Victims, soldiers, peacemakers and caretakers: the neoliberal constitution of women in the EU’s security policy

Hanna L. Muehlenhoff

To cite this article: Hanna L. Muehlenhoff (2017) Victims, soldiers, peacemakers and caretakers: the neoliberal constitution of women in the EU’s security policy, International Feminist Journal of Politics, 19:2, 153-167, DOI: 10.1080/14616742.2017.1279417

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2017.1279417

© 2017 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

Published online: 10 Feb 2017.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 731

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Citing articles: 2

View citing articles
Victims, soldiers, peacemakers and caretakers: the neoliberal constitution of women in the EU’s security policy

Hanna L. Muehlenhoff

Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands

ABSTRACT
Feminist scholars praise and criticize the UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security for its considerations of women and gender in conflicts. Poststructuralist feminists show how gender is constructed in the UN’s security policies and how these constructions reproduce gendered dichotomies between women and men and representations of women as victims, part of civil society and neoliberal subjects. Although the UNSC Resolutions 1325 and 1820 are implemented by the EU, there is no literature on how the EU is taking up the UN’s discourse. Scholars studying gender policies in and of the EU mainly analyze the (in)effectiveness of EU gender mainstreaming but rarely interrogate its discursive foundations. Using a governmentality perspective, I argue that on the one hand the EU produces a binary and stereotypical understanding of gender, and on the other hand constitutes women as neoliberal subjects responsible for their own well-being, ignoring broader structures of (gender) inequality and war and making gender equality solely an instrument to achieve more security and development.

KEYWORDS governmentality; EU; gender; security; neoliberal

Introduction
Gender mainstreaming has been part of the European Union’s (EU) policies since the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992. All policies should contribute to the equality of women and men. Many studies investigate the (in)effectiveness of EU policies in terms of gender equality. Feminist research largely focuses on the integration process of the EU and its internal economic and social policies (Hubert 2012; Prügl 2012; Stratigaki 2012). Gender mainstreaming has also become part of the EU’s foreign policies, such as in the area of development assistance or security policies. However, feminist analyses are still rare and focus on the implementation of gender equality, such as in development (Painter and Ulmer 2002; Lister 2003) or enlargement policies (Bretherton 2001; Galligan, Clavero, and Calloni 2007; Galligan and Clavero 2012). For example, Charlotte Bretherton (2001) finds that in the EU enlargement policies gender mainstreaming plays...
a surprisingly small role. This is different in development policies for which in 1995 the EU Council passed a resolution that included gender equality as a goal (Elgström 2000, 462). Since then, gender has been mainstreamed in the EU’s development policies, such as in the European Consensus on Development (Carbone and Lister 2013a, 2). The authors in a book edited by Maurizio Carbone and Marjorie R. Lister (2003) ask whether the gender policies existing on paper have been implemented in practice. Most contributors conclude that the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the EU’s development aid in different regions is weak. Petra Debusscher (2011) deconstructs the EU’s gender understanding. She argues that the EU’s gender discourse in development aid is largely instrumental and neoliberal, meaning that gender equality is only an instrument to achieve economic development, not a goal in itself. Debusscher further shows that the EU’s discourse mainly refers to women instead of using a transformative gender concept. Besides Debusscher’s article, other analyses of the construction of gender in the EU’s foreign policy are rare, although there are many critical feminist studies of gender politics at the global level (Marchand and Runyan 2000a; Shepherd 2008). Much of the literature on the EU’s gender mainstreaming (especially in its foreign policies) is written from first- and second-wave feminist perspectives (Elgström 2000; Bretherton 2001; Lister 2003; Galligan and Clavero 2012; Carbone and Lister 2013b). This is surprising, as the EU’s role in the world has been analyzed from discursive and social constructivist, poststructuralist and critical perspectives (Christiansen, Jorgensen, and Wiener 1999; Diez 2005, 2013; Walters and Haahr 2005; Mitchell 2006; Bieling 2010; Buckel and Pichl 2012; Borg 2013; Muehlenhoff 2016).

There is also an immense body of third-wave or poststructuralist feminist literature on the United Nations (UN) gender and security policies (e.g., Cohn 2004; Shepherd 2008). Feminists in IR show how discourses present women as being part of the private sphere, as more peaceful and as victims in conflicts, thus marginalizing an active role (Tickner 1992; Shepherd 2006). These studies apply a poststructuralist understanding of gender. Judith Butler’s book Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (2006) is the key text of poststructuralist feminism, which defines gender as a social construct. Discourses ascribe arbitrary gender roles. Third-wave feminists further broaden the understanding of gender, including gender beyond male or female and beyond a universal understanding of gender (Hudson 2005, 159). Poststructuralist feminists argue that the deconstruction of gender is necessary to end discrimination and accordingly aim to deconstruct the discursive representation of gender in international politics.

Moreover, third-wave feminists criticize the concept of universal human rights. Women are oppressed in different ways around the world; for example, discrimination based on gender can be coupled with discrimination based on race. Claiming universal human rights runs the risk of neglecting the realities of women in some parts of the world (Hudson 2005, 167–169). For example, the EU’s civil society funding uses specific concepts of gender when financing women’s rights civil society organizations (CSOs) in Turkey (Muehlenhoff 2014).

In the discipline of International Political Economy (IPE), scholars such as Nancy Fraser (2013) analyze gender in economic relations. They focus on the consequences of neoliberalism on women and gender relations. Marianne H. Marchand and Anne Sisson Runyan’s (2000a) comprehensive volume shows that the dimensions of gender in globalization, or what they call “global restructuring,” are more complex than often assumed. They point to two seemingly contradictory gender constructions of women. On the one hand, women are still part of the private sphere, such as civil
society, and assigned more social roles, for example providing social services. On the other hand, women are increasingly described as economic actors who have to be empowered. Yet, empowerment is also problematic because it involves asymmetrical power relations between the one empowered and the one empowering. The one who empowers transfers a specific understanding of what empowerment is to the one to be empowered. Feminist literature has been much more positive about empowerment than the governmentality literature, and has thus not paid enough attention to its ambiguous effects (for an exception see Cornwall and Rivas 2015). Because empowerment and economic rationalities are especially characteristic of the EU’s adoption of the UN’s gender and security agenda, I suggest using the insights of the governmentality literature to analyze it. In neoliberal governmentality, gender equality becomes part of an economic calculation, which makes it a resource for more security and development.

My analysis makes use of the arguments raised by poststructuralist feminist IR scholars and connects with Debusscher’s (2011) work on the EU’s development policy. To analyze gender mainstreaming in the EU’s foreign policy we should investigate how the EU conceptualizes gender to understand what the possible consequences are or might be. In contrast to Debusscher, I suggest using the concept of neoliberal governmentality to understand gender representations in policy texts because governmentality goes beyond an understanding of neoliberalism focused on the economy and the full retreat of the state. Instead, it assumes that economic rationalities dominate all parts of life and become part of governing. It shows how neoliberal rationalities constitute individuals as self-responsible, making emancipation an individual task. The concept of governmentality points to the depoliticizing effects of specific security policies. The neoliberal rationalities of the EU’s gender and security paradigm prohibit looking into the structural causes of war and questioning military instruments as such. Simply adding gender equality to existing policies does not necessarily transform them unless a broad understanding of the structural causes of marginalization is included.

In this article, I analyze the EU’s gender construction in its documents on gender and security and discuss its similarities and differences to the UN’s gender discourse. I argue that the EU – similarly to the UN – (re)produces an understanding of gender which is based on a binary and stereotypical conception and – more strongly than the UN – constitutes women as neoliberal subjects who are responsible for their own emancipation and well-being and are a promising resource for military missions. As a consequence, traditional and neoliberal ideas of gender are reproduced and causes of insecurity and war are not sufficiently questioned. Deconstructing the EU’s discourse is important because it translates into concrete policies in its missions in other countries (Council of the European Union 2005) and its conflict-prevention and peace-building policies (e.g., EEAS 2012).

The EU’s gender and security policies have to be seen in their EU context, in which neoliberal rationalities dominate other policy areas as well (Walters and Haahr 2005; Mitchell 2006; Kurki 2011; İşleyen 2015a). In order to shed light on the foundations of EU gender policies and their consequences, I use the theoretical insights of poststructuralist feminist theory and Michel Foucault’s thoughts on neoliberal governmentality. In the following, I first describe the theoretical underpinnings of my analysis and then analyze key EU policy documents on gender and security. At the end, I conclude and reflect on my analytical findings.
A feminist reading of governmentality

In order to understand the ambiguous ways in which gender is constructed and relations of power are embedded in empowerment, feminist analyses should integrate a comprehensive understanding of what neoliberalism means. Many IR scholars point to the neoliberal nature of gender relations (e.g., Shepherd 2008) but do not make the theoretical underpinnings of such an analysis explicit. I suggest that adding a Foucauldian governmentality lens helps to see and understand how women are produced as neoliberal subjects, which on the one hand constitutes women in specific ways but may also enable some agency (see McLaren 2012; Oksala 2013; Olivius 2014). I agree with Laura Zanotti (2014) that governmentality should be used as a “heuristic tool” to analyze government, but it is one that indeed points us to the ambiguous consequences of specific forms of governmentality. However, I do not assume that neoliberal governmentality is necessarily part of an organized oppressive regime and implemented intentionally (for a good discussion of a “heuristic” versus “descriptive” understanding of governmentality see Zanotti 2014). I put forward that a feminist governmentality approach is especially beneficial for analyzing policies in the EU context for which governmentality is characteristic (Walters and Haahr 2005).

Instead of assuming a full retreat of the state, the concept of governmentality demonstrates how neoliberal governing means that ways to govern are transferred to individuals. Governmentality shapes the subjectivities of individuals who come to act as economic subjects. In neoliberal governmentality, economic rationalities govern all spheres of life, not only the economic sphere but also the social, political and the private spheres (Lemke 2001, 197). This means that decisions on every level and on every issue become subjected to cost–benefit calculations. Gender equality and women’s rights are part of a rational calculation as well. Neoliberal rationalities constitute every human being as a self-entrepreneur who “produces its own self-satisfaction” (Foucault, Senellart, and Burchell 2008, 226). Individuals possess “human capital” made up of all resources or capacities of a person such as the individual’s health, education level, genetic dispositions and social network (Foucault, Senellart, and Burchell 2008, 229). The self-entrepreneur has to use her human capital for her self-emancipation.

This theory of human capital bears some similarities with the idea of human security that is promoted by feminists and critical security studies (Hudson 2005; Hoogensen and Stuvøy 2006; Hudson, Kreidenweis, and Carpenter 2013). “Human security” widens the concept of security, which originally meant the security of sovereign states, by referring to the security of every individual including her access to health care, economic resources, education and protection. Feminists integrated the human security concept into their gender analysis because it is often women who experience insecurities, and “gender justice” is seen to be necessary to achieve security (Hudson 2005, 162). Yet, the human security concept is problematic. From a Foucauldian perspective, the human security paradigm individualizes emancipation and makes individuals and civil society responsible for their own well-being (Jaeger 2007).

Empowerment is the key tool of the human security agenda (Hoogensen and Stuvøy 2006, 211). While empowerment and human security are noble goals, Foucault’s (Foucault, Senellart, and Burchell 2008) and other scholars’ thoughts on governmentality (Jaeger 2007) suggest that human security and empowerment are at least ambiguous. Empowerment implies that someone has to empower the other, which is a “democratically unaccountable use of power” (Cruikshank 1999, 72), and transfers a specific
idea of what empowerment is to the individual (Cruikshank 1993, 341). Postmodern leftist feminists called for the empowerment of women and assumed that structural power relations would change with empowerment (Cornwall and Rivas 2015). Yet, empowerment also fits neoliberal rationalities, as it “preserves, while it radicalizes, the stress on autonomy and self-determination found in many variants of liberalism” (Dean 1999, 67). Empowerment works through productive power and changes the subjectivities of individuals who are supposed “to cast off their status as victims and actively participate in the transformation of their condition” (Dean 1999, 67). Adding gender to the governmentality lens, we see that women are on the one hand constituted as victims and on the other hand as self-responsible individuals who can overcome their marginalization using their own resources. Moreover, women are constituted according to the discourse of the ones who empower.

In concrete policies such as funding of civil society, empowerment usually means enabling women to take care of their own situation and emancipate themselves from it. This is often done either to encourage them to provide services for each other or to participate in the decision-making process. The policies teach women how to govern themselves (Foucault 1991, 92). The sphere of civil society is especially interesting as it is here where women supposedly have the chance to achieve emancipation. At the same time civil society is about “soft” politics and is more private than the market or the state (Marchand and Runyan 2000b, 12–15), and “it is important to keep in mind that a strengthened civil society is also on the neo-liberal agenda” (Marchand and Runyan 2000b, 20). One part of this is that civil society becomes responsible for taking care of the marginalized by offering them the social services they need. Within neoliberal governmentality the state transfers this task to civil society (Kurki 2011). As a consequence the structural causes of marginalization are not tackled but instead individual women become dependent on the services (for an analysis of this for the case of Lesotho see Ferguson 1990, 256).

The idea that women participate in decision making seems to assign to them a much more active role. It may open up spaces for influence and make women’s voices heard. However, feminists have shown how in concrete situations the form of participation achieved fosters relations of power (Cornwall 2003), or is only used as a way to make women feel less dependent while the structural dependencies remain unchanged (as shown for the case of refugee camps by Olivius 2014, 57–59). Moreover, the idea of participation in neoliberal governmentality is based on a deliberative model of democracy in which actors can reach a rational consensus (Mouffe 2007, 136), but from a Foucauldian perspective there cannot be a consensus because in every decision some positions are excluded; and if there is a supposedly consensual agreement it is difficult to criticize it if it was decided by institutions you are part of (Jaeger 2007, 270–271). As Beste Işleyen (2015b) shows for the case of civil society participation and empowerment in the European Partnership for Peace, participation in and empowerment of civil society within neoliberal governmentality does not aim at structural change but rather at management of the existing situation.

The governmentality lens does not only recognize the relations of power within empowerment and the constitution of women as economic and self-responsible subjects, it also points to possibilities for and instances of agency and resistance. Because in governmentality individuals are “free” – although shaped by liberal or neoliberal rationalities – there is some possibility for resistance and agency (Foucault 1982, 790; Lipschutz 2005, 765–767; Foucault, Senellart, and Burchell 2008, 63). Even in the
presence of neoliberal hegemony, it is possible to resist and challenge discourses (see, for example, Olivius 2014, 57). In some situations women might learn how things are done in a specific bureaucratic context and be able to raise their demands (e.g., for the case of women’s empowerment in India see Sharma 2006, 75). Although governmentality creates specific subjectivities and transfers ideas of how to govern oneself to individuals, it depends on the freedom of the individual (Foucault, Senellart, and Burchell 2008, 63). This freedom gives the individuals agency.

In addition, neoliberal governmentality often comes with a mix of neoliberal and liberal rationalities. Liberal rationalities constitute civil society as a sphere of rights and a check on the state. Rights refer to economic rights but also to legal and social rights. Individuals are bearers of these rights and can demand that the state protect these rights, thus politicizing them. Neoliberal rationalities, however, make individuals responsible for their own well-being. Monitoring the state becomes more difficult and rights become part of an economic rationale, meaning that rights are an instrument to achieve, for example, more security or more development (Dean 1999, 123; Foucault, Senellart, and Burchell 2008, 65).

Although Foucault’s lectures neglect the role of gender (also see Oksala 2013, 41), I put forward that his thoughts on governmentality contribute to feminist IR theory. I connect feminist approaches with Foucault’s thoughts on neoliberal governmentality to understand the ambivalences of the human security and empowerment discourses as well as the constitutive effects of neoliberalism. Moreover, security as well as gender policies can take different forms. Because the EU integrates the security and gender policy into its neoliberal governmentality, security is individualized and economic development appears to be the only way to achieve it. In contrast, an emancipatory or transformative understanding of security and gender would aim at structural change and collective forms of development and emancipation such as suggested by the “security as emancipation” agenda (Basu and Nunes 2013, 72).

I study the EU’s discourse because discourses are productive (Foucault 1981; Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 111–112; Hansen 2006, 17–23); a certain representation of gender (re)produces power relations and makes some policies more likely than others. The texts provide the guidelines for the EU’s missions abroad, which account for seven military missions and ten so-called civilian missions (often police missions) in 2015 (EEAS 2015). I chose key texts for both policy areas. I analyze the Comprehensive Approach to the EU Implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on Women, Peace and Security (2008b), the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 in the Context of ESDP (2005) together with the document on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 as Reinforced by UNSCR 1820 in the Context of ESDP (2008c) and the Council Conclusions on Promoting Gender Equality and Gender Mainstreaming in Crisis Management (2006). These are the main texts that exist regarding the EU’s implementation of the UNSCR 1325 and 1820 in its security policies.

I analyze the documents on security policies doing a predicate analysis, meaning that I look for words which describe women or gender in the texts (Milliken 1999, 231–234). In most cases, this does not mean adjectives, but nouns used to describe women. I further focus on how women are related to the main goals of the policies, namely security and policy goals connected to them. Moreover, I look for representations of neoliberal governmentality such as empowerment, self-responsibility, effectiveness, efficiency, participation and service provision. I am interested in whether women are described in terms of economic rationalities. Liberal governmentality is expressed through references
to rights and the guarantee of rights. I organize my analysis as follows: I first focus on the representation of women and empowerment, and then on the discourse of human security. Last, I show how women are represented as soldiers in EU missions.

**Gender equality in the name of security**

In October 2000 the UN Security Council (UNSC) decided on Resolution 1325 (UNSC 2000), which is the first UNSCR to specifically focus on women and security issues, moving from a state-centered concept of security to a human security concept. The resolution addressed the role of women in violent conflicts, such as their role as victims or as contributors to peace processes. More resolutions followed, including UNSCR 1820 in 2008 (UNSC 2008) recognizing sexual violence in conflict as an instrument of war, UNSCR 1888 in 2009 mandating peacekeeping missions to especially protect women and children from sexual violence and UNSCR 1888 in 2009 focusing on the participation of women in preventing or solving conflicts (EEAS 2014). UNSCR 1325 and UNSCR 1820 present the key reference texts for the EU’s policies on security and gender, as visible in the titles of the documents on gender and security (Council of the European Union 2008b, 2005, 2008c). The documents on the one hand focus on the implementation of the UNSCRs within the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) (Council of the European Union 2005, 2008c) and on the other hand set out measures to implement the resolutions’ objectives across policies (Council of the European Union 2008b). Indeed, the EU uses similar discursive representations of women as the UN (Cohn 2004; Shepherd 2008). As we will see, similarly to the UN, the EU largely constitutes gender as binary, and sees women as victims of conflict and better peacemakers than men. However, the EU’s gender representations are more progressive than the UN’s, for example when referring to occasions when women can be perpetrators and men the victims of gender-based violence. More importantly, the EU constitutes women more strongly than the UN in neoliberal ways, emphasizing their empowerment and resources to take care of themselves and contribute to peace, development and EU missions.

**Empowering women for more effective security and development**

In line with the UN’s documents, the EU conceptualizes gender as referring to women and men, excluding other gender identities. Although the EU recognizes gender to be a social construct, it only sees this confined to the difference between men and women (Council of the European Union 2008b, 5). Gender equality between women and men (Council of the European Union 2008b, 2; 2008c, 3) and gender mainstreaming (Council of the European Union 2008b, 5; 2005, 3) are described as the ultimate goals. In conflicts, women and girls are most commonly described as victims of (sexual) violence (Council of the European Union 2008b, 6, 11; 2005, 5). Despite these – what I call – stereotypical gender representations, in which women have passive roles and men have active roles, the EU gives agency to women: “[w]omen are however not only victims of war and violence. They also play active roles as combatants, peace-builders, politicians and activists” (Council of the European Union 2008b, 2).

Yet, these representations of women are shaped by neoliberal rationalities. In order to overcome their role as passive victims of conflict, women are to be empowered. In the end, women are resources that can contribute to more effective peace. The EU defines
the goals of integrating gender into security policy as the “rationale” (Council of the European Union 2008b, 4). The protection and participation of women is supposed to “enhance efficiency and effectiveness” of “conflict prevention, peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction” (Council of the European Union 2008b, 4). Accordingly, the resources, meaning women, have to be “empowered” to positively influence the peace processes (Council of the European Union 2008b, 11, 14). As in other sectors, the EU tries to empower women through CSOs that receive funding and that are encouraged to participate in decision-making processes (Council of the European Union 2008b, 8). The EU stresses the self-responsibility, here called “ownership,” of civil society and of other local stakeholders, for example women’s health groups or women cooperatives (Council of the European Union 2008b, 12, 13, 15, 16; 2005, 5). Through civil society women can contribute to “reconciliation processes,” decision making and governance processes (Council of the European Union 2008b, 17). Women appear to be especially good at conflict prevention, conflict resolution, peacekeeping and peace building, as “women either predicted the outbreak of violence or had access to vital information that may have stopped the outbreak of violence” (Council of the European Union 2008b, 7; also see Shepherd 2008, 396). Hence the self-responsibility and the specific positive role of women in conflicts are stressed and responsibility is passed on to them. Sometimes women are presented as politicians, but mostly women are constituted as belonging to the sphere of civil society, a traditionally rather “female” sphere in contrast to the sphere of politics or the military (Shepherd 2008, 391).

The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) has to be seen in the same light. It gives funding to human rights organizations, such as women’s rights groups, to support “human rights and democratic reform, in supporting the peaceful conciliation of group interests and in consolidating political participation and representation” as well as giving support to “actions on human rights and democracy issues” (Council of the European Union 2008b, 30). It enables the monitoring of women’s rights but it also constitutes women as part of civil society and civil society as the responsible sphere. Under the heading of Mainstreaming Human Rights and Gender into European Security and Defence Policy the EU compiles all its human rights policies, such as its civil society funding programs and support for so-called human rights defenders (Council of the European Union 2008a). Human rights defenders represent the personification of a neoliberal self-entrepreneur as well as a liberal bearer of human rights. They are “those individuals, groups and organs of society that promote and protect universally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms” (Council of the European Union 2008a, 62). Constituting women as human rights defenders transfers a liberal and neoliberal idea of what women’s needs are to women. Thus, a specific idea of “emancipation” is prescribed and the individual is asked to defend that one conception (see, for example, Rivetti 2013).

Women’s human security and human capital for more effective security and development

Similar to the UN, the EU has recognized that the situation of women in conflicts, such as their experience of sexual violence, is a security issue. The EU explicitly refers to the notion of human security as including economic security, and access to health services and education (Council of the European Union 2008b, 9). The EU presents human security as an integral part of development policies and it states that “peace, security,
development and gender equality” are closely linked (Council of the European Union 2008b, 9). This is a step forward, as the EU recognizes the underprivileged socio-economic situation of women as their insecurity. Yet, it is also problematic, because the EU emphasizes that conflicts have a negative influence on development (Council of the European Union 2008b, 9) and presents gender equality and conflict resolution as a matter of economic benefit. The EU’s comprehensive approach makes the EU’s development policies, such as the European Consensus on Development, as well as its development cooperation an important component of its security and gender program (Council of the European Union 2008b, 10, 21). Similarly, the EU’s development policies find women’s empowerment and equality to be important for the purpose of human rights and for the purpose of economic development. The EU links conflict resolution closely to development even in the development documents (European Parliament, Council, Commission 2006, 4). The UN similarly connects development and security, making women’s rights a condition for economic development. Moreover, the EU’s and the UN’s discourses equate development to economic development and thus impose a neoliberal understanding of development and marginalize alternative ways of life (see Shepherd 2008, 397–398).

In addition, the EU stresses the need to increase women’s human capital and their self-responsibility. The discourse implies that increasing human capital, or what the EU calls “capacities,” leads to more peace. Capacities include economic, education and health security. Increasing women’s capacities is also referred to as “enabling” or “empowering.” For example, the comprehensive approach links economic security and “active” agency: “[t]he EU activities aimed at protecting women and enabling them to act as active agents in conflict related situations should also take into consideration the importance of economic security for women” (Council of the European Union 2008b, 18). Health security includes that “the EU will take into account the responsibility that women bear not only for their own health but also for those of their families,” with a special emphasis on maternal health and children’s health (Council of the European Union 2008b, 12, 18). While the EU gives responsibility to women, it is in an area that is traditionally female and private. Education is supposed to enable women to ensure the well-being of their families in the same way: “[b]asic education enables women to protect themselves and their family and to be active at community, local and national levels” (Council of the European Union 2008b, 18). The EU’s discourse stresses women’s self-responsibility as well as their responsibility as mothers. According to the EU, if women have a better human capital, including education, health and economic security, they are more likely to fulfill these roles. The EU constitutes women in traditional and neoliberal ways at the same time and transfers part of the responsibility to solve conflicts and protection to women. It constructs women’s rights as a resource for peace and security, instead of considering them a goal in themselves and directing attention to the broader structural causes of women’s marginalization. It does not raise the question of what the EU’s agricultural policies contribute to the women’s situation, for example, and it does not tackle the causes of conflict.

**Gender equality for more effective military missions**

The EU also gives military agency to women. More concretely, the EU aims to achieve gender equality in the ESDP and its missions. The EU intends to “change stereotypes regarding women’s participation, assignment and tasks” in the military and police
(Council of the European Union 2006, 2). This includes that women are equally represented in the ESDP decision-making bodies and become peacekeepers or rather soldiers (Council of the European Union 2005, 4). Especially the second document on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in the ESDP emphasizes the equal representation of women in all implementation steps of ESDP missions (Council of the European Union 2008c). The EU takes the idea of liberal gender equality seriously but also strengthens and legitimizes an increasing role of the military in EU foreign policy and conflict resolution. As Cohn (2004) argues, the gender-security agenda accepts that wars take place because the gender policies only come in after war has started, not “to prevent war” (14). Gender equality in the EU’s security policies means that women become combatants, ensuring equality but not ending violence.

Moreover, the documents make clear that the EU’s main concern is not gender equality but “effective” missions. The EU assumes that more women means better military missions. It constitutes women as “resources” for military missions: the ESDP document shows that the EU intends to “mobilize” and “exploit” the resources women provide, or their human capital:

Gender mainstreaming in the area of ESDP is not a goal in itself; the ultimate objective is to increase the EU’s crisis management capacity by mobilizing additional resources and exploiting the full potential of human resources available and to make the mission more effective in establishing peace and security and strengthening democratic values. (Council of the European Union 2005, 3; emphasis added)

This statement demonstrates the dominance of neoliberal economic rationalities. The language of exploiting women undermines the broader goals of the EU’s security agenda, namely preventing the gender-based exploitation of women. Further, it describes women as a resource that can contribute to the effectiveness of EU security policies and missions, instead of seeing gender equality as a goal in itself (also see Debusscher 2011, 44). Consequently, the EU sets out to measure the effects created by gender mainstreaming: “[i]f possible, the contribution of gender-mainstreaming to the effectiveness of the ESDP mission/operation should be assessed” (Council of the European Union 2008c, 10). Women become part of an economic equation and are expected to be the better peacemakers. The security and gender policy constitutes every issue as an economic one and part of neoliberal governmentality (Foucault, Senellart, and Burchell 2008, 229–231). The UN makes a similar connection between the involvement of women and more successful peace building, but in less economic terms. Nevertheless, both the EU and the UN emphasize that including women is good because it leads to more successful policies. This makes women’s rights an instrument for other ends such as security and does not acknowledge them as a goal in itself. Further, the EU and the UN policies do not address the structural causes of gender inequality. What Cohn (2004) points out for the UN’s rationale of including women in peacekeeping operations is also valid for the EU:

I don’t actually know if peace – in the way they mean it, as the absence of war – is impossible without gender equality. I am, however, certain that equality between women and men – in the way they mean it, a liberal version of political equality – does not begin to get at the pernicious, pervasive complexities of the gender regimes that undergird not only individual wars themselves, but the entire war system. (16)

The EU gender agenda, similar to the UN’s, does not question dominant peace and security practices and discourses and does not politicize the issue of war. Instead,
women become integrated into the system, assuming military roles in the name of rational considerations. As such, the EU just adds gender to its neoliberal conception of security, one that does not question the broader structures of inequality contributing to conflicts and wars. The only legitimacy for including gender considerations is effectiveness.

**Conclusion**

I began this article by noting that most literature on the EU and gender focuses on the EU’s internal gender mainstreaming policies. There is only some literature that analyzes the EU’s foreign policies, such as enlargement or development, from a gender perspective, and it focuses on questions of implementation and effectiveness. I further pointed out that many IR scholars criticize international security policies for how they define questions of gender, deconstructing gender in these policies. The reproduction of stereotypes as well as making women neoliberal subjects and the problematic consequences are at the center of their analyses. I put forward that one should look at the EU’s security policies from a similar perspective to understand how they constitute women and how inclusive or exclusive the EU policies are. I suggested that the focus on human security in feminism and international politics should be scrutinized, as it may be an integral part of neoliberal governmentality. I argued first that the EU describes gender equality as an instrument to achieve security and development. Gender equality is only a means to an end, not an end in itself. Second, I argued that the EU’s security and gender agenda makes security an individual responsibility, ignoring broader structures of (gender) inequality.

Combining poststructuralist feminist thinking with a neoliberal governmentality approach, I analyzed the EU’s security policies. I found that the EU conceptualizes gender as a social construct but only refers to women and men, excluding other gender identities. Moreover, although the documents see women as active subjects, they reproduce stereotypical representations of women as victims and being more peaceful than men. Most importantly, the EU documents constitute women as neoliberal subjects, meaning self-responsible individuals with “resources” for economic development or security. The EU intends to “empower” women by “investing” in their human capital in order for them to assume these self-responsible roles. Similar to the UN, the EU stresses the need for human security. Although the debate on human security increased the care for the individual insecurities of women, it also strengthened the focus on the individual’s empowerment and responsibility as part of neoliberal governmentality (Jaeger 2007). Lastly, the EU constitutes women as resources for more effective military missions by aiming at gender equality in ESDP missions. The documents portray women as a means to an end and eventually militarize them.

No doubt the EU, just as the UN, has made some progress in accounting for the impact that policies and conflicts have on women, and probably intends something “good.” In the UN context, Shepherd (2011) recognizes that the UNSC increasingly sees women as agents, and this opens the possibility for women to engage in a discussion on gender, peace and security. Similarly, the EU’s inclusion of gender in security issues opens up the space to discuss the role of gender and women in conflict, security and peace. However, the EU’s construction of gender and women is still limited and exclusionary, as it only regards women as the most marginalized,
neglecting other gender identities, and attributes largely stereotypical roles to women. On the one hand, the constitution of women as self-entrepreneurs is a move away from assigning women passive roles. On the other hand, it still confines women to the sphere of civil society and constitutes women as caretakers or peace-makers. Moreover, the EU’s neoliberal governmentality places the responsibility on the individual and elides possibilities for larger restructuring politics. As other authors (Ferguson 1990; Kurki 2011) argue, neoliberal governmentality depoliticizes the issues governed, in this case questions of development, security and war, thus removing them from political contestation. Instead, by bringing women into the ESDP missions, the EU further militarizes its external relations and questions of gender equality. The neoliberal governmentality lens helps us to see that gender equality is often seen as a means for more efficiency in terms of peace or economic development and that empowerment is not free of power. It transfers specific ideas of emancipation, development and security to the individuals being empowered. It creates neoliberal (in terms of self-responsibility and economic rationalities) and liberal (in terms of human rights and democratic participation) subjectivities. While there are women’s CSOs resisting these (neo)liberal rationalities (Funk 2013), the EU is privileged in these power relations. Specific subjectivities are created that make it more difficult to overcome neoliberal policy making that have especially negative effects on women and their insecurities. To understand the dynamics of subjectivity making and resistance one would have to study the effects EU security policies have in other countries, for example by conducting fieldwork around one of the EU military or police missions (EEAS 2015). To say it with Foucault (1983, 231), “[m]y point is not that everything is bad, but everything is dangerous.” That gender equality is included in EU foreign policies is a success but its ambiguous foundations need to be discussed and investigated more.

Acknowledgments

I presented the first draft of this article at the Annual Convention of the International Studies Association in New Orleans in February 2015 and the European Conference on Politics and Gender at Uppsala University in June 2015. I want to thank the participants of both panels for providing very constructive criticism and encouraging me to continue working on this article. Further, I am thankful to Stefan Borg for his very good comments. Also, I am indebted to the two anonymous reviewers and the editors of this journal for very fruitful feedback which has greatly shaped this article.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Hanna L. Muehlenhoff is a postdoctoral researcher at the Amsterdam Centre for Contemporary European Studies (ACCESS EUROPE), Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Prior, she was a lecturer and research associate at the Institute of Political Science, University of Tuebingen. Her research interests include the international relations of the EU – with a focus on Turkey–EU relations and EU civil society funding – and poststructuralist and feminist approaches to international politics. Among her latest publications are an article on the depoliticizing effects of EU civil society funding in Turkey in the Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies (2014) and an article on the ambiguities of power in Turkey–EU relations in Cooperation and Conflict (2016).
References


