



In 1998 Walt Disney Pictures released the animated feature film *Mulan* based on the legend of Hua Mulan.

desire, Mulan's cross-dressing provides scope for shoring up the normativity of heteroerotic desire. Through numerous scenes of 'misguided' desire, audiences are drawn, through myriad hetero-normative jokes, into complicity with the inappropriateness of homosexuality. Her external masculinity is repeatedly described as causing conflicting and confusing desires among her close male comrades as they are curiously aroused by

her underlying femininity. In Yang Peipei's 1999 television series *Mulan's* commanding officer, General Li, cannot understand why he feels such a depth of emotion for a fellow soldier. He seeks confirmation for his 'strange homoerotic' urges from his peers hoping that they feel similar emotions towards each other - perhaps these emotions are merely a masculine camaraderie developed by joint military service? The soldiers make repeated jokes about

the 'homosexual' feelings Li has for Hua and the audience is entertained throughout because they alone 'know' that Li's feelings are really 'normal'. Viewers know that his anxiety about his homosexual urges is unfounded.

The 1961 Cantonese Opera film also includes multiple jokes about the mysterious affinity that is developing between Mulan and one of her fellow soldiers. This version includes a scene where other soldiers voyeuristically spy upon Mulan's 'strange romance'. They make salacious side comments to the Opera's audience who know their homosexual interpretations of the scene are not really as they appear. The 1964 Yue Fong version includes jokes about presumed homosexual interest in the scene describing the imminent separation of General Hua Mulan and her close comrade, General Li. They express their love for each other with Li quickly rationalising it as 'brotherly love'.

The instruction to the audience about the 'inappropriateness' of homosexual desire in the 20th century is also apparent in the 1939 Bu Wancong film. It includes a scene where two soldiers spot the young, 'handsome', new recruit, Mulan. They attempt to bully Mulan with threatening comments

of homosexual intent - of course Mulan repels them with her superior wit and strength. Within these saucy homoerotic themes audiences are comforted in the superior knowledge that homosexual acts cannot occur with Mulan, but made anxious by the fact that the desire her underlying essential femininity provokes among men may result in her undoing.

The Hua Mulan story cycle has been routinely promoted for its advocacy of the key Confucian virtue of filial piety. Yet, as the story evolved over the centuries its power to provoke thought on norms of sexual morality appears to have become central to its popular appeal. Her virtue in filial relations provides the frame within which more problematic social relations can be explored. In part, the expansion in sexualised content, relative to filial content, can be accounted for by the power of the taboo on 'sexuality' and 'the private' to provoke comic and/or sensational interest in a world of increasingly commercialised artistic practice. Sex sold seats in Ming theatres and Republican cinemas and continues to do so today.

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Notes

- 1 For an English translation of the poem see Frankel, H. 1976. *The Flowering Plum and the Palace Lady*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- 2 Wu, Pei-yi. 2002. "Yang Miaozen: A Woman Warrior in Thirteenth Century China," *Nan nü*, vol. 4, no. 2.
- 3 The full paper is a chapter in a book I am currently writing titled *Women Warriors of China*.
- 4 McMahan, Keith R. 1988. *Causality and Containment in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Fiction*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
- 5 Rong, Cai. 2005. "Gender Imaginations in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and the *Wuxia* World," *Positions*, vol. 13, no. 2.

Once the revolution or war of independence is over, the struggle for a better society continues. The reintegration of guerillas into society and the construction of professional defence and police institutions poses considerable challenges to post-conflict societies. From the 1990s onwards, it has been increasingly recognised that gender also needs to be included as a variable in order to allow for a smooth and fair transition to a post-conflict society.¹

Whispered confidences:

articulating the female in the PNTL (police) and the F-FDTL (military) in Timor Leste

JACQUELINE SIAPNO

"The military does not recognize between female or male. The physical obstacles are very heavy, but once you enter the armed forces, there is no such thing as female or male. In our opinion, this is not discrimination." (Interview with female F-FDTL, *Metinaro*, March 2008.)

It is probably no exaggeration to claim that the 34-year East Timorese war of independence against the Indonesian military would not have succeeded without active female participation. Apart from more traditional support roles, women actively participated as combatants. This was greatly facilitated by the ideology of the Falintil (Armed Forces for the National Liberation of Timor Leste) – the military arm of the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (Fretilin) – that all combatants were equal, regardless of gender. As the above quote demonstrates, the women, and presumably also the men, strongly believed in this.

A recently concluded research project in the Democratic Republic of East Timor, entitled "Women in the F-FDTL and PNTL" was undertaken for the country's "State of the Nation Report".² Research included interviews with female (and male) personnel of the F-FDTL (Timor Leste Defence Forces) and the PNTL (Timor Leste National Police). The research project provided interesting insights into the current

role of women in the police and military institutions, and how revolutionary ideals are slowly being eroded, with old and resilient male values on patriarchal domination gaining hegemony yet again.

The post-conflict transition has not been as smooth as expected. In 2006, tensions within but also between the defence and police forces regarding perceived injustices about promotion, collusion and nepotism threatened to erupt into a civil war, resulting in about 40 deaths and about 20,000 internally displaced persons. Violence resurfaced in 2007 and again in early 2008. These tensions and the fratricide arguably have pushed gender issues to the side. Post-independence has failed to deliver what the Falintil and the Fretilin had fought for; it has also failed to deliver genuine equality of men and women in the military and the police.

The post-revolutionary glass ceiling

According to the official statistics, of 3,194 PNTL personnel, 581 are women.³ This compares advantageously to the proportion of women in the far smaller F-FDTL, with 61 women in a force of 706 personnel. In both forces, high positions have generally eluded women, excluding them from key decision-making and consequently the ability to initiate more women-friendly policies. The position of Inspector is the highest rank so far that one single female



Ex-Falintil fighter, Mana Bileza. Viqueque 1995.

has achieved in the PNTL. While there are a few female Sub-Inspectors, the majority of women are Agents and Recruit Agents, with the minimum recruitment criterion being completion of the SMA (High School Degree). The situation is equally bleak in the F-FDTL where only about seven women have achieved the rank of Second Sergeant. In both the police and the defence forces, the majority of women have never been promoted. This generally seems to reflect the 1975-1999 resistance era when there were never any women at the "commander" level in the "official" military ranking, even in the non-statutory forces.

Positions of power and 'regimes of truth'

Some of the general problems and challenges our research was able to uncover in terms of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) and Security Sector Reform (SSR) are not unique to Timor Leste, but have been identified in other post-conflict developing countries, such as the problems of abuse of power and corruption.⁴ This also includes a huge gap between official aspirations and everyday practice, to the extent that women's agency often is articulated only with a great deal of trepidation and in whispered confidences.

Ironically, this is greatly facilitated by the fact that the 706-strong F-FDTL is regarded as a "symbol of affirmation of independence, a symbol of pride".⁵ Any critical questioning, for instance with regard to military personnel who 'act above the law' and violate basic human rights – especially during the 2006 crisis⁶ but also during the recent *Operasaun Conjunta* to 'capture' the rebels – is considered almost unacceptable. Instead the prevailing attitude is that "this is a liberation army of the people". This reflexive rhetoric enacts its own symbolic violence in its capacity to sustain a "regime of truth" that makes it impossible for its victims to raise questions.

Protective silences

One of the challenges of our research project was to understand and read beyond the initial silences of our female interviewees. In some instances, women were unable to speak and express their opinions because their male Commanders insisted on being present during the interviews. In these cases, the women asked us to re-schedule a meeting somewhere else, where they were then able to speak more freely about problems and challenges in their institutions. In other cases, female security personnel appear to have been instructed to provide 'correct, official answers' or to give us 'access' without giving meaningful information. Protective silences with regard to certain questions – such as those regarding dis-

crimination and whether or not the institution had non-discrimination policies – are audible on the tape recordings of the interviews. Those women who did speak on sensitive issues, such as corruption, or sexual harassment did so in whispered confidences. Some interviewees even refused to be recorded, so very good notes had to be taken, though the capturing of the silences on specific questions proved particularly challenging.

On a more positive note, several of the women, especially in the PNTL, spoke articulately and openly on their conditions of work, strategically identifying this research project as an opportunity to express their views, and to initiate reform within their institutions. Additionally, during a workshop that was part of the research project, F-FDTL and PNTL women spoke up. In this public forum, they articulated their aspirations on defence (respectively police) reform and gender and identified key problems within their institutions, such as discrimination and corruption in the Border Patrol Unit. For example, 33 female Border Patrol Unit members had been summarily dismissed by their Commander on grounds of being female and hence unsuitable for work in the border region, though it is likely to have been a pretext for him to protect lucrative moonlighting opportunities such as smuggling, human trafficking (e.g. of young Timorese girls to Indonesian officers), and other illegal activities.

Why female underwear is more important than military hardware

It is not inevitable that the 21st century's first new nation should continue to reproduce the same mistakes in DDR and SSR – including gendered ones – that have occurred in other countries. Despite considerable progress in understanding that

Some key findings and analysis

1. Women in both the PNTL and F-FDTL spoke of the serious need for reform in terms of formation and promotion. Formation is perceived as too short (e.g. police officer training is only three months long). Promotion and career development opportunities were also found lacking, and there was a strong sense that male counterparts were advantaged. Without a process of review and reform, women will continue to be stuck in the lower ranks, unable to benefit from more training or to participate in decision-making processes.
2. Morale is low due to unequal access to resources. This is due to strongly centripetal centre-periphery relations – it is not clear whether this affects women differently than men – and due to gender. Women PNTL from the rural districts feel 'inferior' when they come to Dili, as their four-year old uniform is fraying in comparison to the uniforms of their colleagues in the capital. Besides not getting the proper uniforms, boots, and other equipment to conduct their work effectively, women PNTL and F-FDTL in the districts also do not have much access to training programmes, workshops, and most importantly, open access to information. Many of the problems they face arise because so much goes on behind closed doors.
3. Sexual harassment within the PNTL and F-FDTL is, according to a Secretary of State for Security, "more widespread than we think". A key problem appears to be instilling a culture of non-tolerance by taking disciplinary measures against deviant personnel. In 2003, for instance, a PNTL Commander was investigated for serious misconduct towards 6 female PNTL colleagues, having told them that they would have to sleep with him if they wanted to get promoted. The issue was deemed resolved when the commander was transferred to another city, where he repeated the same pattern of sexual harassment.
4. There is an institutional lack of gender awareness, which may be due to the purposefully gender-blind ideology of the resistance struggle, combined with a lack of resources. China, for example, generously provided uniforms to the F-FDTL, with women receiving exactly the same uniforms and underwear than their male counterparts. Given the context that "everyone is treated as a male, with a male body", this was paradoxically not viewed as "discrimination" by the women we interviewed, though the problem persists.
5. Women's health issues, including untreated physical wounds and psychosocial trauma, e.g. related to the 2006 violence and the absence of any medical and/or counselling support, are further important issues that need to be addressed. According to PNTL Human Resources, about 121 male and female police personnel are victims of the 2006 crisis, and 29 PNTL personnel were wounded. Among the female wounded, some had not been operated on and still had potentially carcinogenic bullets in their bodies. Others had suffered from such serious mental conditions – "I was afraid I would go insane" – that they sought medical treatment at the hospital. This was done on their own initiative, as the PNTL did not offer any psychosocial counselling or support for them.

gender matters, implementation is difficult in post-conflict societies, which often lack the institutional knowledge and the resources, and whose elites may have other priorities.

Our report's recommendations include exploring and creating more inclusive, participatory, and consultative paths. There is a need to engender democratic spaces, not just within the PNTL and the F-FDTL, but by setting up a parallel exemplary representative gender 'balance' in model institutions, such as the government, the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) and the United Nations Police (UNPOL). It is time to get out of the conventional boxes on peace-keeping, peace-building and peace-making, and engage with local knowledge and indigenous belief systems and practices. Progress cannot be made by relying on the rule of external experts and their generic 'one-size-fits-all' formulas. It is also time to create and pro-actively promote non-discrimination policies within the PNTL and F-FDTL, and to transform the mentality of senior-level staff and officials. This can be done through public education programmes, creative approaches, discussions, briefings, and by other means necessary.

All of the above goals could be achieved at relatively low cost and result in the boosting of East Timor's human and state security. In contrast, current attempts at Security Sector Reform, in particular the ambitious Defence Plan 2020 (Forsa 2020) suggest that high-level government officials and their 'expert advisors' prefer a costly hardware-heavy defence and security approach at a time when professional police work is seriously hampered by mundane things such as a lack of filing cabinets, and female morale is sapped by the delivery of 'one-size-fits-all' male underwear.⁷

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Notes

- 1 See Sue Blackburn's contribution to this IIAS Newsletter for a discussion of DDR in Cambodia and East Timor.
- 2 The study was commissioned by the National Commission on Research and Development, by the Sector Working Group on Justice, Defence, and Security. The views expressed in this article are my own.
- 3 PNTL Human Resources, respectively F-FDTL Human Resources.
- 4 See for example, "Report on the Monitoring of the State of Siege and Emergency: February to April 2008," Provedor for Human Rights and Justice, Caicoli, Dili, Timor Leste, 2008.
- 5 *Simbolo de afirmasaun da independencia, simbolo de orgulho.*
- 6 See for example the UN Commission on Investigation Report (Col) on the 2006 crisis.
- 7 It emphasises the need for high-tech equipment and military, naval, coastguard resources, eventually also aerial hardware, to guard the 1.15 mio strong nation's most valuable resource in the sea, oil, even though a study by the Center for Defence Studies, King's College, London, had outlined the shortcomings of such as Security Sector Reform strategy as early as 2000.

The Rani of Jhansi Regiment of the Indian National Army (INA) is one of the most unusual and colourful female-only military units ever created. Enthusiastically initiated in Japanese-occupied Singapore in 1943 by a Bengali nationalist leader, Subhas Chandra Bose, the regiment's name was inspired by an Indian warrior queen, whereas most of the regiment's members were lower-class overseas Indians. Tobias Rettig explains that this unique and short-lived regiment was also a training ground for some of India and Malaysia's pioneering post-independence female leaders and activists.

Warrior queens:

the Rani of Jhansi Regiment

TOBIAS RETTIG

In early 1942, concerned about British-controlled India, the Japanese established the male-only Indian National Army (INA), made up of Indian soldiers unhappy with British colonial rule and those who just wanted to escape the harsh prisoner-of-war conditions. Within a year, however, it was disbanded due to tensions within the ranks and with the Japanese.

It was not until the arrival in Singapore of Subhas Chandra Bose (1897-1945), the Bengali nationalist and former Indian Congress leader, that the INA was revived from mid-1943. Bose reached out to the overseas Indian community and conceived of a female-only regiment. Unlike Gandhi or Nehru, he refused to play loyal opposition, advocating alignment with the leading Axis powers and violent anti-colonial struggle. Unlike his conservative fascist patrons in Berlin and Tokyo, his nationalism included a violent feminism which was not just the product of circumstance or a desire to mobilise the INA and local Indians for his political goal, but "the child [of his] psyche, personality, and politics" (Hills/Silverman 1993).

"... I want ... a unit of brave Indian women to form a death-defying Regiment who will wield the sword which Rani of Jhansi wielded in India's First War of Independence in 1857."

Subhas Chandra Bose, speaking at Singapore's Padang, 9 July 1943.

The Rani of Jhansi as role model

Rather than drawing on India's rich collective (sub-)conscious with several goddesses known for their use of violence, Bose opted for a real woman of flesh and blood as his role model. In fact, Lakshmibai, the Rani (Queen) of the princely state of Jhansi (c. 1828–1858), had led her subjects against the British during the 1857-8 Indian Rebellion, thus demonstrating that

women could assume political and military leadership positions in spite of the custom of *pardah* (sexual segregation). Although Lakshmibai's decision to take up arms against the British had primarily been motivated by local grievances and dynastic reasons, her anti-colonialism could easily be given a subcontinental, nationalistic meaning that would appeal to 20th century audiences.

In 1854, the East India Company had taken over her late husband's territory in central North India on the grounds of not having produced a male heir, even though the Rani and the Raja had, in line with Indian tradition, adopted a distant relative in 1853. Unlike other widows before her, the well-educated Rani first exhausted all legal options against the dispossession before deciding on violent action to reclaim her territories. The 1857 Sepoy Mutiny provided the perfect environment. The fact that she was considered a 'tomboy' in her youth, trained in the martial arts, certainly facilitated her decision. The Rani's courageous and competent resistance, as well as her 17 June 1858 death on the battlefield, would only serve to increase her prestige and enduring popular appeal.