

# Periods, Pregnancy, and Peeing: Leaky Feminine Bodies in Swedish Military Marketing

MARIA STERN

*University of Gothenburg*

AND

SANNA STRAND 

*Stockholm University*

The notion of “leaky” female bodies has long rationalized the exclusion of women from military service. Yet, in an attempt to bolster enlistments by appealing to women, the Swedish Armed Forces (SAF) embarked on a marketing strategy that aims to break with gender stereotypes in order to fill its ranks. Most notably, in a 2018 recruitment campaign, an SAF billboard posed the question “Can I have my period in the field?” This article probes how the leaky female body is mobilized in SAF marketing campaigns and outreach activities. While remarkable for their commitment to gender parity, we aver that there is more going on in these campaigns that seemingly render women’s bodies normal and unproblematic as military bodies than a move toward gender equality. The representations of female soldiering bodies that emerge reproduce a familiar form of militarism that promotes the necessity of a battle-ready military corps that is predictable, and poised for warring. Moreover, these explicitly feminist SAF campaigns also beckon with the possibility of becoming that transcends the bodily limitations of sex/gender in civilian as well as military life, in war as well as in peace—to become perhaps something/someone/somewhere else that only military service can offer.

La notion de corps féminins « sujets aux menstruations » a longtemps justifié l’exclusion des femmes du service militaire. Pourtant, dans une tentative d’augmenter les engagements en attirant les femmes, les forces armées suédoises se sont lancées dans une stratégie marketing visant à rompre avec les stéréotypes de genre afin de grossir leurs rangs. Plus particulièrement, lors d’une campagne de recrutement en 2018, un panneau d’affichage des forces armées suédoises posait la question « Puis-je avoir mes règles sur le terrain ? ». Cet article examine comment le corps féminin « sujet aux menstruations » est mobilisé dans les campagnes marketing et les activités de sensibilisation des forces armées suédoises. Bien qu’elles soient remarquables pour leur engagement en faveur de la parité des sexes, nous affirmons que ces campagnes, qui semblent présenter le corps des femmes comme « normal et non problématique » en tant que corps de militaire, ne constituent pas un mouvement vers l’égalité des sexes. Les représentations des corps des femmes soldats qui émergent reproduisent une forme familière de militarisme qui promeut la nécessité d’un corps d’armée prêt au combat, prévisible et prêt pour la guerre. De plus, ces campagnes explicitement féministes des forces armées suédoises font également appel à la possibilité d’un devenir qui transcende

les limites corporelles du sexe/genre dans la vie civile comme dans la vie militaire, en temps de guerre comme en temps de paix, peut-être en utilisant ce que seul le service militaire pourrait offrir pour devenir quelque chose/quelqu'un d'autre/arriver ailleurs.

La noción de cuerpos femeninos “inadecuados” ha justificado durante mucho tiempo la exclusión de las mujeres del servicio militar. Sin embargo, en un intento de aumentar los alistamientos apelando a las mujeres, las Fuerzas Armadas Suecas (Swedish Armed Forces, SAF) se embarcaron en una estrategia de mercadotecnia que pretende romper con los estereotipos de género para completar sus filas. En particular, en una campaña de reclutamiento de 2018, una valla publicitaria de las SAF planteaba la pregunta: “¿Puedo tener la regla en el campo?” Este artículo analiza de qué manera se moviliza el cuerpo femenino inadecuado dentro de las campañas de mercadotecnia y las actividades de divulgación de las SAF. Si bien es notable su compromiso con la paridad de género, afirmamos que en estas campañas existe algo más que aparentemente hace que los cuerpos de las mujeres sean normales y no problemáticos como cuerpos militares que un movimiento hacia la igualdad de género. Las representaciones de los cuerpos de las mujeres soldados que surgen reproducen una forma familiar de militarismo que promueve la necesidad de un cuerpo militar listo para la batalla, predecible y preparado para la guerra. Por otra parte, estas campañas explícitamente feministas de las SAF también atraen con la posibilidad de convertirse en algo que trascienda las limitaciones corporales del sexo/género tanto en la vida civil como en la militar, en la guerra como en la paz, para llegar a ser, tal vez, algo, alguien o algún lugar más que solo el servicio militar puede ofrecer.

Becoming a soldier has long been associated with promise: of transforming from a child into an adult; a boy into a man; disenfranchised into skilled and valued; weak into strong; civilian into citizen-soldier; etc. Indeed, the highly gendered aspirational pledge of the military is the stuff of legends and has played a key role in the production of political and social orders throughout history. The particularities of its promise, however, shift depending on the geographical, historical, and political contexts. In the current global political conjuncture, many state military institutions have pivoted from explicitly excluding women from this promise toward actively recruiting women into their ranks—even in active combat roles—be it for reasons of military expediency, or as indicative of changing gender relations and even feminist political agendas, both globally and locally.

The Swedish Armed Forces (SAF) can be seen as a global beacon in this larger shift, through the pointed and even sensational ways that it cultivates an image as particularly progressive and inclusive. In its recent recruitment campaigns, it explicitly recognizes and refutes familiar gendered (and heteronormative) tropes that have positioned women and their female bodies as unwelcome and problematic to the goals of combat-readiness and warring. Most prominently, the SAF has underscored how female soldiers can indeed menstruate in the theater of war without their “leaky bodies”<sup>1</sup> hazarding operational effectiveness. In a military recruitment campaign first communicated via billboards across Sweden in 2018 and again in the spring of 2020, the question “Can I have my period in the field?” was posed in large capital letters against the backdrop of an armed and fierce female soldier. Although Sweden has recently reactivated conscription for both men and women, this billboard is one of several marketing initiatives designed by the SAF to bolster voluntary

<sup>1</sup>The feminine/female body as “intrinsically unpredictable, leaky and disruptive” (Price and Shildrick 1999, 2) is a common theme in feminist theorization of the body (Conboy, Medina and Stanbury et al. 1997; Grosz 1994; Irigaray 1985; Shildrick 1997).

enlistments and instill motivation to serve by appealing to non-traditional recruits. The SAF aims to thus cast the military as a competitive and progressive employer in the labor market as it returns to a territorial rearmament policy ([Government of Sweden 2015](#)).

This campaign enacts an intentional reversal<sup>2</sup> of one of the most persistent tropes of female oppression: the menstruating, irrational, weak, unpredictable, uncontrollable, soft, penetrable, and vulnerable female body—stereotypes that are often given as reasons, either implicitly or explicitly (e.g., [Lamothe 2015](#)), for the unsuitability, if not danger, of allowing women into active combat. That Sweden, framed both globally and from within Swedish society and government as a gender-equal, even “feminist” state ([Towns 2002](#), 164), publicly invites women into the armed forces in this way might seem like just another manifestation of a well-established, and relatively unproblematic example of gender equality.<sup>3</sup> However, and leaving aside a discussion about how feminist or gender-equal Sweden may be, we aver that there is much more going on in these recruitment campaigns that seemingly render women’s bodies normal and unproblematic *as military bodies* than a move toward gender equality.

In this article we explore how the SAF has positioned women’s bodies as unexceptional and unproblematic features of military life in their marketing campaigns and outreach activities. We focus on activities and campaigns aimed at addressing women directly and that identify and “solve” the anxieties that they may have about “being female” in the military.<sup>4</sup> In so doing, we critically query the gendered promise of military service in this context—a promise that aims to beckon young women to form themselves, and be formed, into a military body (both the SAF, and their individual soldiering bodies) for the purpose of warring.

More precisely, we home in on the problems attributed to female bodies that have long rationalized the exclusion of women from military service: periods (and related premenstrual symptoms), pregnancy and peeing (the supposed physical inability of female bodies to urinate efficiently while in the field) as they are recast in SAF marketing. Closely exploring how the gendered soldiering body is reimagined in SAF marketing helps raise critical questions about the political work done by military recruitment campaigns, relevant far beyond the Swedish context.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, these campaigns can be seen as examples of how aspirational promises inscribed through feminism can produce configurations of a de-sexed/gendered battle-ready body that is both politically palatable and poised for warring. Our in-depth exploration of such configurations of the warring female body is intended as a springboard for raising anew wider questions about military practices and militarism, “broadly understood as the preparation for war, its normalization and legitimation” ([Stavrianakis and Stern 2018](#), 4). Moreover, paying attention to the imbricated process through which people are enticed to become soldiers, how familiar lines of political and social ordering (such as that between war and peace, and military and civilian spaces) are drawn, embodied subjectivities are molded, and violence is enabled, helps us better grasp how war “becomes” ([Bousquet, Grove, and Shah 2020](#)) in the space of the international.

<sup>2</sup> Because of how the menstruating body has been stigmatized, excluded, and problematized throughout history, and across geographical contexts, menstruation has increasingly been mobilized in activism and has become an effective feminist symbol of resistance (see e.g., [Dahlqvist 2018](#)).

<sup>3</sup> A drive for a gender-equal military in Sweden can be seen as expected, as the SAF takes its place among other governmental bodies such as the Parliament, where 46 percent are women, and among other policies, such as shared parental leave.

<sup>4</sup> These campaigns do not trouble dominant notions of female, white corporeality and, while they do explicitly address sexual identity ([Strand and Kehl 2019](#)), they do not address the myriad ways to be an embodied woman.

<sup>5</sup> The “Snowflake” campaign in the UK army, although not as focused on female embodiment, could also be read in this light ([Higate and Manchanda 2018](#)).

Our main line of argument is as follows: By rendering embodied femininity (as represented by, and manifest in, the figure of the leaky female body) unproblematic, the SAF's marketing and outreach both reconfigure and reinstate particular versions of military embodiment as ones in which soldiers retain mastery over their bodies. In this sense, "unproblematic" feminine bodies are reinscribed in ways that seemingly allow them to transcend their corporeality, and are cast as useful and efficient tools of warfare in a rearmed modern military. How these campaigns reinscribe women's bodies as military bodies to encourage military service break with familiar aspirational tropes, and markedly depart from the highly masculinized promise of "making men out of boys." Instead, they appeal to military service as a vehicle through which the leaky female body can be freed from its limitations. In these campaigns, the women, themselves, become the agents responsible for mastering their fleshy vulnerabilities and thus birthing or releasing their military body. As in other military contexts, the process of "becoming" (Bousquet et al. 2020) warriors is made both legible and possible through aspirational<sup>6</sup> depictions of agentic subjects who responsibly "practice freedom" (Bell 2017) and thus overcome the limits that constrain them.

To be clear, like many before us, we understand the body as both productive of, and produced through, discursive practices (such as those of the SAF), such that appeals to what the "sexed" biological body is or does cannot be separated from the workings of gender. Let us briefly explain. Feminist theorizing of embodiment has long debunked the heteronormatively reductive tethering of gender to biological sexual difference. Gender emerges as "socially constructed" and performed, and therewith relatively open for reinscription—something in which the SAF explicitly engages. Yet, "sex" cannot be fully decoupled from gender insofar as gender, intersecting with other relations of power, discursively produces "sexed" bodies and their physical functions (including peeing and menstruating, as well as pleasure and desire) (e.g., Cahill 2000). In other words, sex and gender are yoked together to become sex/gender (see Stern and Zalewski 2009). Sex/gender renders cis-gender bodies or even queer bodies intelligible. Indeed, following this line of reasoning, being human in available lexicons implies being sex/gendered in one way or another (Irigaray 1985). Taking stock of such insights in our reading of the SAF campaigns, we note how sex/gender animates efforts to recast the female body as unproblematic and how these efforts often slip into reinscription as masculine through familiar coding. Yet, as we will suggest, to reduce these recasting efforts as facile masculinization would be to miss the complex and even contradictory ways that the SAF marketing scrutinized here not only promises that military training will provide growth and corporeal optimization, but also that military training and indeed soldiering offer a way of becoming that surpasses the bodily limitations that being a female sexed/gendered human entails.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, the recasting of women's bodies as unproblematic (as opposed to problematic and inadequate) latches on to and enables other related discursive reordering practices. More specifically, these SAF recruitment campaigns cast Sweden's ongoing rearmament and reterritorialization policy as "progress," which at once includes, signals, and protects "diversity" and gender equality. This construction not only requires the redrawing and blurring of distinctions between civilian and military spheres, but also those between the peaceful civilian home-front and the military theater of war. These campaigns thus enable and foster a reinvigorated militarism in light of today's security landscape that is arguably more palatable to the Swedish public than previous appeals.

<sup>6</sup> Many thanks to the constructive reviewer comments, which helped us to better see this point.

<sup>7</sup> A discussion of what such an argument might mean for notions of "cyborg soldiers," or other technological advances, including AI, although highly relevant, is beyond the scope of this article (e.g., Masters 2005).

This article proceeds as follows. First, we explain our methodology. Second, we set out the context of transformations in the Swedish military. Third, we reflect on common rationales for the exclusion of female bodies from military spaces and warring. Fourth, we turn to our analysis of military marketing and outreach in the SAF, paying attention to leakiness and its mastery, and the redrawing of sex/gender, the soldiering body, the military, and the limits of war.

### Methodology

This article is primarily based on an analysis of Swedish military marketing campaigns and outreach activities in the form of advertisements and videos published in both social and traditional media as well as soldier blogs available on the SAF webpage. To complement this, we also draw on interviews with SAF marketing, communication, and recruiting officials conducted within a larger research project on the branding of the SAF.<sup>8</sup>

In generating and analyzing our empirical material, we draw on Ahmed's "ethnography of text" (Ahmed 2006, 105). Ahmed (2010) has developed a methodology centered on "following words around" in order to understand how they are ascribed, and in turn inscribe, meaning in different social contexts. An ethnography of text can be seen as an approach that "considers texts as actions, which "do things," but it also suggests that "texts" are not "finished" as forms of actions, as what they "do" depends on how they are "taken up" (Ahmed 2006, 105). Our empirical "archives" (Ahmed 2010) include a wide variety of text, images as well as spoken and written words. We pay attention to intertextuality/visuality, and the relationship between images and words (e.g., Hansen 2011) in marketing, analyzing how coexisting forms of text may both reinforce and contradict one another.

More specifically, we follow "the forms of materialisation of the [female] body" around SAF marketing and outreach (Price and Shildrick 1999, 7). Although the point of departure for our ethnography of text is the campaign image of the menstruating soldier mentioned above, we also identify other forms of "leakiness," including pregnancy and peeing (see Mackenzie 2015b). We thus seek to avoid treating the female figure as an easily distinguishable and *a priori* identifiable, sexed subject (Stern and Zalewski 2009). This does not imply that the materiality of the body in its continual "becoming" does not matter; embodied subjectivities are clearly produced through their material conditions and limits (see e.g., Grosz 1994). Yet, our focus considers how the cis-gendered female leaky body is being *represented* in these SAF campaigns biologically, that is how the materialities and limitations of female embodiment are being produced through SAF campaigns, as well as how sex/gender informs these aspirational reconfigurations.

Our analysis addresses neither how the female soldiers depicted are utilized, or experience their bodies as military resources, how those targeted by the campaigns respond to the female figures represented, nor the campaigns in relation to the overall SAF recruitment strategy. Neither do we establish whether or not materializations of the female body in marketing ultimately render the SAF a more inclusive workplace. Instead, we address how representations of female soldiers (managing their periods/PMS, pregnancy or pee) "taken up" in marketing can "do" (Ahmed 2006, 105) something *more*—perhaps even something *else*—than performing an inclusive military institution. They can, as we will argue, enable militarism and the "becoming" of war in ways that at first might not be apparent (Bousquet et al. 2020). We therefore note how such representations also allow the drawing of other lines of distinction as they are being recast in Swedish marketing, and to intimate what

<sup>8</sup>The article is based on twelve interviews conducted in Swedish during 2017 and 2018. These officials were not explicitly asked about the campaigns in focus in this article, but are cited when they have addressed representations of the female soldier in marketing and outreach.

occurs in the border zones that are created through their inscriptions (Huysmans and Nogueira 2012, 3).

Importantly, the SAF, a key state institution, is not only marked by masculinity; but it also signals a particular version of white, secular, Swedishness (Hübnette and Lundström 2014; cf. *Patterns of Prejudice* 2012). In the SAF campaigns where feminine “leakiness” is explicitly addressed, we see only images of a dominant white Swedish, feminine, soldiering body and therewith white femininity. This stands in contrast with other military marketing campaigns globally, which profile, *inter alia*, explicitly racialized aspirational figures and accompanying narratives of becoming soldiers.<sup>9</sup> It seems, at least judging by the images of female bodies we did find that address “leakiness” directly, that the figure of the aspirational women soldier *must be* white in order for her appeal as a figure who has transcended her corporeality to be legible in the prevailing societal discourses that privilege whiteness. Herein, an undercurrent of familiar Colonial and racist tropes that yoke racialized feminine bodies to nature, their dangerous carnality *and* their passivity arguably make, for instance, a menstruating, or pregnant black and/or Muslim Swedish woman unconvincing or even impossible as a sign of the possibilities of becoming a battle-ready soldier.

### Military Transformations

The end of the Cold War is frequently described as a catalyst of comprehensive military transformation across Europe (King 2011). In Sweden, it marked the beginning of a gradual disarmament of the territorial defense often described as a precondition for Sweden’s role as a neutral and militarily non-aligned actor. Beginning in the mid-1990s, the government redirected the SAF toward expeditionary operations abroad, and Sweden contributed to the NATO-led missions in Afghanistan and Libya. This strategic shift also resulted in a temporary deactivation of all-male conscription in favor of a professional All-Volunteer Force (AVF), charging the SAF with forming an attractive brand and promoting military careers to young individuals (Strand and Berndtsson 2015).

Yet, despite intensive marketing, the SAF largely failed to recruit and retain enough voluntary military personnel. These difficulties, together with augmented media reporting about Russian military activities and aggressions in Crimea, Ukraine and the Baltic Sea—close to (and sometimes crossing) Sweden’s territorial borders—initiated another shift in Swedish defense policy. In 2015, the government ordered the SAF to rebuild the territorial defense and, two years later, reactivated military conscription. Military spending has since drastically increased and the SAF has intensified its military exercises, with the ultimate aim of increasing its deterrence and warfighting capabilities (Government of Sweden 2015). This defense strategy requires, so we are told, battle-ready soldiers who—using terminology often employed in the Swedish defense debate—can raise the “threshold” envisioned to prevent or (if the former fails) halt a military assault on Sweden (*ibid.*).

While conscription has been reactivated, the SAF has continued to rely on marketing to motivate young individuals to conduct military training as well as recruit soldiers and officers for part and fulltime positions. Notably, the SAF in recent years has focused particularly on recruiting women, who constitute only 7 percent of SAF officers and 11 percent of SAF soldiers (Försvarsmakten 2020a, 3, 16–8). This ambition arguably serves a dual purpose: broadening the recruitment base for a military institution struggling to fill the growing ranks, and transforming its public image from traditional and masculine to “modern” and “progressive” (Strand and Kehl 2019).

<sup>9</sup>Such explicit racialized messages of becoming can be found in recent SAF marketing campaigns; further inquiry on secularity and race in the SAF is much needed.

### (Im)Possible Productions of the Warring Body: Mastery and Leakiness

In order to better understand how and why this message of inclusion appears so progressive and modern and thus ironically powerful in its subtle message of rearticulated and augmented militarism, we pause here to revisit some of the underlying logics that SAF campaigns seemingly subvert, but, we aver, *also* reinstate.

#### *The (Masculine) Soldiering Body*

The prime goal of military training is to produce the soldier-subject as battle-ready and as an integral part of a well-oiled machinery for fighting wars and thus protecting the nation/state. In military training, disciplinary power acts upon the bodies of recruits in order to correct and improve them (Foucault 1991 [1977]). According to martial logics, the soldiering body must be molded and continually fine-tuned to play its part in warring with reliability and predictability to enable the effective and victorious execution of missions. The body thus figures centrally as product, material, and site of practice in militarism and warring (e.g., Higate 2012; McSorely 2013; Dyvik and Welland 2018; Eastwood 2019).

Much feminist research has explored “the cult of the body” (Carrieiras and Kuñmel 2008, 29) within armed forces, as well as how military institutions, identities, and practices are coded as masculine. Through drills, marches, physical punishments, strict discipline, and routines that regulate how to stand, eat, sleep, the body of the boy is broken down and seemingly rebuilt into a masculine body associated with strength, toughness, rationality, bravery, aggression, virility, risk-taking and, importantly, self-mastery (e.g., Belkin 2012; Higate 2012). Through proper military training—so the “familiar fable” (Stern and Zalewski 2009) goes—the (masculine, cis-gendered, heterosexual) body becomes a controllable, dependable, potent machine that both is a weapon in itself (Kirby 2020) and capable of reliably wielding and controlling weapons. When properly trained, the male military body thus becomes impenetrable and optimally suited for armed combat and warfighting.

Clearly, however, human bodies have limits. They need sleep, get sick, become wounded. While a soldier may learn to overcome his (sic) emotions—fear being paramount—he is ultimately not able to control all of his bodily functions: he may vomit, shake, hallucinate from fever; be wracked with diarrhea; suffer from psychosis. His flesh will also bleed if wounded. As Kinsella (2020) shows in her analysis of sleep in warfare, moments of vulnerability (such as sleep) become a matter for military logistics. For military effectiveness and potency to be met, for soldiers to be battle-ready, the persistent vulnerability of the warring body that manifests in corporeal needs and limits must be seemingly mastered through proper military training, discipline, and equipment. MacLeish (2012, 64) explains that the “condition of being a resource, of being an instrumentalized military body that is weapon *and* a target at the same time” means that the soldiering body must “own its pains and breakdowns and its simple exhaustion” (ibid., 58)—even those caused by the heavy armor that is designed to counteract its vulnerabilities. The soldier does this through mastering these “ungovernable sensory impingements” by the “reassertment” of discipline (ibid.).

Even the inevitable reality of wounded bodies need not unravel this sense of sovereign masculine mastery over the dangerous frailties and limits of human corporeality and the marks of violence. Martial logics accomplish this through, as Cree and Caddick explain, carefully managing the meanings of such woundedness or disability through the language of heroics: recasting the veteran or the wounded as more-than-human: “producing the wounded soldier as *not less but more of a man* serves to blur out the violence of the sovereign state, and render the military subject governable and manageable again” (Cree and Caddick 2020, 7; see also Bourke 1996). Ideas about soldierly “fitness” are therefore crucial in martial logics, and

“these notions are modified according to the particular demands of specific forms of militarism” (Eastwood 2019, 4–5). Importantly, the military works under the assumption that the vulnerable male-human soldiering body can be rendered predictable and controllable through minute corporeal regulation; and that military training can countervail human weakness, which is arguably read as feminine.

In military recruitment campaigns and practices, this assumption often translates into aspirational pledges. The promise of masculinity, in particular, has long been considered a military recruiter’s chief resource (Brown 2012; Enloe 2015). Yet, research across national contexts shows how young people are not only mobilized in war through the aspiration to overcome human weakness and “achieve” masculinity, but also through the promise to transcend boundaries of race and class. Notably, recruitment for the US and British AVF has mobilized disenfranchised minority groups to undertake military service with the appeal of inclusion, citizenship and a better future, often manifested in free education or access to the job market (e.g., Basham 2016; Favara 2018). As we will see, the promise of transcending embodied limits is re-extended, but also renegotiated to include the specific limits of sex/gender in the SAF campaigns studied here.

#### *Inclusions/Exclusions: Female Bodies as a (Solvable?) Problem*

As noted above, representations of women’s bodies as leaky have rendered the idea of a female soldier problematic and even dangerous in prevailing martial logics (e.g., van Creveld 2000). These logics, arguably, build upon deeply entrenched gender discourses. Feminist theories of embodiment have revealed how the idea of the masculine body as impenetrable is constituted through its differentiation from—and subordination of—a feminized body deemed weak, irrational, uncontrollable, leaky, and ultimately tethered to its certain biology.<sup>10</sup> One need not look far to find the familiar tropes of female hysteria, slipperiness, duplicity, chaos, and seduction; the female figure manifests excess, fluidity, and uncontrollability (Irigaray 1985). Indeed, feminist theorists have long called our attention to how women and their bodies have been cast throughout history as inherently unruly, and dangerous to social, political, and military order, and have been subject to state and societal discipline, regulation, and domination; this is especially true of racialized women (e.g., Conboy et al. 1997; Price and Schildrick 1999).

In military discourses worldwide, such leakiness is portrayed as both symptom and metaphor, threatening to spill over, rub off on, and unravel the order and mastery of the military as institution, as well as the soldier’s mastery over other military bodies. Arguably, the presence of female bodies in the military ironically reveals the soldier, who has been molded to overcome his frailties and limits, as persistently human, with fleshy desires, needs, and vulnerabilities. It therefore threatens to undo the careful regulation of the soldiering body that promises its mastery and perpetual battle-readiness discussed above. As Belkin (2012, 35) argues: “men’s warrior bodies are supposed to be leak proof, like impenetrable armor, while women’s bodies have been coded as leaky and soft.” Female sexual desirability (and homosexuality) in turn—so the story goes—threatens military hierarchy, loyalty, order, and effectiveness, as it elicits seemingly uncontrollable carnal urges. It also renders the military body vulnerable to the enemy, through both its feminization and soldiers’ supposedly ingrained inclination to protect women, irrespective of the goals of the military mission. Women’s presumed leakiness has therefore been cited as key in why they, as well as other feminized bodies, should remain *outside* of military institutions (e.g., Mitchell 1998).

Discursive representations of the feminine and female soldiers as leaky thus enable the separation of the masculine, military protector from the feminized

<sup>10</sup> See footnote 1.



body/nation, in turn justifying its protection through state-sanctioned war preparations and deployments (e.g., [Carreiras and Kuñmel 2008](#)) and ultimately distinguishing between war and (the promise of) peace. These representations inform and are informed by the drawing of lines of distinction between the military and civilian sphere—lines that underscore what is “inside” and what must remain “outside” the military—as well what can be included or must be excluded from different roles within military institutions, such as active combat.

Attachments to “the feminine” as dangerous and inherently problematic ([Pin-Fat and Stern 2005](#)) manifest in how military institutions have both excluded and included the leaky female body in its attention to specifically female bodily flows and functions, such as menstruation, pregnancy, and urination—both metaphorically and in very tangible ways (see e.g., [Mackenzie 2015a, 2015b](#)). The seemingly disproportionate amount of scholarly (often medical) research and government regulations that focus on the management of women’s bodies and fluids in military contexts, compared to non-female-specific bodily fluids such as sweat and diarrhea, and the blood that seeps or gushes from bodily wounds inflicted in battle, is noteworthy in this regard (see [Basham 2013, 127–31](#); [Belkin 2012, 35–6](#)). Let us then briefly touch on some of the ways that military institutions have dealt with bodily flows and functions, particular to female bodies.

In many military discourses worldwide, *motherhood* is both valued by, and rendered disruptive to, military practices ([Basham 2013, 118–24](#); [Enloe 2015](#)). Throughout history, mothers have been relied upon to support their sons and husbands through deployments (think, e.g., of Penelope in the *Odyssey*); and modern militaries have understood mothers as gateways to their sons’ enlistment and therefore as targets of recruitment campaigns ([Christensen 2016](#)). But mothers are clearly also problematic for military institutions, especially when they are also enlisted soldiers. In unpacking the arguments that long excluded women from combat positions in the US armed forces, MacKenzie suggests that motherhood has been presumed to change women’s priorities and commitment to defending the nation and that *pregnancy*, in turn, has been framed as a cost and liability that threatens unit cohesion by making women “un-deployable” ([MacKenzie 2015a, 122–8](#)). MacKenzie also shows how *menstruation* has been framed as an obstacle for maintaining personal hygiene during field missions (*ibid.*, 118–22) and is linked to hormone fluctuations, which in turn, are presumed to affect women’s ability to fulfill their assignments. Thus, “[t]he unpredictability of pregnancy and menstruation are treated as unavoidable, unmanageable, and inevitable risks associated with women serving”; indeed, they are “considered indicators of the threat women’s bodies represent to operational and mission stability” (*ibid.*, 128; see also [Szitanyi 2020, 58–72](#)).

Relatedly, armed forces have advocated for medically managing women’s reproductive cycles in order to ensure against “irresponsible” pregnancies ([MacKenzie 2015a, 123](#)). For instance, a “coping strategy” suggested to servicewomen by the British Armed Forces before exercises or deployments is to take oral contraceptives to prevent menstruation ([Basham 2013, 127–8](#)). Thus managing a women’s hormones serves not only to police their sexual activity, and mitigate the “effects” (pregnancy) of sexual assault (which becomes normalized through such precautions), but also to regulate potential mood swings associated with menstrual cycles in order to ensure battle effectiveness. Like in the United Kingdom, through such practices of control, “menstrual and deployment cycles are fully harmonized” in the US army ([Chua 2020, 8](#)). Similar arguments that women hinder battle-readiness and effectivity because they cannot manage their need for urination expediently also abound in many contexts worldwide (see [MacLeish 2012](#); [Sløk-Andersen 2018](#)).

Before the Swedish government implemented gender-neutral conscription in 2018, the debate about women’s integration in the armed forces often revolved around women’s bodies. Actors opposing the integration of women in the Swedish draft system have persistently referred to women’s presumed weakness and physical

inability to handle military training and operations, also pointing to the alleged dangers, risks, and costs associated with pregnancy, breastfeeding, and menstruation in the ranks (Persson and Sundevall 2019, 1044–5).

This focus on feminine/female bodies as problematic, unruly, and leaky (in contrast to the seemingly unproblematic male body) also slips into other dichotomies, such as gay/straight and ill/healthy. For instance, Belkin cites a US military official speaking about the importance of containing “homosexuality” by keeping “it” hidden from other soldiers in the ranks because “[o]nce it *leaks out*, they think this person is abnormal, perverted, and a deviant from the norm” (Belkin 2012, 35–6; emphasis added). The inscription of “the female soldier” and “the gay soldier” as leaky also mirrors discourses around *some* injured war veterans—veterans whose bodily injuries and diseases are not and cannot be recast as heroic and therewith disarmed as threatening to the idea of military mastery (cf. Cree and Caddick 2020). Kilshaw’s study on American Gulf War veterans struggling with incontinence and impotence resulting from war injury shows that these veterans often describe themselves as “vulnerable” and their bodies as “leaking,” “embarrassing,” and “undisciplined”; “like children or the elderly” (Kilshaw 2009, 74,206). Veterans also talked about suffering from “old women’s diseases” (ibid., 177). These veterans experienced their injuries as emasculating and their symptoms as symbols that they no longer are the impenetrable and self-managing soldiers they saw themselves as being before they deployed (ibid., 188). The promise of correction and transformation linked to military training and discipline is thus, it seems, not extended to all bodies.

As such, while increasingly called upon to fill in military ranks globally, female bodies are nonetheless often reproduced as either a problem that has already been, or can be, solved through military regulation, or too problematic to be fully included in the military corps by the very institutions that set out to recruit them. It is often suggested that the increasing presence of feminized bodies within military ranks have revealed the instability of gendered civil-military distinctions, as well as their importance. This twofoldness is apparent in practices which still render “the woman soldier” Other and her body problematic (e.g., Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2011; Sztanyi 2020; Woodward and Winter 2007). The illegibility of the “woman soldier” is also reflected in popular culture and in military public relations activities and messages (Pin-Fat and Stern 2005). Tasker, for instance maps cinematic images of military women in combat settings and argues that only “in the future” imaginary of fantasy films and science fiction, can female soldiers be “smoothly integrated into the military team” (Tasker 2017, 502). Similarly, studying US military recruiting campaigns, Brown (2012) has argued that by representing female soldiers as passive, unarmed, and essentially different from the masculine norm, the link between masculinity and soldiering remains intact. This remains a powerful narrative that the recent Swedish recruitment campaigns seemingly counteract (see also Rinaldo and Holmberg 2020).

Including women into the armed forces has thus occurred in tandem with a re-drawing of lines between the masculine-coded military and the feminine-coded, private, civilian, spheres that the military protects. Consequently, in our analysis below, we pay attention to the work that SAF campaigns do in drawing and blurring boundaries between the masculine and the feminine, but also between the concomitant peaceful civilian home-front and the military theater of war.

### **Periods, Pregnancy, and Peeing: Following the Leaky Female Body around SAF Marketing and Outreach**

When the SAF launched the recruitment campaign *Many Have Many Questions* in 2018, the ambition was to publicly pose questions that potential (women) recruits

might have before they enlist, and then answer them. The campaign was distributed widely across billboards in Sweden (on ad-walls, in subway stations, on trams, etc.), in printed media as well as through a range of digital and social media platforms (as bought pop-up signs on newspaper or social media websites and directly to SAF followers on *Facebook*, *Instagram*, and *YouTube*). Each campaign unit prominently contains one question and then a link to the SAF's website where the answer is found. The SAF's PR firm Volt explains the logic of the campaign:

The more questions that we address, the more we will lower the threshold for those who are thinking about enlisting ... And the more answers that we can deliver ... the easier it will be for our target group, young adults between 18-25 years old with a particular focus on women, to take the step to join the SAF. (*Försvarsmakten 2018a*)

The campaign unit that arguably received the most public attention posed the question: *Can I have my period in the field?* Among several other places both off- and online, the message was communicated on a large billboard in the Stockholm subway (Figure 1). The photo displayed four apparently white soldiers in a muddy terrain. One soldier stands on a tank in the periphery of the photo. Two others are located close to the camera, but one has their face partly hidden behind a weapon and the other looks down at their binoculars. The fourth soldier, undoubtedly the focal point of the photo, looks sideways toward (but not straight into) the camera. She is clearly fierce, focused, and in control. How “she” is portrayed contrasts starkly with how women have commonly been represented in military recruitment (cf. [Brown 2012](#)). Not only is her smile replaced with determination, she is outdoors, active, in the center of attention, and she carries a rifle. In addition, the backdrop to the advertisement as well as its headline suggest that she is in “the field,” taking part in the ongoing rearmament and reterritorialization of the SAF (see also [Rinaldo and Holmberg 2020](#)).



**Figure 1.** Billboard from the campaign *Many Have Many Questions* located on a Stockholm subway station.

This is an advertisement filled with contradictions. The soldier foregrounded is clearly marked through sex/gender as “woman”; the question about menstruation highlighted in the center of the frame invites the reader to imagine the servicewoman’s bleeding (leaky) body under her military uniform. “She” is also masculinized through her association with determination, focus, activity, weapons, and war preparations. She is leaky, yet seems unencumbered and undiminished by this leakiness. She presents as master over the limitations that her body poses, and is unproblematically included in the SAF, its core identity and tasks.

The servicewoman’s relative closeness to the camera, and the frontal angle of the photo, positions the audience—which the campaign implies is white and

Swedish—on the same level as her (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 136–40). We could be her. We could be in control. We could be “the military.” Yet, her gaze turns away from us and she does not stare directly into the camera; she does not appear to be challenging us (*ibid.*, 118). Neither is she *demanding* something of us. She is not asking *us* about whether she “can have her period in the field.” She knows she can. That makes her nothing like Lord Kitchener in the famous British WWI recruiting poster or American Uncle Sam whose stares and pointing fingers render the audience inferior objects of the state (*ibid.*, 121). Instead, this servicewoman addresses the audience indirectly, inviting us to contemplate her situation, become curious, imagine ourselves as her and find out how to become her (*ibid.*, 119). Hence, when visiting the SAF webpage to find the answer to the question posed by the billboard, we learn the following:

Of course you can. Sure, it might not be as easy as it is when you are home and always have access to a toilet, but there are many tricks which makes it easier and you will quickly find the routines that best suits you. You can ... bring wet-wipes, hand sanitizer and plastic bags to dispose of the garbage. When in the field, you will always have access to ... sanitary protection. More often than not you will be surrounded by other women who feel and think the same as you .... (*Försvarsmakten* 2018a).

The answer ends with an invitation to press a link “for more advice from our co-workers” (*ibid.*). We are directed to a blogpost on the SAF’s platform with the title: “Women’s problem is not menstruation” (*Försvarsmakten* 2016). In the text, the white soldier—who introduces herself as “not only a soldier but a single mother” (*ibid.*)—guides the reader through different types of sanitary protection and ranks them according to how well they work for a soldier in different situations: in the field, on a shooting range, during sleep and in the event of a catastrophe such as a kidnapping. The text strikes a problem-solving tone, arguing that “there are no female reasons to refrain from entering the field and from physical challenges [such as] crossing stretches of water, forests or desert.” (*ibid.*) The soldier also notes that some of her colleagues use contraceptives to avoid menstruation in the field, and assures us that “everyone simply learns how to handle these situations, particularly in the event of longer military exercises or unanticipated incidents” (*ibid.*).

In another blog,<sup>11</sup> accessible on the SAF webpage, the author—a women soldier in basic training—recalls a meeting with a network of servicewomen, in which menstruation was explicitly equated with other, seemingly non-gendered, bodily fluids; a link which usually has been missing from materializations of the figure of the servicewoman (Basham 2013; Belkin 2012; MacKenzie 2015b):

She [a network representative] made it clear that all types of bodily fluids are dramatized in the armed forces. Our focus is on maintaining combat efficiency, and bodily fluids affect combat efficiency in an enormous way—that is why they need to be discussed. That made me feel calm. It was also nice to see that the male officers confirmed her words. (*Försvarsmakten* 2017a)

In this recollection, the inherent, incurable leakiness associated with female bodies is addressed and the anxious recruits are assured that their bodily flows need not pose a threat, if properly managed in the same way as all other corporeal fluids. The soldier thus explicitly tried to dissolve the link between menstrual blood and sex/gender in her recounting of this exchange—a move that in its very proclamation also reinstated this link.

The SAF’s focus on “solving” menstruation continued in the spring of 2021 through a social media campaign entitled “This is bloody serious”. The campaign was directed at girls and women between the ages of 15 and 23 and was launched

<sup>11</sup> The blog, written by a soldier in basic training, is called “11 lingonveckor i grönt” [11 cranberry weeks in green]. In Swedish “cranberry week” means the week of menstruation and the title seems to be a reference to how many times this recruit will have her period during basic training (*Försvarsmakten* 2017a).

to highlight the SAF's decision to provide conscripts with free sanitary protection (Figure 2). A campaign image shared on social media pictures army-green encased tampons and—in the video version—tampons present as bombs falling from the sky, followed by the message: “as natural as weapons and ammunition” (*Försvarsmakten* 2021). According to the SAF webpage, this campaign signals that the military is “a modern workplace” committed to improving the situation for women conscripts and employees. It states: “[i]n the same way as different environments, assignments and weather conditions demand their solutions, menstruation shall not prevent the battle-readiness of a soldier” (ibid).



**Figure 2.** Image from the campaign *This is Bloody Serious*.

These campaigns, blogposts, and the text about menstruation on the SAF's campaign website stand in stark contrast to the US's and UK's stance noted above. Instead of positioning menstruation as difficult and to be prevented (through contraceptives), the SAF depicts it as a “natural” and unproblematic (albeit sometimes tricky) occasion in the life of a soldier. In addition, servicewomen manifest *as agents* who manage, regulate, and control menstruation; leakiness emerges *not* as something that inevitably happens *to* them, rendering them vulnerable and ineffective objects, and thus preventing them from functioning as soldiers. Instead they master their otherwise unruly, dangerous, and unreliable bodies. By showing the successful “solving” of the logistical problems of their bodily functions, the SAF defuse them. In the latest campaign centered around “feminine protection,” such diffusion is facilitated through military provisions, although it is still up to the women to use the “weaponry” of tampons—to be inserted inside their martial bodies—in order to “protect” themselves from the problem of leaking blood. The SAF thus tames the seemingly taken for granted and natural imagined anxiety of the potential recruit—an anxiety that girls/women are taught worldwide must/should accompany the annoyances, the embarrassment, the shame, the incapacitating reality of menstruation; an anxiety that hails from a dangerous and unpredictable body that rules over the self that lives within it (Dahlqvist 2018).

How menstruation is depicted mirrors the rhetoric surrounding a different bodily fluid associated with the problem of female corporality: *pee*. The first blogpost referenced above directs the reader to another post featuring a test on how to best urinate in the field. The soldier discusses how many of her colleagues experience difficulties when assigned short “pee-breaks” during marches (see also Sløk-Andersen 2018, 18). She then reflects on how it indeed takes longer for women

to pee than men, given that they need to sit down wearing heavy gear, suggesting that women drink less water so that they can pee less often, which in turn, can negatively affect the combat efficiency of the unit. The soldier thereafter introduces a “peeing-horn,” which allows her to stand erect next to the male soldiers and urinate in a timely fashion (*Försvarsmakten* 2015). This blogpost thus represents yet another way in which women’s bodies materialized in our material as simultaneously problematic yet as “solved” through the mastery of simple technology. The management and the overcoming of particularly feminine bodily constraints remain in focus. Furthermore, that the “peeing-horn” can be read as phallic strengthens the coding of such mastery as masculine.

Through this blog, the menstruating and peeing soldier is portrayed as governing her leaky female body while also managing another marker of unpredictability: motherhood. The title of the blog is “En grön-sak till mamma,” which translates into literally “a vegetable mom”; a reference to the green military uniform. In the byline photo, the white/green “Swedish” soldier/mother is lying down in the grass next to her daughter (who is dressed in pink), pointing a gun in the same direction as her daughter points her binoculars. This soldier is not only a mother, but a single mother, who entertains her child *and* performs her soldiering job. She is Sweden’s progressiveness, gender equality, and welfare state at once manifested and transformed into a warring body. We will return to this point below.

These materializations of the (managed) leaky female body in the context of military recruitment must be understood in relation to the SAF’s ongoing struggle to staff the new territorial organization. SAF officials repeatedly emphasize the need to broaden the recruitment base and attract women by “breaking stereotypes” about both the military organization and the soldier as a male, muscular infantryman (Interviewees 1 and 2). In other words, the re-branding of the SAF from an exclusive to an inclusive organization and the reinscription of female soldier embodiment is seen as a question of survival; a precondition enabling the ongoing territorial rearmament. In order to attract women, SAF officials note the importance of breaking stereotypes about “women in green,” often reinforced in marketing (Interviewees 1, 3, and 4; cf. *Brown* 2012). When asked the question, “what messages works on social media?,” one marketing official answered: “I think that people react when we break the stereotype [of a soldier]. It might be [an image with] a lot of mud, a very large vehicle and a women soldier. People are not expecting that” (Interviewee 3).

This does not mean that infantry or active combat roles are the only or even the primary roles for which the SAF attempts to attract women—or that only infantry soldiers are required for the core mission of the new territorial organization. Nor does it mean that the SAF marketing only portrays women in these roles. Yet, it is this practice of breaking stereotypes of the infantryman (in contrast to the stereotypes of the mechanic or the medic) that enables the SAF to portray military service as a way to overcome the limits of the sex/gendered body. For it is the particular association between the unruly leaky female body and armed combat or participation in field training that warrants reconfiguring. Indeed, an image of a women soldier under the headline “Can I have my period while repairing an airplane?” would, in the Swedish context of gender equality, be a ridiculous puzzle, and therefore probably have failed to be aspirational.

However, although SAF officials and campaigns emphasize the importance of breaking stereotypes of (service)women, they also underscore providing women with the information which “they” demand (Interviewee 3). In addition to questions about periods and pee, this includes questions about pregnancy (“What happens if I get pregnant?”), home and family (“When can I go home?”), fitness (“Do I have to be strong?”), equipment (“Will I find a bra in my size?”), and accommodation (“Where do I sleep?”)—all of which were publicly posed and answered as part of the nation-wide campaign with which we started this discussion (*Försvarsmakten* 2018a, 2020b).

In following the leaky female body around SAF marketing, it is evident, however, that not all of the problems associated with female corporality are so easily “solved.” When answering the question about accommodation posed above, the SAF emphasizes that although all soldiers (both men and women) sleep in the same lodgings, “all regiments have shower curtains” (*Försvarsmakten* 2018a). Moreover, when the campaign *Many Have Many Questions* was relaunched in the spring of 2020, the question “Must I shower with men?” was added to the campaign website (*Försvarsmakten* 2020b). Additionally, the SAF livestreamed videos from military showers on *Instagram*, demonstrating the shower curtains utilized by both men and women for the audience. This type of targeted information reflects one of the main contradictions in this project to include women in the SAF by breaking stereotypes of “the woman soldier.” That is, while addressing “her”—the heterosexual civilian would-be soldier’s—presumed anxieties about military life and, ostensibly, her awareness of her body as vulnerable, sexualized, and already inscribed as “rapable” (Cahill 2000), the campaign inscribes the potential soldiering body as already, and indelibly, different from the ideal sovereign soldier figure who seems to beckon from beyond sex/gendered bodily limits.

There thus seems to be inescapable tensions here between wanting to break stereotypes of the (white) female recruit (i.e., by portraying her in muddy settings, with a weapon and a fierce expression) and providing “her” with the information and the motivational messages that “she” needs in order to enlist (i.e., how to pee, manage menstruation, act when pregnant, shower, and sleep). These tensions run along three main lines:

First, the SAF’s rebranded representations of the potential soldier’s female body undoubtedly do challenge ideas of the soldier as inevitably male/masculine, constituted in relation to a feminized rejected and/or protected Other. In the examples discussed above, the servicewoman’s body is not problematic, and she is positioned as active, agentic, and aggressive. “The female soldier” is re-inscribed as not hindered by her bodily limits; the unproblematic feminine body is masculinized and cast as a useful and efficient tool of warfare, territorial protection, and rearmament politics.

Second, this reinscription is clearly not complete. In seemingly taming the anxieties that are yoked to biologicistic logics, the SAF re-inscribes ideas about sexual difference so that femininity need not entail being mired in dangerous fleshy vulnerabilities and weaknesses in the theater of war. Nonetheless, the female figure is still marked by her fleshiness: periods, peeing, and pregnancy still need solving, while men soldier’s bodily functions are not posed as specifically gendered problems, but as human ones. Difference remains.

Third, when responsabilizing the female body through relaying information on how to manage and regulate her leakiness, the threat she poses in, and to, the military is defused. The servicewoman that we have followed around may remain leaky, but—the SAF assures us—she is not inevitably problematic or dangerous. Hence, these campaigns and blogposts simultaneously reinforce women’s fundamental difference from the ideal soldiering body, and solve this difference: masculine mastery, we are told, conquers biological sex. Female recruits thus easily fit as potential soldiers ready to be trained, and ultimately made battle-ready. And entrenched notions of what the military *is* (i.e., a masculine institution characterized by control and mastery of its tools: bodies and weapons and bodies as weapons) and *does* (i.e., killing in the name of protection) are thus reinforced.

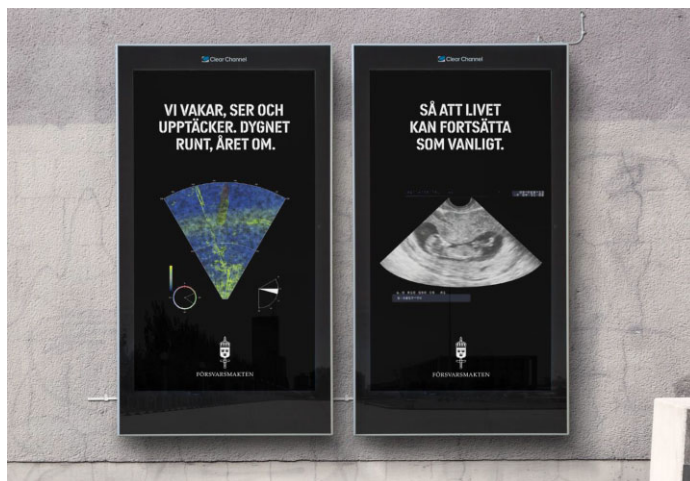
This dissonant, triple move should be understood as a very particular way of mobilizing young individuals in war preparations, clearly distinguished from the notion of “making men out of boys,” but still reproductive of the notion of military life as transformative and fulfilling. However, in these examples, it is not the aspiration to “become a man” or to transcend the limits of class and race, which link to and reinforce the survival of the state through continuous war preparations, but the aspiration to undo sex/gender and its fleshy boundaries. Moreover, the SAF casts

soldiering or military training more broadly as an activity and a way of becoming that transgresses the limits of the feminized body that prevail in civilian life. These limits, the campaign promises, will be shed through military training as the agentic soldiering body is born.

Finally, returning to the materialization of periods, pregnancy, and motherhood underscores the wider stakes attached to the mobilization of soldiers through the recasting of sex/gendered stereotypes: the inscription of the home-front as also a warfront.

One of the questions addressed on the SAF website was “What happens if I get pregnant?” The answer was remarkable in its mundane reference to protocols designated in general labor laws and that one might want to “avoid certain physical activities.” The military as institution, in these responses, is cast as just one of many employers in Swedish society (cf. [van Creveld 2000](#)). This message tells us that pregnancy and fetuses are included in military space. It features servicewomen who can be pregnant while protecting the home-front (“at peace”) when situated not at home but in the theater of war. This message echoes a reoccurring theme in SAF marketing, where Sweden is positioned as a liberal and progressive country. The white, female soldier, because of her successful mastery of her unruly body—be it through managing periods, pregnancy, or pee—is poised to serve as the defense line for a Swedish way of life; a way of life that, SAF campaigning assures us, embraces gender-equality and tolerance.<sup>12</sup>

The way that possible life (both that of Sweden and that which flourishes in the uteruses of potential martial bodies) materializes in the SAF campaigning discussed above follows a previous campaign aimed at increasing recruitment and at countering negatively charged ideas about violence and warring associated with the military, designed around the slogan “We let Sweden be at Peace” ([Försvarsmakten 2017b; 2018b](#)). One of the billboards figuring centrally in this campaign is that of a military map in an inverted triangle juxtaposed with a mirror (upside down) image of a sonogram of a fetus (the promotional video for the campaign begins with a pregnant woman having a sonogram). The caption reads: “We are on guard, we see, and we notice. 24 hours a day. Year around. So that life can continue as usual” ([Figure 3](#)). These images reinforce the familiar tropes of the home-front as a site of reproduction of the nation/body politic and of the military as its protector.



**Figure 3.** Billboard from the campaign *We let Sweden be at Peace*.

<sup>12</sup>For further discussion of what “tolerance” implies and the SAF mobilization of LBGTQ+ rights, see [Strand and Kehl 2019](#).



Yet, through intertextual/visual references (Hansen 2011), the fetus is not only that which is protected, but is in, and of, the military. The dividing line between the military as exceptional site of heroic duty that is charged with protecting society and the civilian site of the everyday workings of society is thus blurred. The labor of warring can be recast as the work of mundane peaceful society—a society in which space is made for the healthy nurturing of fetuses and babies. In this sense, pregnancy emerges at once as both a potential problem that is managed and ultimately solved, *and* as an unproblematic and integral part of warring. The pregnant female body is rewritten as not only life-giving and in need of protection (Enloe 2000) but also as a battle-ready lethal defender.

Together, these campaigns thus effectively convey a notion of Swedish warring which is necessary, tireless and strong, but that is not really warring at all. The military emerges as the condition of possibility for the peaceful home-front in which Swedish life—literally—continues as usual. While this message—war for peace and the good life—is neither novel nor unusual, the way in which the Swedish marketing campaigns work with reconfigurations of sex/gender and the leaky soldiering body to convey it tells us much about how modern militarism, in Sweden, pervades, even produces “peaceful” life. The military campaigns discussed above thus not only hail young individuals in novel ways by promising that the sex/gendered female body can be managed or even transcended, but it also widens the space for, and appeal of Swedish militarism, recasting it as a version of war for peace and life.

### Concluding Reflections

Throughout this article we have followed the figure of the leaky female body around Swedish military marketing and outreach activities, produced in the era of reterritorialization. Through our ethnography of text (Ahmed 2006, 2010), we have explored the SAF’s recruitment strategy aimed at *undoing* the association between the armed forces and “the masculine infantryman” in order to motivate and attract voluntary recruits in general, and women in particular. We have showed how white female soldiers are positioned as territorial warriors and protectors through these campaigns, which differ significantly from depictions of servicewomen as peacekeepers or as serving in supporting, passive, non-combat roles, prevalent in other military contexts. This is an unusual strategy or reinscription—one that surely fits with the Swedish government’s commitments to gender equality and the oft-claimed idea that Swedish culture is particularly non-sexist, even feminist.

SAF marketing openly invites women into their ranks—including active combat—and pointedly entices them to enlist through, *inter alia*, addressing their fears and anxieties about their problematic bodies as unsuitable for warring. By quelling these presumed anxieties, the SAF frames military training and life as a way to transcend the limits imposed by traditional gender hierarchies on bodies read as feminine. How the SAF represents “the soldier” in these campaigns pointedly addresses female bodily functions (menstruation, pregnancy, and urination when on field missions) that previously have been rendered deeply problematic, even dangerous to, and in, the military. Instead it inscribes these as “natural” and “unproblematic” aspects of a life in the military, and seemingly demonstrates no fear of women’s leaky bodies—in their very materiality and as symbol—as threats to military effectiveness and battle-preparedness. Indeed, through recasting sex/gender stereotypes, the campaigns and activities discussed above perform a purposed flipflop of traditional tropes that emerge from perennial, gendered martial logics: the protected is cast as agentic and capable protector; and the civilian, private, feminized space of the home-front and the theater of war merge. The SAF thus certainly widens traditional representations of the military: what it is and who it includes.

Yet, in attempting to solve the problems of women’s bodies as they materialize in the fears and anxieties of potential female recruits, the SAF also reinscribes

feminine embodiment as Other and inescapably tethered to biology. Indeed, similar campaigns targeting fears of male fleshy vulnerability and leakiness remain rather unthinkable. There are key contradictions in this strategy to break and reverse stereotypes, as it both reproduces the female figure as requiring special containment and control, and proposes how the potential soldier can “practice freedom,” working on her body (and mind) in order to gain mastery. It thus also reinforces the connection between a white military masculinity that abhors (leaky, embodied, vulnerable, uncontrollable, unpredictable, etc.) femininity. In so doing, these materializations of tamed, regulated, and controlled female embodiment reinstate familiar forms of military corporeality in which soldiers manage, master, and control their bodies to be honed and prepared for territorial defense. The revolutionary representations of the female soldiering body that emerge in SAF marketing thus reproduce a form of militarism that promotes the necessity of a battle-ready military corps that is predictable, and poised for warring.

Ultimately, through such multiple and contradictory reinscriptions of sex/gendered bodies and the concomitant ordering delineations (military/civilian; war/peace), the SAF widens and strengthens the appeal of a reaffirmed commitment to warring. This subtle move relies on familiar and impossible aspirational promises, for sure. Importantly, however, it also relies on a newly configured promise that builds upon the discourses of Sweden as feminist, progressive, secular state—a discourse which is often hailed as global inspiration for “women, peace and security.” In its attention to “solving” leaky feminine embodiment so that civilian women can become warring bodies mobilized *for* killing as well as bearing and producing life; *for* optimizing their bodies as weapons, protection, and even sacrifice, the SAF campaign promises them masculine-coded mastery over their always already gendered, sexed bodies—a familiar line of feminist reasoning. Yet, these explicitly feminist SAF campaigns also beckon with the possibility of becoming that transcends the bodily limitations that being a sexed/gendered human entails in civilian as well as military life, in war as well as in peace—a way, as it were, to become something/someone/somewhere else that only military service can offer. This de-sexed, de-gendered, and ultimately de-humanized figure glimmers alluringly through the fog of contradictory, perpetually unraveling, and imbricated messaging, pledging a feminist freedom through practicing violence.

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