Woodard, Rachel and Trish Winter. *Sexing the soldier. The politics of gender and the contemporary British Army*. London/New York: Routledge, 2007.

Gender stories in the military become news not just because things happen within the armed forces on a day-to-day basis, which duly get reported, but also because gender stories are inherently attractive as news stories. They are attractive because they can readily be retold as human interest stories, an increasingly important mode of news reporting in the contemporary British media, based on the principle that audience or reader identification promotes audience or reader interest and thus circulation and viewing figures. Military gender stories can so easily become people stories, whether they involve sexual transgressors, victims of gendered abuse or heroic example of military man- and womanhood. … The personal narrative of US Army prisoner-of-war Melissa Rathbun-Nealy held much less news value within the US print media than speculative narratives about her potential for sexual violation. P. 8

We start by looking at patterns of male and female employment in both the British armed forces and the British Army overall, and then compare the British experience with the armed forces of other nation states. One of the most interesting outcomes of any comparative exercise like this is not in establishing whether or not the British Army is like any other, but rather in establishing which factors make direct comparison so problematic. What becomes clear, once comparisons are attempted, is the contingencies that govern the gendering of military participation. This observation reinforces an emerging consensus within sociological studies of the military, which supports the view that although patterns of gender distribution within armed forces may show similarities across both space and time such diversity is most helpfully explained as an outcome of the social construction of both gender and military activities, rather than any innate and essential difference between men and women. P. 12

<http://www.nato.int/issues/women_nato/index.html>

The US Army excludes women from employment in posts where units below brigade level might engage in direct ground combat, and this includes artillery and combat engineer functions. The British Army excludes women from the infantry and the Royal Armoured Corps (tank regiments), but permits them to hold jobs in the artillery and engineers. P. 18

The reasons for exclusion differ too; the British exclusion is made on the grounds of unit cohesion, and this exclusion has been upheld through British and European legal judgments. The same European legal framework on employment equity facilitated the opening up of combat positions in the German Bundeswehr. The existence of European legislation on employment equity initiated the inclusion of women in the Austrian armed forces because of Austria’s need to comply with European Union (EU) legislation following that state’s accession to EU membership in 1995. p. 19

The Danish government, for example, is (at the time of writing) in the process of adopting United Nations (UN) resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, examining how the Danish armed forces can improve the protection of women where its forces are deployed, and facilitate their involvement in post-conflict resolution and reconstruction. P. 19

<http://www.peacewomen.org/un/sc/1325.html#Full>

But, despite this variation in the participation rates of men and women in different national forces around the world, the point remains that armed forces remain male dominated and masculine. What are we to make of this? One line of argument explains the persistence of this gender order as a reflection of innate differences between men and women. … These physical differences between men and women are often but not exclusively incorporated within wider arguments, which see men and women as essentially different in their attitudes towards armed conflicts, a factor which for some lies at the root of the military gender division of labour. .. These arguments have a tendency to construct women as naturally more peace loving, or influenced by maternalist thinking that makes them less readily able to take life, or look at women’s actions in terms of their (unwitting and uninitiated) support for militarism. Men, in contrast, are portrayed as innately more aggressive. P. 20

Particularly in the case of the US military, participation in armed forces gives many women opportunities for greater economic stability and social status than they would otherwise have in civilian life; this is particularly the case for women of colour, who constitute around one-half of all enlisted female personnel in the US Army.

…

Essentialist arguments about men and women’s inherent natures imply that men can be excused from their actions because their innate masculinity absolves them from personal responsibility.

Joshua Goldstein phrases this best when he argues that the stability and persistence of the gendered military division of labour, attributable to the cultural reproduction of gender roles, produces and reinforces a gender division of labour which, because of the omnipresence of armed conflict across human history in time and space, has become self-perpetuating:

“Killing in war does not come naturally for either gender, yet the potential for war has been universal in human societies. To help overcome soldier’s reluctance to fight, cultures develop gender roles that equate “manhood” with toughness under fire. Across cultures and through time, the selection of men as potential combatants (and of women for feminine war support roles) has helped shape the war system. In turn, the pervasiveness of war in history has influenced gender profoundly – especially gender norms in child-rearing.”

It is clear, then, that the military division of labour is social in origin, and that it is shaped not only by military demands, but also by the effects and demands of armed conflict on the wider structure and dynamics of the civilian host population. P. 21