Peacekeeping and the Gender Regime

Dutch Female Peacekeepers in Bosnia and Kosovo

Liora Sion
Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois

This article addresses the issue of women's participation in peacekeeping missions by focusing on two North Atlantic Treaty Organization Dutch peacekeeping units in Bosnia (SFOR8) and Kosovo (KFOR2). I argue that soldiers are ambivalent toward what is perceived the “feminine” aspects of peace missions. Although peacekeeping is a new military model, it reproduces the same traditional combat-oriented mind-set of gender roles. Therefore Dutch female soldiers are limited in their ability to perform and contribute to peace missions. Both peacekeeping missions and female soldiers are confusing for the soldiers, especially for the more hypermasculine Bulldog infantry soldiers. Both represent a blurred new reality in which the comfort of the all-male unit and black-and-white combat situations are replaced by women in what were traditionally men’s roles and the fuzzy environment of peacekeeping. At the same time, both are also necessary: peacekeeping, although not desirable, has become the main function for Dutch soldiers, and women are still a small minority, although they gain importance in the army. Present government policy prescribes a gender mainstreaming approach to recruiting, partly due to a lack of qualified male personnel, especially after the end of the draft in 1996.

Keywords: women; peacekeeping; Dutch; exclusion; NATO

This article addresses the issue of women’s participation in peacekeeping missions by focusing on two North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Dutch peacekeeping units in Bosnia (SFOR8) and Kosovo (KFOR2). This is an important issue because Western militaries, although

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focusing on preparation for armed conflict, have gradually begun to take part in peacekeeping operations, in which their mission is mostly a constabulary one (Durch 1993; Moskos and Burk 1994; Moskos 2000; Segal and Tiggle 1997). Yet the percentage of women in peacekeeping missions is still very low. Many of them are part of the missions’ civilian staff, not military, and they mainly serve in administrative, public relations, information, and secretarial positions, and only a few occupy high-level positions (Beilstein 1998).

I argue that peacekeeping missions are perceived by peacekeepers as feminine and therefore as a challenge to their combat and masculine identity. As a result, soldiers reject the participation of women and perceive them as endangering the missions’ prestige. If “even a woman can do it,” the value of the mission for proving masculinity is thrown into question.

Peacekeeping is a military third-party intervention to assist the transition from violent conflict to stable peace. It evolved from neutral monitoring missions to complex multitask endeavors, and the missions have expanded to become increasingly complex and now account for the larger share of the United Nations’ expenditures. Since the 1990s, peacekeeping had become a vague label for a wide variety of international operations, including heavily armed NATO-led missions, some of which waged war to enforce peace accords imposed on warring parties. Such examples are the Stabilization Force in Bosnia (SFOR) and the peacekeeping force in Kosovo (KFOR), which started as peace enforcement missions. However, when this research was conducted in 2000, SFOR8 and KFOR2 mostly performed light infantry missions and were mainly involved in the humanitarian and peace-building aspects of the mission.

This research will contribute to the bulk of existing research on women in peace missions. The literature on women in the military is comprehensive; however, only rarely does it utilize participant observation or focus on peacekeeping missions. The current case study, although limited in scope, may give us a glimpse into the difficulties that women in peacekeeping missions may face.

This article is composed of three parts. The first section analyzes the discrepancies between the Dutch military image as a weak and “feminine” organization and its combat rhetoric and training, which exclude women. In the second part, I present the female soldiers in these units and the men’s attitudes toward them. The third section presents three methods of women’s exclusion: functional, physical, and sexual. But first, a literature review presents the anthropological fieldwork on which this article is based.
Literature Review

Much has been written about women’s service in the military (Cohn 2000; Herbert 1998; Rosen and Durand 1996; Nuciari 2003; Sasson-Levy 2003; Segal Wechsler 1982; Stiehm Hicks 1981, 1982; Titunik 2000; Barrett 2002). Most of the research deals with the army as a masculinized organization, in which masculinity is largely valued but femininity is not, and analyzes how it marginalizes women. Yet, in comparison, the literature about women in peacekeeping missions is still quite limited, and there is hardly any ethnographic work, despite the growing importance of the topic.

Much of the academic and policy-making attention is focused on gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping missions and the suitability of women to such missions. Some scholars claim that women’s characteristics, such as their gentle nature, conciliatory attitude, and ability to control violence, make them effective peacekeepers—possibly even more effective than men (Reardon 1993). These stereotypes can be referred to as “women’s peace” and “men’s war” (Burguieres 1990; Kaplan Duhan 1994; Tickner 1994; Warren and Cady 1994; Boulding 1995; York 1998; DeGroot 2001; Salla 2001).

Other advocates of female participation in peacekeeping believe that in local societies where women and their dependents often constitute the majority of the population, it is an advantage to have a large number of women in various peacekeeping capacities. Advocates argue that it is easier for female peacekeepers to establish a dialogue with local civilians than it is for their male colleagues. The involvement of women would also reduce sexual harassment and benefit all aspects of the operation through the greater variety of experiences they would add (Enloe 2001; Olsson and Tryggestad 2001; Carey 2001). The question was asked why missions continue to be dominated by military men when so many functions and the majority of clients in peacekeeping are civilians and women (Stiehm Hicks 2001).

My research fills this gap by showing that women may not be welcomed in peacekeeping missions because of the soldiers’ ambivalence toward the “feminine” aspects of peace missions. Therefore, although peacekeeping is a new military model, it reproduces the same traditional framework of gender roles as the missions are currently constructed and carried out. At least Dutch female soldiers are limited in their ability to perform and contribute to peace missions.
Method

This article builds on a larger study about the experience of two Dutch peacekeeping units: the “Grizzly” artillery battery, which was deployed in Kosovo (KFOR2), and the “Bulldog” Infantry Company, which was deployed in Bosnia (SFOR8). From the fall of 1999 to the summer of 2000, I conducted a fieldwork with the cooperation of the Dutch Army. While conducting research, I had full access to the soldiers. In general, I was left to my own devices and was allowed to observe whatever I wished, without having a military escort. As part of my fieldwork, I accompanied the soldiers from the first stages of their training with the Dutch brigade at Seedorf, Germany, through their combat and peacekeeping training in Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands. During this period, I lived with the soldiers and participated in all of their activities, such as day and night marches, theoretical and practical military studies, and also off-duty activities such as eating and socializing in the camp’s bar and club, watching TV, and so on. I also spent time with the soldiers during their deployment in Kosovo and Bosnia. Moreover, as an Israeli, I have served a two-year mandatory service in the Israeli Army in an infantry unit composed mainly of men.

This article is mainly based on participant observation; in-depth interviews with seventy soldiers, sixteen of them women; and conversations with some of the other women. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed. The interviews as well as the fieldwork were conducted in the Dutch language.

The Dutch Army As a Threatened Masculine Organization

Much has been written about the army as a masculinized organization, in which masculinity is largely valued but femininity is not and as such disproportionately benefits male soldiers. The army’s organizational logic assumes that soldiers are male, even if this is not explicitly stated. Moreover, skills that are perceived as unique to men are more valued in the army than those that are identified with women, and this value is reflected in the higher status and/or rewards that accrue to male soldiers (Acker 1990; Britton 1997; Connell 1987; West and Zimmerman 1987).

Since combat is closely associated with masculinity, what happens to soldiers’ identity in an army that does not fight? In this section, I examine
the military’s combat and masculine orientation through analyzing peacekeeping training and deployments.

The Dutch Army is a good example for an army that is only loosely connected to combat. Like many other European armies nowadays, it must justify its existence to the public more than ever. Despite “the war against terror,” the public perceives a decline in the intensity of direct and current threats to the national territory. Instead, the public relies on the military to perform the nobler, but probably less dangerous or masculine, tasks of peace missions (Boene 2003).

The Dutch are known for their pacifist attitudes and limited trust in military institutions (Koch 1984; Soeters 2000, 2001). As such, the status of the Dutch military and the level of the Dutch public’s trust in the armed forces are definitely lower than they are in the United Kingdom, France, or the United States. The armed forces in the Netherlands and the Dutch population in general seem to have assumed a self-image of “non-martial” (Teitler 1977) or “unheroic behavior” (Dudink 2002), or, in other words, “non-masculine.” Military failures, especially the Srebrenica massacre, contributed to this image.

The Dutch Army, which became an all-volunteer force in September 1996, focuses mainly on peacekeeping missions, humanitarianism, and disaster relief operations. These missions enjoy widespread support in the Netherlands, even after the abysmal results of the Srebrenica operation in 1995, when the UNPROFOR Dutchbat airmobile brigade assigned to protect the Muslim enclave failed to do so. As a result, over seven thousand Muslim men were imprisoned and killed by Bosnian Serbian military units (Honig and Both 1996; Van der Meulen 2000).

The massacre provoked an eruption of public anger in the Netherlands and strengthened the army’s image as not masculine, or, in the words of the press, “passive” and “cowardly” (Klep 1998). One newspaper even declared that Dutch soldiers were “too sweet and innocent for war” (HP/De Tijd, 1995). From the perspective of the media, the Dutch armed forces were nothing but losers (Van der Meulen 1998; Schoeman 2003). The events of Srebrenica diminished the status of the army, in spite of the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation in Amsterdam report clearing the soldiers in 2002.

**Peacekeeping Training**

Although peace missions are perceived by soldiers as rather feminine, peacekeeping training takes the shape of combat exercise and emphasizes
infantry combat core expertise. Most of the training is engaged with shooting, assaulting, and marching exercises (Sion 2006). Moreover, peacekeeping training has no gender mainstreaming. Instead, it mainly focuses on masculine combat roles. This is not unique to the Dutch Army. Winslow (1997) concluded that the training conditions in the Canadian Airborne Regiment deployed to Somalia led to a “hyper-investment” in the warrior identity.

Women had a minor role in peacekeeping training since they did not function as combatants or in command roles. Most of the peacekeeping final training took the shape of simulations that were aimed at teaching the soldiers how to handle local and international media. Soldiers from other units, and even some professional actors, participated in this role-playing. Some of the roles that women took during these simulations were of local mothers who demand food for their babies or local wives. Training videos and simulations warned soldiers against visiting local prostitutes and having affairs with local married women, explaining that it might upset their husbands. In other simulations, “locals” (played by soldiers) offered the soldiers prostitutes.

Some women participated in the training, but mainly in auxiliary roles such as nurses, drivers, and administrative workers. However, since the training was generic, it was mostly masculine. Because many women were not fully involved in the training, they took it less seriously than men. For example, Ingrid, the only woman in Bulldog, laughed at her infantry peers’ enthusiasm during training, saying “it is just a game.” Moreover, in comparison to men, the women did not devaluate the mission or saw it as “feminine.”

Peacekeeping Missions

While peacekeeping training was violent and exciting, the missions in Bosnia and Kosovo were peaceful and more humanitarian. The disappointed soldiers, especially infantry, perceived the mission in feminine terms. Infantry soldiers said that “everybody can do a peace mission” and that “peace missions are too easy and the demands are too low” to the stage that “even women can perform peace missions, because nothing happens.” An infantry officer said, “I think that the demands are too low, it is too easy and it is because we are talking about a peace mission. . . . There is an argument that women can serve, based on the assumption that in peace missions nothing happens.”

An infantry soldier said, “A good peacekeeper is someone who can . . . communicate well with the interpreter and who is very social . . . with the
local people. Therefore a peace mission demands more social skills . . . it is actually the same as going out on the weekends! On weekends, you speak with your friends about what you did this week and what you are about to do. After all, you talk with your girlfriend about everything, it is just that here you do it with foreign people but actually ask the same questions.” If peacekeeping demands qualities such as “chatting in the pub” or “speaking with a girlfriend,” it may fit women since according to this soldier, they could chat better.

To resolve their confusion, many of the infantry soldiers defined the mission as combat. Yet the discrepancy between the mission reality and their expectations contributed to their confusion and dissatisfaction (Sion 2006). An infantry soldier in Bosnia expressed his disappointment from the exciting and stimulating training in comparison with the mission: “A lot of the things they told me weren’t true. . . . In the training they said, ‘There is a lot for you to do there.’ Look! [in a cynical voice] If there are no patrols, we have nothing to do here!”

Therefore, at the same time as the army turns into what can be termed as a less glorified and masculine job and open its doors to more women (at least as far as policy goes), it also exaggerates excitement and adventure in the most conspicuous and distinct way that excludes women. This raises the question, Can women play a role in peace missions, which are perceived as feminine? Or maybe there is no place for women, especially because of this reason.

**Women in Grizzly and Bulldog**

There were twenty-six women in the camps that contained Grizzlies and Bulldogs in Bosnia and Kosovo (each camp contained about five hundred people). But only four women were part of the units: three women served in the Grizzly artillery battery, and one woman served in the Bulldog Infantry Company. The rest of the female soldiers joined the units only for deployment in Kosovo and Bosnia and served mainly as paramedics, as drivers, and in different administrative functions. Only three of the sixteen interviewees were officers: a medical doctor, a social worker, and an engineering platoon commander. The other women had marginal positions, which is not surprising considering the fact that the absence of women in the Dutch military has been conspicuous, especially among the higher ranks: NCOs and officers (Van der Meulen 2000; Bosch and Verweij 2002).
According to official data (Office of Women in the NATO Forces 1999–2000; ter Laak 2005), the Dutch forces comprise 9.1 percent women, with most of them serving as lower-ranking soldiers; only a minority of women serve as NCOs or officers. This number is average in comparison with most other NATO countries for the year 2000.

The women shared the same blue-collar background as the rest of the soldiers; most of them were young and joined the army when they were seventeen or eighteen years old. Not like American soldiers, Dutch soldiers do not join the army for health care, which is mandatory and relatively cheap in the Netherlands, and not for college tuition, which is subsidized by the government. Yet most of the women joined the army for pragmatic reasons, having no other job prospects. Other women were motivated by adventure such as a wish to see the world.

The women I interviewed usually saw their time in the army as an experience in life, not as a career, and usually stayed in the army for one or two contract terms of two and one half years each. They also believed in having a family at an early age. They did not join the army as a result of a women’s liberation motivation and point of view. Instead, as research shows, military women tend to be conservative in their ideological attitudes and to venerate the traditions of the military (Barrett 1996; Titunik 2000; Williams 1989). In the next paragraphs, I will portray the women who served in Bulldog and Grizzly and will analyze their complex relationships with the men in these units.

The infantry company had only one woman, Ingrid,1 a driver, who was a quiet but self-confident twenty-one years old. Ingrid was in a peculiar position in a hypermasculine unit that resented women’s service. She mainly associated with soldiers from the staff platoon yet did not seem to have any close friends. The three women in Grizzly had little in common. Madge was thirty years old and socially associated with the NCOs of her age group, who, like her, had served in the army for many years. Sabine was nineteen years old and also belonged to the staff, but her age and experience made her identify with the soldiers and kept her away from the commanders, with whom she had a complicated relationship. Carina was twenty-one years old and a member of a combat platoon, and she did her best to be one of the guys. She was popular with the other soldiers and protected by her commanders.

Female combatants are a rare phenomenon in the Dutch military, and only a few women, such as Carina, have performed this function. Carina was a plain-looking woman who had served three years in the platoon. She was quiet and shy but got along well with the rest of the soldiers. She liked being the only woman in the unit and felt “special”: 
It is completely different to be the only woman here. I thought, I would like to give it a try, it is fun. Therefore, I chose it. Everybody looks at you, also when I drive through the city [in Kosovo], then [everybody says] wow, a woman behind the wheel! It is great . . . it is special.

It was important for her to be part of the male group, and she was proud that her colleagues trusted her enough to talk openly in front of her about topics such as women and sex. Like the other women in the unit, she preferred men’s presence to women’s:

I get along well with the guys . . . . I wouldn’t like to serve with a platoon full of women, I don’t think that I would be able to get along with them, I’m used to working with men.

As part of being “one of the guys,” Carina also used to supply the men with semierotic magazines. The only problem was that while she encouraged the men to speak freely, she felt that she needed to censor herself in front of them. Carina said,

You cannot really tell the men everything . . . . this is the only [problem]. . . . Usually they know that I’m used to [hearing talk about women and sex]. They know that I can take it or they ask if they can continue talking. I say, go on talking, I’m used to it, go on.

Fine (1987) argues that women are accepted by male colleagues, but this acceptance comes at a cost. Women who wish to be part of a male-dominated group typically ought to accept patterns of male bonding and must be able to decode male behavioral patterns. They must be willing to engage in coarse joking and teasing and accept the male-based informal structure of the military occupation—in other words, become “one of the boys” like Magda and Carina did. Herbert (1998) describes this strategy as neuter. She refers to attempts to render notions of feminine and masculine absent from one’s presentation of self. In trying to downplay any sense of gender or sexuality, women are seeking to neutralize a presumably important part of who they are. They do so because it is far more difficult to penalize that which is absent. The price that Carina had to pay to belong to the male group was to suppress her sexuality and femininity. Being part of the male group meant being a nonwoman: a nonthreatening being who is able not only to listen to men’s fantasies and adventures, but also help them by supplying soft pornographic magazines.
Magda was also proud of her ability to speak with men about everything. For example, one afternoon in Kosovo, she was sitting with some NCOs in the bar, discussing their pending vacation in the Netherlands. One NCO said that on his vacation, he would like to drink a lot of beer and have a lot of women. Magda said, “You’ll have to pay for both, but women will cost you more.” Then they discussed how much money women would cost him. Becoming one of the guys restricted not only Magda’s and Carina’s sexuality, but also their entire character and nature. The female doctor in Bosnia described it as “acting tough.” She said that while observing female soldiers, and especially those who serve as the sole woman in a unit, she noticed the following:

I see a lot of uncertain women and they act tough . . . in order to cope with the man’s world. . . . There is one girl in the unit and she must act tough in order to be able to speak with the guys. You cannot show your emotions if there are a lot of guys around. You must be macho . . . and struggle sometimes to keep one’s foothold. You . . . kind of get lost.

Carina’s colleagues who perceived her as “not really a woman” appreciated her character. As was expected from “real” men, she never complained or talked much; she worked hard and was not “soft,” as a male soldier said:

With Carina it doesn’t feel like she is a woman. She does her work and there is no difference. Carina is special, she . . . never complains. . . . But I met many women who do not do their work well. . . . Artillery is too difficult for them . . . too hard, not every woman can do it. They must be physically strong and . . . not too soft.

Sabine, on the other hand, adopted a clear feminine strategy. One of the NCOs described her as “wild! She must adapt because she is misbehaving.” She was nineteen years old and good looking, especially in the evenings, when she dressed provocatively and went dancing, usually with her fiancé, an infantry soldier. Sabine, who looked fragile, was constantly looking for men’s attention and trying to manipulate them to avoid unpleasant duties. Compared to Carina and Magda, she usually worked less. She employed accommodation strategy, conforming to the image of preferred femininity, which is marked by a tone of cooperation and compliance, a desire not to threaten men’s sense of competence or superiority (Connell 1987). In other words, Sabine fit the soldiers’ stereotype of how a woman should behave. She spoke in a confident, self-assured manner when she explained how she managed to be accepted by the male group:
After acting once in a regular way, you are accepted by the guys as one of them, and of course, you should joke with them, and this is what I like most. . . . you must make an effort to become part of the group, the faster the better. . . . you shouldn’t have affairs with commanders because then you get a name.

It is worth mentioning that her only self-restriction was avoiding having affairs with commanders. Sabine openly acknowledged using feminine sex role behavior to win men over. This feminine strategy upholds a paternalistic masculinity, and women who adopt it often openly seek men’s attention. Yet she showed some ambivalence in using this strategy. She wanted to be accepted by the male group and become one of the guys. Conversely, being pretty, young, and inexperienced contributed to her willingness to use her looks and sexuality to be treated as a woman.

Sabine believed that women’s behavior code was relevant only during daytime, when she wore her uniform, while in the evenings, she could do whatever she wanted. She was wrong. Her flirtatious behavior with male soldiers was on the verge of sexual harassment. Sabine liked the attention she attracted but at the same time felt threatened by its explicit form. For example, her commander used to laugh about how young and fresh her body was, and how difficult it must be for her boyfriend to have sex with her. Sabine liked flirting with her commander but at the same time complained about the way he spoke to her. To me, her entire attitude was that of a girl in a candy store who is confused by the abundance of choices, saying “You can do what you want” and “There are so many guys!”:

The guys . . . are just colleagues and nothing more . . . but when you are a civilian in the evenings, it is different. You can do what you want, you can speak with whomever you want, no matter how high or low his rank is. . . . It is cozy and fun, but I’d never do it if I were in uniform. . . . It is easy, of course, because there are so many guys! And if things get heavy or difficult and you need attention, you look for it; it is human. But there are so many guys! And you can get such a name! Therefore it is difficult . . . and nobody wants it [to be unfaithful] but it happens! And I’m afraid of it.

Sabine’s overt enthusiasm to spend time with the men and what seemed to be her constant need for attention made her unknowingly cross the fine line between trying to be one of the guys and becoming a sex object. According to Kanter (1977a, 1977b), she adopted the role of “seductress” or sexual object, which introduces an element of sexual competition and jealousy. Should the woman be seen as a sex object who shares her attention widely,
she risks the debasement of a whore. Despite having a fiancé back home, while in Kosovo, Sabine became romantically involved with a foreign NATO soldier and was the subject of gossip in her camp. She did not only cross the line, she even did it with a stranger. When Carina was asked about Sabine, she said,

Yes! [laughs] We are so different! I wouldn’t like to be like Sabine, no! I sometimes have the feeling that she didn’t really get acclimated to the job . . . she is engaged and she went to bed with another soldier . . . you know that you are in a society where everybody is male, and if you cannot handle it, don’t come to work here.

The three women tried to find their place in the male group by choosing different strategies as a result of their different characters, outlooks, and military roles. Ingrid, Magda, and especially Carina gained a level of acceptance among the men, but they did so by playing the part of one of the guys to the extent of hiding and ignoring their femininity and sexuality. By being perceived as a nonwoman and asexual, they were allowed to listen to men’s sex talk mocking other women. However, being a nonwoman did not make them full members of the male group.

Sabine, on the other hand, chose to gain power and acceptance by using her femininity and sexuality, but she lost the respect of the group and became what every female soldier is afraid of: the subject of camp gossip. Her behavior, and especially her affair with a non-Dutch soldier, made her cross the fine line between being a sex object to being considered loose. Her situation in the camp became uncomfortable and made her want to leave Kosovo before the end of deployment, and possibly leave the military altogether.

Attitudes toward Women in Grizzly and Bulldog

Despite being combat units, artillery and infantry units do not share the same culture and perceptions. Artillery soldiers usually work behind the lines, where they are not directly exposed to the enemy, while infantry soldiers aim to contact the enemy and fight him face-to-face. The operational modes of infantry and artillery units, and especially their relative proximity to the enemy, influence the social structure and self-image of the units. Infantry soldiers have a more prestigious and masculine self-image than artillery, and as a result, although generally, women were not welcomed in both units, the soldiers in the artillery battery were more relaxed than infantrymen in their attitude toward women.
Infantry soldiers resented women in the military in general, and in combat units in particular. One NCO argued that “a woman should nurse” because this is her role “since prehistoric times” and that a woman “who behaves like a man and has dirty nails” is not “natural.” The soldiers’ image of “correct femininity” is what Connell (1987) calls “emphasized femininity.” Like hegemonic masculinity, emphasized femininity as a cultural construction is very public, though its content is specifically linked with the private realm of the home and the bedroom. It is organized as an adaptation to men’s power and emphasizes compliance, nurturance, and empathy as womanly virtues.

It seems that many infantry soldiers felt threatened by women who did not look and behave according to emphasized femininity. This can be seen in the following joke about the “masculine” nuns. What this joke, which was told by infantry soldiers during a night out in the pub, discusses is women out of their traditional sex roles, who have the symbolic power to emasculate men:

Three men who are depressed from lack of sex are advised in the pub to go to a mushroom field of a nearby abbey and to lie down, pretending that their penis is a mushroom. The first lies down and hears a nun [imitation of a female delicate voice]: “Mushroom, mushroom, mushroom.” She gets to his [penis] and tries to get it out [and masturbates him]. The second man lies in the field and a nun comes, saying [imitation of a delicate female voice], “Mushroom, mushroom, mushroom.” When she gets to his penis, she tries to get it out [and masturbates him]. The third man lies in the field and a nun comes, saying [in a masculine voice], “Mushroom, mushroom, mushroom and hop, it’s out!” [She tears out his penis].

This joke is about threatening masculinized women, yet women were not welcomed in infantry, even if they possessed “correct” femininity. I witnessed this during training, in which Ingrid and another female driver participated as well. I asked their male colleagues how they were doing. The other woman’s group complained that she was physically weak and that they had to carry her all night. And how was Ingrid? I asked. “Terrible,” they answered. “She behaves like a real man, functioning better than us.”

The reason is that women are compelled to strike a balance between the “feminine demands” of their sex role and the “masculine demands” of their work role. Both types of gender violations result in attributions of “deviant” sexuality (Herbert 1998). Therefore women are blamed of two contradicting arguments. On one hand, as one NCO put it, women’s presence could cause “a bestial behavior; some guys will hunt the woman.” In other words,
women’s presence could evoke the men to a more “masculine” behavior. On the other hand, soldiers also worried that women’s presence will “soften” them; as another infantry NCO said, “If women would join the platoon, we would behave like chickens.” In other words, women’s presence has the potential to emasculate the men. Another argument used in combat rhetoric is to claim that “it makes more impact if a woman gets killed.”

Many infantry soldiers also believed that women would hurt group cohesion, or in their words, “the social sphere,” and would also hurt training because “men would behave differently.” Yet research shows that negative attitudes toward women, who are blamed for undermining unit cohesion in a male bonding system, persist despite positive performance results (Rosen and Durand 1996).

Most of the artillery soldiers, on the other hand, did not reject women’s service in the military, and a small minority were even positive about the presence of women in artillery combat roles. Most of these soldiers did not see themselves as combatants but rather viewed their army service as a job and therefore did not see any obstacle to women’s service. One interviewee said that “there is always a place for women in the artillery, what we men can do, women can do as well” and that it is “better to have a woman who can work quickly than a guy who is always sick” because “women want to prove themselves more; they complain less.”

Those soldiers who were in favor of women’s service, or at least did not object to it, justified it by devaluing the combat character of the unit. In other words, in this case, combat proximity or identity determines attitude toward female soldiers. If a unit is more combat oriented, it is more likely to exclude women, as we shall see in the example of the Bulldog Infantry Company.

The attitude toward female soldiers depends not only on the unit’s combat proximity but also on soldiers’ rank. Soldiers were generally more open toward women’s participation in the unit than their commanders, NCOs, or officers, or in other words, men who perceived themselves as the caretakers and gatekeepers of the “correct” masculine image in the army.

Many officers with whom I spoke were ambivalent about the participation of women in peace missions. Viewing femininity stereotypically as a nurturing and gentle nature, they saw women’s participation as a double-edged sword. On one hand, women were a welcome addition to everyday life in the camp because they “soften the masculine atmosphere.” On the other hand, they saw women as problematic. “It is hard to choose,” said an infantry commander, “between their contribution to the camp’s life and the drama they create.” By drama, he meant problems and scandals, mainly
sexual. Officers also argue that a sizeable number of women with a back-
ground of family abuse join the army because they look for a highly struc-
tured environment. Williams (1989) brings similar evidence in her research
about American women in the marine corps. One possible explanation is
that these women look for a family substitute and find some comfort in the
military patriarchal structure.

Methods of Women’s Exclusion

As illustrated, women’s participation in peace missions challenges
men’s combat and masculine identity. Miller (1997) pointed out that most
of the men that object to women’s increased participation in the army fear
negative organizational consequences for expressing their objections
openly. Therefore they resort to interactional or indirect forms of protest.
Because Dutch women have been officially able to serve in the military in
every unit but the marines and submarines, the exclusion of women from
peacekeeping is mostly informal and has been done in three ways: func-
tional, physical, and sexual.

Functional Exclusion

Functional exclusion refers to the gender-based exclusion of women
from taking an active part in peace missions. Because the army’s division
of labor is constructed along lines of gender, it initiates gender divisions
and organizational practices to maintain them. The army’s logic is the con-
struction of symbols and images that explain, express, and reinforce the
division of labor.

Some of the women said that they wished to serve in a combat role but
were refused on the grounds of being a woman. Others were bitter that dur-
ing deployment, their roles were changed. Instead of the functions they had
been assigned to before the peacekeeping mission, they were given simple
and unchallenging administrative work during the mission. An example
was Carina, an artillery combat soldier in Grizzly. Although in Kosovo, her
male colleagues had to work around the clock, she was not allowed to join
them. The reason was that Carina was posted to an emergency team, which
was supposed to be called on only in case of emergency. Although before
deployment and also during training, Carina had functioned as an artillery
soldier, now she was doing an administrative job, waiting for an emergency
situation that never happened:
Time passes slowly, I must find something to do, I must be busy or otherwise I’ll get bored to death... I told the lieutenant several times that I want to do more. I hope that he will take it seriously and at last will organize for me something to do.

Carina wished to join her colleagues who patrolled daily among the grateful and hospitalized local population. This mission was not perceived as dangerous, yet it constantly implied the possibility of a potential riot or outbreaks of violence. This lends a what if quality to the army’s belief that women can handle peacekeeping. Since violence is always a possibility in peace missions, women are seen as less capable soldiers than men.

Images of masculinity are linked to technical skills, and the possibility that women might also obtain such skills represented a threat to that masculinity (Cockburn 1991). Not allowing Sabine, another Grizzly female soldier, to drive an armored personnel carrier (APC) during deployment in Kosovo, despite the fact that she was trained for that exact role back at home, is such an example:

I would like to become an APC driver, I was trained for that, but I came here [Kosovo] and was told, “You are too small and you cannot do it”... but they didn’t say it openly, “No, you cannot do it because you are a woman.” They give you administrative work, and I’m sick of it.

In both missions, most of the women were restricted to the camp area. This happened mainly because most of the women were engaged in diverse support functions inside the camp, but it also appears that their commanders were afraid of exposing them to the local population. This attitude is not unique to the Dutch and is, for example, also shared by the Norwegian United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). UNIFIL commanders in Lebanon explained their reluctance to let women patrol by their concern for negative reactions that might come from Muslim and Druze men (Karamé 2001). A Dutch artillery NCO said, in the same spirit,

It won’t work if a woman stands at the gate because they [the locals] won’t do any business with her. Therefore you must keep the women in the rear.

In Kosovo, women mentioned the astonishment of locals at the sight of female soldiers and at the fact that they were blonde. In Bosnia, where the locals were more accustomed to peacekeepers, a female soldier claimed that when she asked to join the soldiers on patrol, she was told that the locals would not tolerate the presence of women. Hence some of the
women were frustrated at being in the camp all the time and even called it a “prison.”

Another interrelated issue is female soldiers’ empathy or curiosity toward locals. Soldiers in general did not show much empathy or even plain curiosity toward the local population. This is not entirely surprising, according to the substantial literature examining why professionals are contemptuous of those whom they serve (see, e.g., Becker 1951). Yet soldiers on patrols had to interact with locals, while women, who were confined to the camp, did not. In all my encounters with the soldiers, none of the women showed much empathy or even curiosity toward the local population. For example, the paramedics’ tent in Kosovo was less than five meters away from the first houses of the Kosovar town of Suva Reka, but the female paramedics said that they had never had contact with the locals and that “it is better to keep away from their misery.” When I asked a female administrative worker in Bosnia what she thought about the locals, she answered surprised that she had never thought about them because it is not her job.

This contradicts the assumption that women make effective peacekeepers because it is easier for them to establish a dialogue with local civilians than it is for their male colleagues (Enloe 2001; Olsson and Tryggestad 2001; Carey 2001). The women that I met showed no interest in such a dialogue.

Another way of getting to know locals was through contacts with the interpreters, who were mostly local women. While male soldiers socialized with the interpreters during the long patrols or because they had romantic or sexual interest in them (some of these encounters ended in marriage), there was no contact between female interpreters and female soldiers. Both groups of women, who separately conducted close relations with the men, ignored each other, maybe because they were in competition over the men.

One possible explanation for women soldiers’ indifference toward locals is that they kept away from anything that would identify them with traditional feminine roles such as nursing and caring. Therefore they kept away from local women and children. However, what seems to be the major reason was a lack of opportunity to be in contact with locals. While many men were forced to communicate with locals, the women, who were mostly confined to the camps, had no opportunity to do so.

**Physical Exclusion**

The second method of exclusion is physical and refers to how the exclusion of women is rooted in the naturalization of discursive practices and the ways in which women’s bodies are ruled out of order and used against
them. This is done as a way to restrict and exclude women from army activities and tasks. Following Cohn (2000), the military debate over physical fitness reveals some deeper, more fundamental issues about gender integration, and it is men’s response to institutional changes in an organization they identify as their own. The debate here is about peacekeeping physical fitness, not combat. Yet the rhetoric that soldiers use to exclude women is that of combat.

While both artillery and infantry soldiers rejected women, resulting from their differing self-images as combat soldiers, they used a different rhetoric. By defining the mission as combat, infantry soldiers excluded women, claiming that women are not physically fit and that their presence impaired men’s physical ability. They argued that “women deteriorate the quality of the army” because they “are physically weak” and therefore “cannot function in war situations.”

Because most of the artillery soldiers did not feel like combat soldiers, they perceived their work in more humanitarian, less masculine terms (Sion 2006). Therefore they used another physical excuse to exclude women: reasons of hygiene. There is a strong ethos in these units not to shower while training, even when the training is two weeks long. Women who served in the artillery unit mentioned the problem that they had not been allowed to take showers. Women are allowed to shower during their monthly period, after obtaining special permission from their commander, who is usually a man. This regulation is a clear source of embarrassment and a problem for many women. Artillery NCOs claimed that “this is not a place for women” because “they have a hygiene problem. They cannot skip showers for a week like men do.” An artillery soldier said, “How can women not take showers for a week? They have their period and therefore cannot serve in combat units.” Menstrual blood acts as a symbol through which gender identity is reflected, bringing to the surface what had otherwise been erased. Emphasis of the most inherent differences between men and women is used against women as an excuse to exclude them.

Gendered social practices change the meaning and character of women’s bodies by actually altering them physically. Following Levi-Schreiber and Ben Ari (2000), this “translation” is one of the main ways in which power becomes “naturalized,” that is, seen as part of the order of nature. Women, according to this reasoning, are assumed to be inferior (and therefore to merit exclusion) because they do not have the kinds of bodies that have been fashioned through military service and have not actively participated in this “bodily” transformation.
Sexual Exclusion

The third method of exclusion is sexual. Because many men perceive the military as a male domain that has been invaded by women, it is femininity that highlights theses “invaders’” status as women and their alleged inability to soldier (Herbert 1998). By sexual exclusion, I employ Pyke’s (1996) description of how men use sexuality to establish a hierarchy that separates them from women and keeps women “in their place.”

One source of frustration among many women were the self-restrictions that they had to impose on their behavior. The most common complaint in Kosovo was that men could wear whatever they wanted after working hours, while women had to be careful so as not to attract attention and sexually arouse the men.

Women argued that “men can wear bathing suits when they sunbathe or wear a towel on their way to the showers, while women have to think twice before wearing sports gear or otherwise men will look strangely at me and ask questions.” “Men love to look at us but at the same time comment on the way we are dressed” and “it is difficult when men look at you. But if you are irritated by this attention, they blame you for being too sensitive and a complainer.”

Moreover, the few women in the camps were often the subject of gossip concerning their sex lives and felt that their personal lives were under intense scrutiny. Carina said,

You cannot joke and flirt with anybody because you are the only woman and people will talk about you. Keep your privacy . . . otherwise there will be a lot of talking. If you do it even once, it will stick to you forever. If something happens to you, everybody will know for sure! [laughs]. . . . Sometimes they speak against women . . . who go to bed with everybody. I’m used to it. I can take it. . . . It’s a man’s society and it will always be, it will never change.

What these women experience is being token numbers in a male-dominated sphere. The negative consequences of tokenism seem to occur only for members of social categories that are of lower status relative to the majority, with gender status as one example. Tokenism effects are the result of being a woman, being numerically scarce, and working in an occupation normatively defined as men’s work. Women who enter gender-inappropriate occupations and numerically skewed work groups experience the negative consequences of tokenism: performance pressure, social isolation, and role encapsulation (Yoder 1991). Sexual allegations and rumors are part of it.
The women were easily blamed for being sexually promiscuous (they joined the army for male company) or for being lesbians (they joined the army for female company). For example, infantry soldiers claimed that “women are more attracted by the soldiers’ presence than really wanting to march and train with the company.” One officer claimed that it is a known fact that lesbians are especially fond of the military.

These stereotypes are common in Western militaries, and this designation allows men to maintain their sense of masculinity, while placing women in an impossible paradox. If they perform effectively, they are labeled “abnormal” (Williams 1989). Yet, in this case, these stereotypes were especially widespread, not as much among soldiers as among infantry officers and NCOs. “My experience with women is bad,” said one officer, and another one added, “Women here like being a minority among men, and some of them take advantage of it. Some women here have . . . eight different boyfriends.” A NCO said, “Women are . . . sexually loose with the guys.”

Gender differences in Bosnia and Kosovo were maintained through functional, physical, social, and sexual exclusion of women from taking any substantial role in the peace missions. But it would be a mistake to claim that all gender differences were forced on the women. In addition to the external pressures I have just described, female soldiers actively constructed their own gender by redefining themselves in terms of traditional masculine and feminine traits. Many of the women I interviewed expressed ambivalence toward femininity and accepted the grounds for their exclusion (see also Sasson-Levy 2003). They attempted to estrange themselves from “femininity” as it is portrayed by the army and did so by keeping away from women’s company and by mocking other women who were viewed as stereotypical females. For example, women said that women who chose to serve in the military are “brutal by nature,” “the kind of people that can bite you and are also arrogant.” Also, “women quickly become ‘catty’ to each other,” “invent stories,” and “make it hard for the rest of the women and give us a bad name.”

The women emphasized the bad qualities of women by comparing them to the good qualities of men. By constructing a gender division, the army creates a stereotypical image of the man as strong, brave, independent, and moral and the woman as weak and dependent. As a result, female soldiers who try to create a positive self-identity may need to estrange themselves from “femininity” as it is portrayed by the army and to mock other women who are viewed as stereotypical females. According to Williams (1989), by viewing herself as an exception to a general rule—“women are incompetent, but I am not”—a woman can resolve the contradiction between men’s
negative evaluation of femininity and her own positive sense of self-worth. This strategy accommodates women to the restrictive policies, without diminishing their sense of their own abilities and individual prowess.

**Discussion**

This article addresses the issue of women’s participation in peacekeeping missions by focusing on two NATO Dutch peacekeeping units in Bosnia (SFOR8) and Kosovo (KFOR2). I argue that because soldiers are ambivalent toward what they perceive as the “feminine” aspects of peace missions, they exclude women, mainly through functional, physical, and sexual methods. Therefore, although peacekeeping is a new military model, it reproduces the same traditional combat-oriented mind-set of gender roles and limits women’s ability to perform and contribute to peace missions.

Although peacekeeping training is explicitly gender-neutral, it clearly assumes as its model the experiences of male soldiers. The challenges that women face during peace missions are not addressed. These peace missions, although NATO-led, dealt mostly with peace building and humanitarian tasks, which women could have performed as well. Yet the military organization’s ambivalence toward the missions and soldiers’ wish to define them as combat caused the soldiers to perceive women as a danger to the missions’ prestige.

Yet this research is limited in scope because of three main reasons. First, it focuses on women in two Dutch peacekeeping units only. Second, conducting fieldwork in an institutionalized organization—such as the military—where access depends completely on the goodwill of gatekeepers can be quite complicated. Although I had full access to soldiers, I was not free to join them for long periods in the Balkans. Third, the competition among women did not exclude me, and sometimes I was perceived by them as a rival for men’s attention.

However, this research is important because the bulk of existing research on women in peace missions is still quite limited and only rarely utilizes participant observation. Therefore this research contributes to the important debate on women mainstreaming in peacekeeping missions and sheds light on their complex situation.

Both peacekeeping missions and female soldiers are confusing for male soldiers, especially for the more hypermasculine Bulldog infantrymen. Both represent a blurred new reality in which the comfort of the all-male unit and black-and-white combat situations are replaced by women in what
were traditionally men’s roles and the fuzzy environment of peacekeeping. At the same time, both are also necessary: peacekeeping, although not desirable, has become the main function for Dutch soldiers, and although women are still a small minority, they enjoy growing importance in the army because present government policy prescribes a gender mainstreaming approach to recruiting, partly due to a lack of qualified male personnel.

Note

1. All names are pseudonyms.

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**Liora Sion** is a sociologist who researches peacekeeping, the Israeli military, and gender and ethnic minorities in the military. Her dissertation, titled “Changing from Grey to Blue Beret: Dutch Peacekeepers in Bosnia and Kosovo,” was written for Amsterdam University/The Free University in the Netherlands. She was a postdoctoral fellow at the Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, Harvard University, and is currently a postdoctoral fellow in the sociology department at Northwestern University, Illinois.