Peacekeepers Camp in Kosovo - Camp Clarke – while I was there I met with a local Kosovar woman acting as one of the interpreters for the mission, and one of the things she said:

I believe that the presence of women soldiers has a very positive influence as it helps local women to open up. Local Kosovar women are not allowed to talk to men who are not members of their family so we need female soldiers, it changes a lot. It does make a huge difference (having women) because the presence of women in powerful roles influences and inspires local women – including women becoming soldiers.

It is civilian women like her who inspired my research journey. I wanted to find out if the inclusion of women peacekeepers on a mission can make a difference to civilian women's lives and if so what are those differences. Then I wanted to find out what needs to change so that the numbers of women peacekeepers can increase?

Here are the facts: UNSCR 1325 calls for:

The Secretary General to seek to expand the role and contribution of women in field based operations, and especially among military observers, civilian police, human rights and humanitarian personnel;

Expresses its willingness to incorporate a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations, and urges the Secretary General to ensure that, where appropriate, field operations include a gender component.

Currently, women make up 3% of UN peacekeepers worldwide – and 10% of all police personnel on UN Missions. The UN has a goal of increasing the numbers of women to 20% by 2014 a goal that is unlikely to be met. Why does the UN want more women involved in peacekeeping? The UN says that women's presence is critical for:

- empowering women in the host community;
- addressing specific needs of female ex-combatants
- helping make the peacekeeping force approachable to women in the community;
- interviewing survivors of gender-based violence;
- mentoring female cadets at police and military academies;
- interacting with women in societies where women are prohibited from speaking to men.

A recent report 'Not Just a Numbers Game' (Dharmapuri, 2013) sets out why the 1325 goals on peacekeeping have not been met.

1. There is a lack of understanding amongst member states about 1325 (often interpreted as about increasing the numbers of women peacekeepers only with little understanding as to why this is important or why including a gender perspective into missions is necessary)
2. There is a gap in data and analysis about women's participation in national security institutions

3. The prevalence of social norms and biases perpetuate gender inequality within the security sector.

My research set out to address the gap in empirical data and analysis by considering how discourses on gender – which reflect social norms - position women soldiers in different peacekeeping scenarios. To do this I interviewed 28 Irish peacekeepers (equal numbers of women and men) at home in Ireland and while participating in a mission in Kosovo.

I was interested in looking at the discourses circulating within the participant's accounts because discourses reveal invisible power relations. A discourse is a meaning repertoire underpinning a particular set of ideas and taken for granted knowledge about the world. Discourses reveal how women and men position each other depending on the social context. They are ways of seeing the world. As such discourses are difficult to challenge as they are usually considered normal or natural – often unquestioned and assumed to be facts.

In relation to women's inclusion into the ranks of the Defence Forces a dominant discourse within the organization, revealed through the interviewing process, is that women are 'equal but different'. I set out to explore what 'equal but different' means in practical terms, and how this discourse plays itself out in the different situations peacekeepers find themselves in. I was also keen to draw connections between discourses – and women's opportunities to take part in a wide variety of jobs, tasks, and missions, access to promotions, and ultimately their likelihood to be retained within the organization.

I divided my findings into three groups:

1. Discourses on what women bring to a mission
2. Discourses on inhibitors to women's inclusion on missions
3. Transformative discourses on gender

Here's what I found:

So what do women bring to a mission? Men say that women bring a new energy to a mission, with their diversity of experience and knowledge. In relation to civilian women and girls, women are now positioned as necessary to the new multi-dimensional mission profiles. Both women and men draw on discourses that position women as necessary because they can search civilian women at checkpoints; gather different types of intelligence; and for communicating with civilian women on certain sensitive issues such as GBV.

Male participants saw the benefits of women to a mission predominantly in their care-giving roles. For example, they state that women normalize the camp environment; the presence of even a few women can reduce tension amongst men; women provide empathy and listen to men's concerns; and that women galvanize men into performing to higher standards.

What are the barriers to women's inclusion in a mission?

Within this section of my research a series of contradictory discourses were revealed. While the discourses drawn on by women and men participants often overlapped on certain subjects there were a lot of contradictions, relating to their differing experiences and perspectives. What follows is a map of different discourses that highlight some of the complexities around women's inclusion in the military:

On the subject of Culture: there is a notable shift in the discourse from 'women can't go there' to 'women are necessary' on a mission. However, some men still consider the culture of the host country and traditional gender roles in those countries as inhibitors to women's access to certain jobs or missions. The rationale being that civilian men will not deal with women (in specific situations women peacekeepers are advised to take a step back and to let their male peers or subordinates deal with local men). Women themselves say that while there were some issues back in the 1990s particularly in the Lebanon overall they report few problems in dealing with civilian men in recent missions. They say that the military

uniform and their role as peacekeepers gives them status and respect amongst civilians, both men and women. And while they are cogniscent of cultural differences they don't think those differences should curtail their access to the jobs they have been trained to perform.

On Military culture: Men said that male peacekeepers from often from non-western troop contributing countries cannot work with women soldiers in certain situations and that this is due traditional gender norms within their countries; as well as the fact that many militaries either have no women or few women soldiers. While women participants said that they find these attitudes of soldiers from different cultures a nuisance and irritating they did not see them as a serious issue that would inhibit their access to specific jobs or missions.

On the subject of Protection: Some men position women as needing to be protected from certain dangerous tasks, jobs or missions. However, women say that the arduous nature or danger element of certain missions can be over-emphasized to women and that while some women may be put off by this others want access to their full set of duties; and the opportunity to put their training into action.

On the issue of Sexuality: Men talked about how women's bodies and sexuality can create problems for them within the mission camp or while stationed in an isolated area or post (for example, some men prefer not to work alongside women in isolated areas where they have to share accommodation - in case it upsets their wives or girlfriends at home.) Women did not report any issues with working alongside men in isolated situations.

On the subject of Segregated Facilities: While they are one way of dealing with sexuality issues and as protection for women from harassment or abuse, women talked about feeling isolated on a mission. Particularly women officers who are often housed individually, and are not allowed visit male peers privately in their rooms.

The need for women's segregation from the male cohort can also be used as the rationale not to deploy women on certain missions if facilities are not available; or if

a commander does not want to give up an entire accommodation block to a small number of women peacekeepers.

In relation to divisions of labour: 1325 is raising concerns for both women and men within the DF. Some women are concerned that 1325 will ghettoize all women soldiers into 'women/civilian-facing' jobs that they may not be most suited to doing or they may not want to do. Secondly, there is a concern that these jobs will become devalued as feminized jobs which has happened previously, with jobs such as paymaster. Thirdly that 1325 could create a backlash towards women if military men feel that a. The military is becoming too feminized and b. If men feel that women are being promoted or sent on certain missions instead of them because of their gender. So it is clear that how a military interprets and responds to 1325 will impact on discourses around the resolution and ultimately on women's inclusion.

On the subject of Civilians: The accounts do reveal a bias towards male civilians (because they are positioned as holding most of the social power in the host countries) and the importance of meeting their needs and listening to their experiences rather than to female civilians. There was little understanding voiced within the participant accounts as to why civilian women's experiences and needs should be included within the mission mandate, beyond seeing them as victims of the conflict.

While the discourses I have outlined are informally circulating amongst peacekeepers they do have the power to influence formal policy and practice as they are often taken for granted within society more broadly as just how things are between women and men in different cultural contexts.

What are the Opportunities?

It was important to me as a feminist researcher to uncover discourses with transformative potential, discourses that could genuinely equalize gender relations within a mission. So I looked for discourses that position women multiply, not only in their socialized role as care-givers to male peers or civilian women, but within a variety of jobs, tasks and missions suiting their particular skill sets and interests. I

found a number of these discourses which include: 'buddies protect regardless of gender'; the importance of 'integrating without adopting the culture of the host nation'; how 'gender inequalities within the host nation need to be addressed as well as gender inequalities within militaries', and discourses on 'women as role models' and 'as the leaders and protectors of their troops'.

Here's what I recommend:

Discourses that dis-empower and undermine women's right to be included on missions must be challenged. For alternative discourses to take root and flourish they must be supported by the DF, the UN and all security institutions involved in peacekeeping. A plan of action to include gender perspectives in a mission must adopt an 'Agenda setting' approach to gender mainstreaming. A human rights approach would consider the desired impacts likely to flow from specific practices and policies. Security institutions then need to wholeheartedly engage with these reforms to enable gender-equal outcomes.

While 1325 is clearly not only a numbers game - numbers are important. The military is male dominated which gives men control over how the military and peacekeeping is organized, strategized, what is prioritized and what is minimized. Without numbers of women in the military women will not have influence over agendas and how things are done. The first step in any modern military taking the needs of women in post-conflict situations seriously, is to take the needs of women within their own ranks seriously. This is not likely to happen if the numbers remain low and women are seen by civilians and other troop contributing countries as being positioned tokenistically within missions.

The discourses in my research imply that it is military culture that needs to transform if it is to incorporate women as equal members. Women are not just an adjunct to men on a mission. Men need to understand the value of women to a mission beyond their care-giving roles. A plan of action for gender equality must ensure that women are positioned multiply in a variety of ranks, jobs, tasks, and roles on a mission. By positioning women peacekeepers inclusively within a mission, and especially within decision-making and leadership roles, will demonstrate to

civilian women in fragile post-conflict situations, that the UN and national militaries take gender equality seriously; and that they acknowledge the empowerment of women as a necessary step towards the creation of a just and peaceful society.

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