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Title:

Willing and Able: Articulations of vernacular security in voluntary defence training courses for women in Finland

Abstract:

This ethnographic study takes stock of the field of women's own emergency preparedness training courses within the larger field of voluntary defence training Finland. It is based on participant observation of weekend courses in 2018-19 and semi-structured interviews of 22 participants and course leaders from different parts of Finland. In the interviews, a heuristic device of the dimensions of how citizens relate to national defence (attitude, confidence, skills, and agency) based on earlier studies in Finnish military sociology was applied (see Kosonen et. al 2019). Defined by their legal sex, age, and capabilities, what kinds of forms of participation are open to civilian women in Finland within defence-oriented civil society and what kinds of civic ideals does this field of activity reflect? Defence-oriented voluntary organisations exist in many different countries such as the Nordic countries and Eastern Europe. They offer a variety of State-supported and/or State-friendly civic activities ranging from supporting territorial defence to studying household preparedness. This field is still very much under-studied by sociologists and scholars of adjacent disciplines, bar some exceptions. In this study, women's emergency preparedness training in Finland under the umbrella of the Women's National Emergency Preparedness Association (WNEPA), a league of NGOs devoted to this particular cause, and the National Defence Training Association, an association with legally prescribed public duties, are studied as a field of vernacular security (Bubandt 2005). The notion of 'vernacular security' as introduced by Bubandt has given rise to a debate of its own that has mainly branched to international relations and security studies. Here, I focus on vernacular security in its original, anthropological context to shed light on the local articulations of what security is understood to mean in different social, historical and geopolitical contexts. In the context of Finland and voluntary defence training courses offered specifically to women (organised mostly by women), these understandings morph into articulations of "vernacular preparedness". This is due to the visibly militarised but also content-wise ambivalent form and content of the courses. Oscillating between a narrower, official, and technocratic and a broader, comprehensive, and vernacularised understanding of 'national defence', the interviewees articulate a civic ideal of a willing, caring, and able civilian. In a national and ethnographic context defined by male conscription and voluntary forms of participation in national defence for women ranging from voluntary military service to defence-oriented civic activities, the non-reservist women interviewed gain entry to the field of national defence by ascribing to a broad conception of national defence and a gendered division of security labour in Finnish society (see Tallberg 2017). This study will be of relevance to those who are interested in the role and agency of defence-oriented civilians within defence-oriented civil society and the social impact it may have of developing resilience, cohesion and capable citizenship in European societies.

Keywords: vernacular security, gender, national defence, preparedness, citizenship,