The Enemy Within
Female Soldiers in the

BY MARCIA KOVITZ

Cette auteure remarque que l'armée canadienne n'est pas fidèle à la clause des Droits de l'homme de 1989 qui demande l'intégration paritaire des femmes. Elle explique que la structure mâle de l'armée occidentale ainsi que sa mission associent les femmes, symboliquement et en pratique, à des sphères sociales qui menacent l'efficacité d'une opération militaire.

The military recruitment of women, generally, has sparked tremendous controversy. Supporters wish to "ensure equal rights and responsibilities of all citizens," whereas opponents are concerned with ensuring combat effectiveness (Segal). Feminists are split: promoters of women's equal rights as citizens "to lay down their lives for their country" and gain access to the career advancements afforded by combat service are pitted against pacifists who either *reject*, outright, women's participation in favour of peaceful conflict resolution (Äs; Brock-Utne; Ruddick), or *encourage* women's military enrolment, anticipating that, Trojan-like, they will change the military from within. Some, however, disagrees with the suggestion that women infiltrate the military in order to change it, arguing that "the more likely result is that militarization will change women" (Vickers 19).

Despite the 1989 Human Rights Tribunal ruling that gave the Canadian Forces ten years to integrate women into all military occupations (except for submarines), and despite the need to recruit greater numbers of women because of decreases in the cohort of eligible men, women continue to face considerable resistance within the organization. According to the Commission's final assessment, "An examination of the overall statistical information regarding the number of women in the combat occupations at the end of the ten years indicates that "full integration" has not been achieved. As of January 1, 1998, the most recent data for which the Commission has reliable information, women accounted for 10.6 per cent of the members of the regular forces but only 3.1 per cent of the members of combat occupations" (CHRC 4). The Commission also indicated, through its concern, that harassment remains a problem for women, and that the lack of "a comprehensive plan, with targets and timetables" suggests less than a full commitment to "achieving results" (4).

Understanding militarization and its impact on women's lives requires an examination of the military's gendered division of labour and why women are marginalized.

Although military women have known of, and experienced, this resistance for some time, and have acted on it through a higher rate of attrition (Davis), their situation has received little publicity until the recent media coverage of the sexual abuse of Canadian female soldiers.[1] Compounding questions around the abuses are the dismissive and/or repressive responses of military authorities. They include: interference from superiors in military police investigations into sexual assaults; attempts by superiors to keep sexual assault charges out of civilian courts; the quiet removal of perpetrators from the base where the assault took place; and pressures on victims to remain silent (Branswell; O'Hara 1998a, 1998b).

The sexual harassment, abuse, and assault of women is no longer "news" in Canada (although occurrences such as these are used regularly to *make* the news). Yet, should not every such incident be considered an outrage, and even more so in these military incidents because of their occurrence in what is a highly supervised environment, where both the work *and* personal lives of military members are carefully scrutinized, monitored, and controlled? This leads us to question both the treatment of military women and the military leadership's response.[2]

This article argues that the Canadian military is a conflict zone for women. To address these issues I begin by briefly placing western gendered warfare practices and meanings into a comparative cross-cultural and historical perspective. I then examine whether there is historical continuity in the treatment of women's within the military in Canada, and consider what *meaning* women and their femininity have for the Canadian military today. Based on my research on gender in the Canadian Forces[3] I argue that understanding the military as a "conflict zone" for women requires an understanding of how the military—both as gendered and gendering institution—constructs multiple femininities (and masculinities)[4] on the basis of their support for, or interference with, the principle goal of "operational effectiveness"(a euphemism for combat readiness) (Pinch). Although feminists committed to peace building and peaceful conflict resolution may argue against the recruitment of female soldiers, it seems

a moot issue given their presence. Understanding militarization and its impact on women's lives requires an examination of the military's gendered division of labour and meanings and why women are marginalized or excluded.

A review of the anthropological and historical literature (Kovitz) suggests that the organization and practice of war—which incorporates far more than combat—is, like other social practices, characterized by a gendered division of labour and meanings. But, this is not to say that war is everywhere or has always been exclusively masculine or male-predominant. As a gendered practice, warfare is a prism into the society which wages it. In different times and places, women have been among those to encourage and endorse, as well as participate in all of their societies' war practices, whether recruiting warriors through calls for revenge, exhortations to heroism, or accusations of cowardice (see Keshen); supplying warriors for their journey; sustaining their spirits through careful ritual observance; tending their wounds; deciding and/or imposing sentences on prisoners of war; or taking up weapons for offensive or defensive purposes. Where war has been monopolized by men it has been for structural reasons: for example, women have been strictly excluded from all knowledge of, or participation in, their society's armed conflicts where they have married in from enemy groups and therefore have divided loyalties between their families of origin (fathers and brothers) and procreation (husbands and in-laws).

Women have also been excluded from armed combat where they have been numerically scarce. The Yanomamö of South America, who practice female infanticide and are polygamous, are one such example; not only do women not bear arms, during murderous raids they are immune except as booty (Chagnon). In the West, there were also long periods of demographic imbalance whether due to female infanticide, neglect, poor nutrition, and the hazards of childbirth; for many men, women were also scarce because of polygamy and concubinage. During the Middle Ages, women had shortened life expectancies due to strenuous work as producers and reproducers; they were also more susceptible to the violence of the age—especially abduction—and were in greater demand than males in the still-active slave-trade (Herlihy).

Yet, despite their exclusion from combat, women could be counted among those who supplied militaries with services such as food, laundry, and mending so long as European armies remained hybrids of public and private enterprise with many tasks subcontracted to civilian entrepreneurs (van Doorn). It is only with the institutionalization of armies under direct state control during the military revolution of the mid-sixteenth to seventeenth centuries that women were excluded from their association with armed forces (Hacker and Hacker).

But, if women have been, and continue to be, active participants in various war practices, how do we explain the western insistence that war and the military are masculine? And how do we explain the absence of women from its past war narratives? What may partly explain the appearance of female combatants in the historical discourse of certain eras, and their disappearance or their appearance of passivity in others, is the predisposition of (male) witnesses to either acknowledge or overlook this behaviour. This is what Elshtain suggests in her periodization of dominant images of women's war-related roles. In the first, or Mirror stage of the pre-Christian heroic era, women were the warrior's mirror on the battlefield, reflecting back his bloody glory so as to enhance it. Disputing those who have thought women of Greek tragedies to be pacifists, Elshtain notes that they were often bloodthirsty and revengeful; what they mourned were the effects of war. Since the Other, is, in part, "a projection of repressed or unacknowledged parts of the self" (32), and the human subject in Ancient Greek and Germanic barbarian societies was insufficiently complex to split into parts to be embraced or rejected, the warrior mentality could not allow for female pacifism, if it did exist.

In the Christian era, the human subject becomes "complex enough to split" (Elshtain 33) and women shift from men's Mirror to their Other, possessing qualities that dominant men must deny within themselves: love, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, close ties with nature, charity, nurturance, reciprocity, and pacifism. Women have vacillated between a peacetime posture of pacifist moral superiority opposed to an essentialist male bellicosity, and a wartime pos-

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ture of patriotic fervor that supported, though failed to endorse, war. This combination of pacifism between wars and patriotism in wartime served to absolve women of responsibility for military violence.

Elshtain's third and contemporary stage is that of militarized feminism which rejects both the second stage's essentialized pacifist Other and its opposition to male militarism and its destructiveness. Militarized feminism represents a regression to something akin to the Mirror phase: the Other and what it represents is suppressed, and war is again wholeheartedly endorsed. Immersed in the warrior code, Elshtain's militarized feminist casts off her role as enhancer of male bellicosity, androgynously embraces the soldier's identity, and aims to join him on the battlefield.

Elshtain's narrative can certainly account for the lobbying that has sought and realized an expansion in military occupations open to women as well as their right to serve as equal citizens alongside men in combat.[5] But can it account for the contrary argument that there is a need to protect the "manliness of war?" (Barrow qtd in Lloyd). Lloyd looks at equal employment opportunity in the military through the lens of the western philosophical connection between war, citizenship, and gender. In this tradition, sacrificing one's life in battle has long been conflated with masculinity, and has been constructed as a right—even a privilege—of male citizenship (Lloyd).[6] Women are "symbol(s) of attachment to individual bodies, private interests and natural feeling ... all that war and citizenship is supposed to contain and transcend" (Lloyd 76). Going into battle entails discarding the feminine. Men's patriotism is demonstrated in the masculinity of war and self-sacrifice; women's is demonstrated in the surrender of sons to "significant deaths" (Lloyd 76). This would explain why admitting women to combat is so disruptive to the military: as well as what maleness and femaleness symbolize, this symbolism has been "incorporated into the gender construction of real men and women" (Lloyd 76).

Elshtain's bifurcated model (Christian Male Warrior/ Female Other) and the western political ideals of the masculinity of war (Lloyd) provide a broader theoretical context for understanding what women and their femininity represent to western militaries. Recent empirical support is provided by Francke who concludes that, despite the need for women by American armed services, opposition to women in combat is based on the military's deep cultural need for masculine exclusivity. Turning to the Canadian military, my own study (Kovitz) suggests considerable historical continuity in a gendered division of labour that has confined women to subordinate, traditional roles first as "nursing sisters" in Saskatchewan during the 1885 Northwest Rebellion, then with the Canadian contingent in the Boer War, and later with the Canadian Army Medical Corps during World War I (Davis; Pierson).

Later, during the Second World War, even though the numbers of women greatly expanded, women were, again, relegated to traditional roles. And although World War II was promoted as an emancipatory watershed for Canadian women, both military and civilian, and although a small minority of service women did eventually graduate from traditional jobs into skilled blue-collar trades, most remained segregated and subordinated in jobs identified as women's work (Pierson). Moreover, women, as a group, were subordinated to men: women officers could command women, but in divisions that were under male authority (Dumont *et al*). Within an institutional division which distinguished the operational or combat end from administrative or support functions, women were recruited to fill the shortfall of male military support staff, only ever filling a tiny percentage (1.4 per cent of the Canadian Air Force and 2.8 per cent of the Army) of jobs considered suitable for women, to free men for combat duty.

Double standards also prevailed, for example, in pay and other benefits; in officer qualifications[7] (Dumont); in parental status; in designating enlisted men as "soldiers" and women as "volunteers" (Prentice *et al.*); and even in provisioning only men with condoms and prophylactic kits, while portraying women as purveyors of sexually-transmitted disease. Uniformed women symbolized the threat which the war posed to traditional sexual morality and the gendered social order (Pierson). But, what may have most marked the gender divide is that, unlike men, women were exempt from the severest penalties under military law: penal servitude, imprisonment, detention and the death penalty by court martial. Bearing out Lloyd's argument, these exemptions reflected deeply binarized notions of war and peace, life and death, and notions about people as essentially gendered beings. Women were seen as the bearers of human life, therefore exempt from killing, and also needing protection from death in battle. To men was reserved both the right and, again, what was deemed a privilege, to die for their country, which was how they were used by the military elite: "as cannon fodder by the high command" (Pierson 127-8).

This is the gender divide that has carried through to today, and in its breach, ordered by the Human Rights Tribunal in 1989, poses the greatest threat to the Canadian Forces. Despite a more frequent role as peacekeeper since World War II—notwithstanding the recent participation in the NATO bombing of Kosovo (Spring 1999)—the Canadian Forces remain legally mandated and structurally organized for war. Their primary goal remains "operational effectiveness." The military meets its goal of perfecting the techniques of death and destruction through an organizational structure which recruits and constructs different kinds of lives and deaths. Embedded in its ranked and authoritarian organization are multiple oppositions: war/peace; friend/enemy; defender/defended; military/

society; operational effectiveness/ineffectiveness. It is onto every facet of its organizational structure and onto these oppositions that a dualized, militarized gender, splintered into multiple masculinities and femininities, is mapped. Understanding the social construction of gender in the Canadian Forces requires mapping it onto the Forces' organizational structure and requirements, manifested both materially in bodies and in the symbolic association of men and women with different social spheres which are seen to either support or undermine aspects of the military endeavour. Here lies the gender boundary which military men establish, mark, and defend.

The example of female sexuality illustrates this point. Although seemingly contradictory at first, two forms of female sexuality seem less so when traced to their source in the military's structure, needs and practices. Thus, on the one hand, female sexuality can serve as the object of men's sexual desire to affirm their masculine heterosexuality[8] which is conflated with violence. On the other hand, as seduction, female sexuality can distract and debilitate men's violent resolve, and can be especially lethal in the form of "fraternization" (sexual liaisons between members of different ranks), threatening the military's very foundation: its hierarchy.

Femininity is another example illustrating gender's roots in military organizational requisites. Like female sexuality, femininity is also splintered into multiple, sometimes contradictory, attributes. Nurturing femininity (a component of Elshtain's second stage) acts as a welcoming counterpoint to that military masculinity which is lived out in a largely antithetical world: aggressive, competitive, dirty, gruff, vulgar, harsh, brutal, and deadly. It is in this context that one of my respondents referred to women as "soothing." As weakness, femininity can also mark the antithesis of soldiering: reminding soldiers of what they must not be, and representing the sphere of the defended, thereby providing the military with a key *raison d'être* and soldiers with their identity as defenders. Yet, as weakness, femininity can also debilitate. The family is a principal site of this contradiction: incarnated in military wives, femininity services male military members just as corporate wives service their husbands (Harrison and Laliberté), and even more so because of soldiering's extreme conditions.[9] But the family also makes demands which conflict with the Forces' and can disrupt operational effectiveness. Thus, when one of my respondent's informed his commanding officer that his wife was depressed, having been left alone with a new baby for two and one-half months while he was away on exercise, the response was, "Get a grip on your wife."

To conclude, in the case of both militarized female sexuality and femininity, much of the threat derives, not from women themselves, but from their identification with those social spheres or attributes which are antithetical to the military's core organizational imperative of operational effectiveness. Each of the Forces' organizational requirements has structural referents which can be found in official and unofficial narratives manifested in, or associated with, gendered identities, social practices and meanings. And, in-so-far as the military's operational effectiveness is aimed at the enemy—about which military discourse is strangely silent—and the enemy can be said to represent whatever might impact negatively on the military, from within or without, women come to represent, and thereby to embody, the Enemy itself. Whereas women have worked alongside military men, in the past gender boundaries were well marked and institutional efforts were made to defend them. What makes women's entry so threatening, now, is that, despite the Forces' reliance on a dualized gender system, it is under orders to integrate women on an equal footing. This has the potential of challenging and disrupting not only men but the military's very goals and methods. In this sense, women are the "enemy within".

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[1]There is little public evidence of women soldiers's abuse because, for one, most countries have no female soldiers. Women comprise fewer than two per cent of the world's soldiers, and apart from Sweden (42 per cent) and Australia (11 per cent), Canada (8.6 per cent) and the United States (10 per cent) had the highest proportion of women soldiers in 1990 (Addis 7-8). South of the border, the Tailhook scandal involved American naval officers who sexually assaulted their women colleagues and guests during a flier's convention in February 1992 (Dobie).

[2]And why, nearly a year after the appointment of an ombudsperson to address the complaints of military personnel against their commanders has he still to be given a mandate (Gamble).

[3]This article is drawn from a doctoral study entitled *Mining Masculinities in the Canadian Military* (Kovitz). It used narrative analyses of (unclassified) written military texts and oral interviews of military officers, as well as semi-participant observation over a period of five years.

[4]We also need to problematize rather than take for granted the masculinity of the military and combat, but this is the subject of another paper.

[5]Women have this right in four countries: Belgium, Canada (except submarines), Denmark, Norway (Department of National Defence).

[6]Enloe notes that the right to participate in violence

"under state discipline for the sake of sacrifice for the nation...[remains] the norm for "first class citizenship", at least in the United States (102).

[7]Women needed a university degree or equivalent, whereas men only needed seven to ten years of schooling.

[8]Thus, despite the earlier reading of "the Riot Act to ... [the] troops over sexual harassment and outdated attitudes toward women" ("Regimental dinner had steak on the menu"), a regimental dinner in Sherbrooke, Québec, held in early September, 1998, featured a pornographic film projected on a flag, a streaker, and "a hooded chorus line of men in G-strings" ("Officers suspended over port at military dinner").

[9]The military's dependence on the unpaid services of military wives was recognized recently in a monument entitled "Home Fires," set up in a park on Canadian Forces Base Petawawa. The monument, which, according to the commander of Land Force Central Area, Brigadire General. Walter Holmes, is long overdue, intends to be a visible sign of appreciation. The monument is engraved with a stylized picture of a mother and child, each with tears engraved on their faces, and holding a candle ("Military wives get recognition: Home Fires momument acknowledges service to country").

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There amidst the crumbled stones
and shattered ruins
I stood alone
among women the last of a proud line
that defended the walls of a fortress
once so mighty
but now little more than
blackened rubble.
I tried, my friend,
I fought and fought
against the forces that threatened to
overwhelm
not only me
but the thousand other warriors
who bravely stood by my side
but I could not win.
I could not prevent
the onslaught that killed my sisters
and wounded so many more.
Knocked down
I lay motionless,
staring up at the nameless faces
that so determinedly
rushed to surround the fortress.
Intent on conquering,
so blindly seeking triumph
that they did not stop
and wonder at the ocean of bodies
trampled upon by muddy boots.
Do they not see?
Do they not see the resurrection of
a thousand warriors who now stand
proudly?
Immovable they are as they stand
swords in hand
defending in spirit
a fortress that shall stand
forever.

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