

## War is where the hearth is: gendered labor and the everyday reproduction of the geopolitical in the army reserves

Victoria M. Basham & Sergio Catignani

To cite this article: Victoria M. Basham & Sergio Catignani (2018) War is where the hearth is: gendered labor and the everyday reproduction of the geopolitical in the army reserves, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 20:2, 153-171, DOI: [10.1080/14616742.2018.1442736](https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2018.1442736)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2018.1442736>



© 2018 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 19 Mar 2018.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 775



[View Crossmark data](#)





Citing articles: 2 [View citing articles](#)



OPEN ACCESS



# War is where the hearth is: gendered labor and the everyday reproduction of the geopolitical in the army reserves

Victoria M. Basham <sup>a</sup> and Sergio Catignani <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Politics and International Relations, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK; <sup>b</sup>Strategy & Security Institute (Department of Politics), University of Exeter, Exeter, UK



## ABSTRACT

The feminized imaginary of “home and hearth” has long been central to the notion of soldiering as masculinist protection. Soldiering and war are not only materialized by gendered imaginaries of home and hearth though, but through everyday labors enacted within the home. Focusing on in-depth qualitative research with women partners and spouses of British Army reservists, we examine how women’s everyday domestic and emotional labor enables reservists to serve, constituting “hearth and home” as a site through which war is made possible. As reservists – who are still overwhelmingly heterosexual men – become increasingly called upon by the state, one must consider how the changing nature of the Army’s procurement of soldiers is also changing demands on women’s labor. Feminist IPE scholars have shown broader trends in the outsourcing of labor to women and its privatization. Our research similarly underscores the significance of everyday gendered labor to the geopolitical. Moreover, we highlight the fragility of military power, given that women can withdraw their labor at any time. The article concludes that paying attention to women’s everyday labor in the home facilitates greater understanding of one of the key sites through which war is both materialized and challenged.

**KEYWORDS** Gendered labor; home and hearth; reservist’s wives/women partners; war; military power

## Introduction

This article examines how everyday gendered forms of labor in the home, specifically the labor of the women partners and wives of reservists (hereafter “women partners”), reproduce and challenge the state’s capacity to wage war. Feminists have long-argued that the home is a symbolic site that has been reified as that which is fought for and that markets, states and armed forces have relied on women’s unpaid labor within the home for centuries, even

**CONTACT** Victoria M. Basham  [bashamv@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:bashamv@cardiff.ac.uk)  Department of Politics and International Relations, Cardiff University, Law Building, Museum Avenue, Cardiff, CF10 3AX, UK

© 2018 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group  
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

though its value to national and global economies is habitually obscured (*inter alia* Elshtain 1981; Pateman 1988; Yuval-Davis 1997; Basham 2008; Rai, Hoskyns, and Thomas 2014; Gray 2016). The invisibility of women's household labor is the outcome of gendered practices whereby the home has been designated as private and apolitical; as distinct from the public sphere dominated by men constituted as its "key players" and, thus, the shapers of (geo)-political agendas. The resultant division of "public" from "private" has made women's experiences less visible, disguised the toll "domestic" labor takes, and enabled men to dominate both spheres. The traditional casting of the state as both agent and referent of military security has further worked to confine gender relations to the "domestic" and "private" sphere. The everyday is, thus, both an empirical reality and an outcome of discursive processes "through which some aspects of social phenomena are defined as global and others as mundane" (Chisholm and Stachowitsch 2016, 826).

Though the household and its significance have been explored in feminist analyses of global political economy and geopolitics (*inter alia* Enloe 1989; Harrison and Laliberté 1997; Dowler 2012; Rai, Hoskyns, and Thomas 2014; Elias and Roberts 2016), much of this literature does not directly deal with the "military home" nor the specific ways in which women's labor in it reproduces military power. Addressing this is important, because whilst the growing expectations of reserve families reflect broader trends wherein women's domestic labor is discounted from evaluations of economies despite being central to their functioning (Hoskyns and Rai 2007; Peterson 2010, 2013; Elias 2011; Elias and Rai 2015), it is also vital to consider the specific ways in which the changing nature of how the Army recruits is also changing the nature and extent of labor required by families, especially women partners. Moreover, despite the "relative paucity of research on women married to servicemen," particularly within the UK context (Hyde 2016, 857), research on women married to reservists, as opposed to regular soldiers, is scarcer still. As we will show, whilst military power heavily relies on the unpaid labor of *all* women partners of soldiers, reservists' partners are mobilized differently. By drawing on insights from in-depth qualitative research with British Army reservists' women partners and reservists, we aim to contribute to these debates by showing how specific forms of women's labor, in the context of reserve service, reproduce war. Moreover, though the influence of geopolitics on the home has been considered, it is important to ask "how geopolitics is influenced *by*, and emerges *from*, the home" (Brickell 2012, 575, original emphasis). Failing to do so could cast women as passive reproducers of the geopolitical when they have considerable agency vis-à-vis "domestic" roles to destabilize and reconfigure it. As Enloe (1989, 3) argues, paying "serious attention to women" and their labor continues to be important, because it "can expose [just] how much power it takes to maintain the international political system in its present form." Following Enloe, we aim to show how war is

animated by practices of social reproduction in the homes of reservists and their women partners (Tickner 1992; Basham 2013). We argue that the labor of these women not only enables reservists to engage in military activities, but also the British state to wage war and prepare for it by maintaining its armed forces. “Home and hearth” is, therefore, a significant site *from* where war materializes.

The research discussed herein comprises over sixty interviews with British Army reservists, nine interviews with spouses/partners (eight of whom are women) and interviews with unit staff and commanders, senior military personnel and members of military family support organizations.<sup>1</sup> All interviewees participated voluntarily by contacting us. After reading our study’s participant information sheet and providing written informed consent we interviewed participants face-to-face or by telephone. Reservists were primarily recruited through on-site presentations during which we distributed recruitment leaflets. Following interviews with them, we asked that they pass on a further recruitment leaflet to their spouse/partner inviting them for an interview. Our relatively small sample of spouses/partners reflects our reliance on reservists passing information on and their geographical dispersal, which made on-site recruitment presentations impractical. Nonetheless, by employing a feminist “grounded theory” approach that seeks to center women’s voices and experiences and theorize their wider significance, we offer theoretical propositions grounded in empirical data. As in any grounded study, our sample size’s adequacy is determined by its richness and our striving to involve as many experiences as possible to develop our analysis (Baxter and Eyles 1997).

The article proceeds in two sections. The first explores how (predominantly) male reservists rely on their women partners “picking up the slack” to be able to undertake military service. We aim to show that the household is a site that facilitates soldiering, and ultimately, preparations for war and its execution.<sup>2</sup> To do so, we consider some of the different forms women’s labor takes and its impact on those women. From this, we problematize the notion that it is the reservist’s “spare-time” that the Army foremost requires by making women’s labor and its significance to military power more visible. The second section considers how the Army’s reliance on women’s labor not only facilitates war and war preparedness, but has the capacity to destabilize it. As Hyde (2016) highlights in relation to the wives of regular soldiers, their domestic and emotional labor connects with the soldiering labor of their husbands. Exploring the negotiations this entails can reveal the emotional contingency produced when military readiness is expected of both. This emotional contingency can, we argue, lead reservists’ women partners to question their support for reservists which could lead them to exit the military to avoid risking their relationships. Moreover, we suggest that military power’s reliance on reservists’ women partners may be precarious, because reservists’ women partners are located outside of the formalized structures of support

provided to “regular” military families, however imperfect they are (Gray 2016; Hyde 2016) or however much they normalize the military’s expectations of wives (Harrison and Laliberté 1997). Accordingly, we conclude that by centering the lived experiences of women in relationships with reservists and by focusing attention to their everyday labors in the home, we can expose the contingent nature of the state’s ability to wage war and make preparations for its eventuality. Women’s lived experiences offer us both a glimpse into just how much gendered power is required for war to become possible, and the capacity for women, through their everyday practices, to destabilize it.

### Picking up the slack

As a result of the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review (HM Government 2010), the ongoing transformation of the British military has entailed, among other things, cuts to the regular Army and targets to recruit greater numbers of volunteer “part-time” soldiers to the Army Reserve.<sup>3</sup> The UK military does not currently collect systematic data on the sexual orientation of its military personnel,<sup>4</sup> but research from before same-sex couples were legally entitled to marry in the UK shows that both regulars and reservists were more likely to be married and less likely to be divorced, as compared with the general population of England and Wales (Keeling, Wessely, and Fear 2017). Whilst women are serving in greater numbers in the Reserves – especially when compared to the regular Army – the Reserves is dominated by men.<sup>5</sup> Though not all of these men will be in relationships, and not all of them will be heterosexual relationships,<sup>6</sup> self-reporting and research suggest that most servicemen in the Army Reserves in relationships will be in heterosexual ones with women (Keeling, Wessely, and Fear 2017). As such, the women partners of male reservists form the focus of this article.

Gender-focused scholarship has traditionally been more attentive to men and masculinities in war, unsurprisingly given that, the world over, men dominate state militaries and security apparatuses. Women, in contrast, continue to be overrepresented in “auxiliary roles” (prostitutes, wives, nurses, etc.). Thus, whilst women are sometimes found *in* the state military apparatus or at its periphery, men *are* the state military apparatus (Enloe 2000; Sasson-Levy 2003). As Hyde (2014) notes, the women partners of military men have long been an “invisible, reserve-reserve army of labour” for militaries. The Army’s increased reliance on reservists, thus, requires a consideration of *how* their women partners may constitute a further reserve army of labor.

Militaries have typically been described as “greedy institutions,” because they limit the time and energy their personnel can devote elsewhere, including family (Segal 1986; Hockey 1986). For the women partners of regular soldiers, re-postings and expectations that families will live “on base” has often

entailed women sacrificing their own careers and regularly uprooting their lives (Gray 2016; Hyde 2016). As Enloe (1989) argues, the “ideal military wife” is a woman content to adopt the military’s worldview and see themselves as “serving” too. Plans to expand the Reserves mean the Army is likely to become much “greedier” towards reservists, but the implications for their women partners differ. Whereas the requirement to re-site the home on the military base means the Army very deliberately inserts itself into the “private” lives of its regular personnel and their families, its reliance on reservists’ women partners is far less visible but no less significant. Most reservists work full-time and, therefore,<sup>7</sup> the Army (n.d.) expects them to serve during what it calls their “spare-time.” This implies reserve service is a quasi-leisure activity. Mobilizing reservists relies heavily on the malleability of the work/spare-time distinction, because time outside paid employment such as evenings, weekends and periods of annual leave is rarely actually going “spare”; it is often time that could be spent, among other things, fulfilling household responsibilities and being with family. Accordingly, military power is reliant on women partners “picking up the slack,” meaning they rely on women performing additional household duties that reservists drop in order to engage in military service (such as a greater amount of childcare) and that are generated by military service (such as the complex care required post-deployment). This is a somewhat different, though related, “gendered story” from the traditional family set up on a military base whereby the Army’s expectations of women are more apparent. The military’s reliance on reservists’ women partners to socially reproduce military power is unacknowledged through the notion that it is the reservists’ “spare-time” that is the only or primary thing the Army requires. Moreover, the potentially depletive effects on the “spare-time,” leisure and health and wellbeing of those women partners are altogether erased (Rai, Hoskyns, and Thomas 2014). As reflected in broader economic trends, failure to recognize how these women socially reproduce both the home and military power “disguises the extent of gendered harm and undermines campaigns for gender justice” (Rai, Hoskyns, and Thomas 2014, 100).

The Army’s increased reliance on reservists has come at a time when not only the military, but the family is under pressure in the midst of global recession, inflation and spending cuts. Though financial pressures could be alleviated by extra income from the Reserves, many families already rely on two incomes which may already make childcare, other care commitments and housework hard to manage. Moreover, civilian employment, which the majority of reservists engage in, has seen a growth of evening and weekend working, and the rise of a long-hours working culture, also influenced broader economic pressures and political ones. Furthering labor market flexibility has become common to both civilian and military workplaces. All this means that at the very same time that the Army is becoming

a “greedier institution,” seeking “exclusive and undivided loyalty” from its soldiers (Coser 1974, 4), families and employers are also becoming “greedier” about what they require of members and employees respectively. In research on Israeli reservists, Lomsky-Feder, Gazit, and Ben-Ari (2008, 608) show that, “during their men’s reserve service” women support and facilitate military service through increased childcare, cooking, cleaning, and household maintenance responsibilities, and that “sociologically speaking,” “for the duration of reserve duty these families become single-parent households.” For many of the male reservists we interviewed, their ability to undertake Reserve activities similarly hinged on the assumption that their women partners would “just get on with” such activities in their absence. As Roger, speaking about his wife, stated:

I think she’s pretty long-suffering ... I’m just very lucky, I mean ... I didn’t sit down and say “you know this could happen. How are we going to solve this?” It was, “this is going to happen ... we’re going to have to find a way round it.” So ... I took a lot for granted.

Similarly, Pam, a reservist’s wife, told us: “I just did it actually. I just made it work as most women do.” This expectation that reservists’ women partners would “make it work” was a common theme in our interviews with them and with male reservists. As Felicity admitted:

It was more my responsibility of sorting out the children, which is fine, but you do need to have prior warning ... My commitments often at a weekend ... would be orientated around whether he was away or not. If I had to do something and he was away, then I wouldn’t do it.

This practice of women “just making it work” is less visible because according to the Army, it is the Reservist’s spare-time that is utilized. In reality, this time is rarely “spare.” As reservist Alex told us, “It’s a bit selfish, yeah ... but ... I enjoy it. I know it’s selfish. It does give the chance to get away.” During interviews with high-ranking reservists, we also came across several instances in which they stated that whilst they had not originally intended to stay in the Army for very long, as they progressed up the ranks they often hinted to their partners that the next assignment would be “the last.” Such acts of momentary appeasement were often serial occurrences during several different stages of an Army career, suggesting a clear awareness of the pressure that staying in the military placed on women partners. Ultimately though, the desire to remain in the Army trumped this. As one senior officer conceded, “I have been saying to her that I am probably going to finish at the end of this appointment, since I was a Captain.”

As Hooper (1999, 485) suggests, militaries have long invited men to enlist and become “a man of the world”; to “flee the domestic hearth in the search of manhood – the further the better.” This appears to be an enduring draw of

military service. Though reservists join the Army for multiple reasons, salient motives emerged including being “outdoorsy,” opportunities to travel and do adventurous training, and deployments. Each involves leaving the “domestic” sphere. Some of the language interviewees used to make sense of their motivations for enlisting even drew directly on gender. For example, Adam told us: “I know its cliché to say that every boy wants to be a soldier, but that was very much me.” Similarly, Alex saw Reserve service as a source of adventure, declaring that, “it was a way to basically play big boys’ cowboys and Indians ... So, running around and being a complete idiot with no responsibility and nothing else to worry about.” For Brad, listening to his dad’s military service stories, and particularly his deployments, got him interested in serving in the Reserve:

You listen to some of the stories and he’s got a couple of pictures up around the house of his tours to Afghanistan and various things that he’s done ... you think ... that looked pretty good, I’d quite like to do that.

The potential impact on women of the repeated absences entailed by reserve service is often less visible, however, precisely because so many of these women simply “get on with it.” As Lesley, a reservist’s wife, told us, absences take their toll: “I would actually feel that he would come back home really tired, he would have really late nights and I used to feel like everybody was taking everything out of him and then we’re left with nothing.”

In many respects, despite popular notions of women’s increased social, material and political gains, the Army’s reliance on traditional gendered divisions of labor are also echoed in wider society. Despite the introduction of shared parental leave in the UK in April 2015, recent research suggests fewer than 10 percent of working men have taken up more than 1 percent of the time allowed, meaning women are still overwhelmingly responsible for childcare. Whilst parental choice plays an important role, 80 percent of the employees surveyed said their decision to share parental leave depended on family finances (Osborne 2016). Moreover, an Oxfam report on UK household divisions of labor found that women spend over a quarter (28 percent) more time on housework and nearly a third (31 percent) more time on childcare than male partners, which contributes to a global division of gendered labor in which “unpaid work by women such as cooking, cleaning and childcare could be valued as much as \$10 trillion a year – 13 percent of global GDP” (Oxfam 2016). However, there are key differences that military partners have to negotiate. As Hyde’s (2016) work on the wives of regular soldiers shows, the state’s ability to deploy soldiers and continually prepare for war relies on military wives also being in a state of constant “readiness.” War requires, for example, women’s emotional labor to smooth out the ruptures brought about by operational deployments and preparations for them, both for soldiers and other family members. Moreover, deployments and their possibility



require that women maintain the supposed stability of home and hearth despite them being continually disrupted by those very deployments and preparations for them (Hyde 2016).

The possibility of increased deployment of reservists, significant numbers of whom were deployed in the recent Afghanistan and Iraq interventions,<sup>8</sup> means their women partners are also more likely required to be “ready” in future.<sup>9</sup> “Readiness” takes different forms. For Felicity, the challenge of her husband’s deployment was the impact it had on her ability to juggle her job with childcare. She said: “On his deployments, I had to change my working practice because I couldn’t go on call and couldn’t work nights because I had nobody to look after the children.” For others, it was emotional labor that was most expected of them. Pam told us, for instance, that her husband had a very different understanding of the impact of his deployment and his subsequent return on her and the rest of their family than she did. She stated: “He says, ‘Oh no, I’m not affected,’ and I say, ‘Well actually, you have been affected’.” Similarly Kerry told us that: “He was different, he wasn’t entirely himself, but he was happier than he’d been on R&R [rest and recuperation] and ... It was quite a tough tour with lots of injuries, lots of life changing injuries.”

Studies of the impact of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) on veterans’ wives show that their lives tend to come to revolve around their husband’s illness and needs (Dekel et al. 2005). Whilst not all of the women we interviewed about the emotional labor involved in coping with their partner’s deployment and return involved cases of PTSD, some form of complex emotional labor was usually expected of them. As Erikson (2005, 349) argues, the time and energy required of women providing emotional support are frequently overlooked, because it is characterized as “interpersonal intimacy or love,” not labor. This, she argues, “parallels the once conventional view of housework and childcare” wherein these tasks were conceptualized as “components of a female role.” Recognizing emotional labor *as labor* is key, therefore, to challenging the gendered scripts that both normalize and conceal women’s emotional work.

Some of the military’s expectations of women partners take more mundane forms like adapting to the peculiarities of military culture. Reservists’ women partners sometimes find themselves in situations where they are expected to perform the “military spouse” role, despite most identify as civilians. As Harriet relayed, such expectations can be awkward for reservists’ partners. In a conversation about whether or not she had met many other women partners of reservists, she said:

Harriet: I remember talking to one guy who is in Jay’s squadron ... his partner hadn’t come with him and he was like, “She won’t

come anymore ... She is not going to be dictated to by what she can wear and ... can't wear".

Interviewer: How funny. So, did you have to wear something quite specific then?

Harriet: Well, yes, because in the mess where they do their functions and things, if it's a formal do and they are in their outfits with the jackets and everything, then ... you have to cover your shoulders and you can't wear anything above the knee ... the women can't pour the port. There are a lot of things like that, which you've got to love, but you've got to roll your eyes at, at the same time [laughter].

The expectation that reservists' women partners will come to events dressed according to what the military deems "appropriate" betrays the continued investment of the military in "essentialized masculine and feminine scripts" where women's attire must "satisfy a male definition of attractiveness" that conforms to "a heteronormative paradigm" (Skidmore 2004, 234). Thus, despite recent policy changes opening all ground close combat roles to women, the military's expectations of wives and women partners reinstates the military as masculine and home and hearth as feminized and heteronormative.

As our interviews show, "picking up the slack" sometimes means women taking on household labor that might otherwise be done by reservists if they were at home, not soldiering, but can also involve women "picking up" *additional* labor generated by the peculiar emotional and institutional demands of military service. Thus, whilst the general demands made of these women are broadly consistent with the gendered modes of social reproduction that national and global markets have long relied on (Rai, Hoskyns, and Thomas 2014), conditions specific to the military, such as deployments, generate additional forms of gendered labor like complex caregiving. As we also show, this social reproductive labor done by reservists' women partners depletes them physically, socially and emotionally (Rai, Hoskyns, and Thomas 2014) and can contribute to their time poverty, limiting their access to leisure and other opportunities (Bryson 2007). Much as Rai, Hoskyns, and Thomas (2014) have argued for the need to account for women's social reproduction and the depletion it entails to strengthen campaigns for gender justice, by discussing the labor of reservists' women partners, and its depletive effects, we have sought to problematize the Army's manipulation of the idea that reserve service is merely a "spare-time" activity of the reservist and to highlight just how significant women's labor for the materialization of, and preparation for, war is.

## Home is where the heart is?

Thus far we have built on work that takes women's work in the home seriously by mapping out some of the specific ways that the labor of reservists' women

partners facilitates war and war preparedness. The expectation that both soldier and partner will work to facilitate military readiness is contingent upon multiple factors, however. In the regular Army, various structures attempt to stabilize women's support, from the provision of services like housing to the normalization of moving out of that housing periodically when a soldier is reposted (Gray 2016; Hyde 2016). For reservists' women partners, however, support from the Army is largely limited to signposting them to services provided by civilian agencies, or, during deployment, to occasional briefings and issuing them with a military contact. Their geographical dispersal and independence from military structures may make their support for military readiness more contingent and less easy to stabilize. Thus, whilst reservists' women partners do constitute a further reserve army of labor, by being less beholden to the military's formalized structures, they also have significant capacity to destabilize military readiness, and with it war and war preparedness, by withdrawing their labor.

This distance from the military's formalized structures is reflected in one of the ways reservists often try to maintain the support of women partners: compartmentalizing Reserve service and minimizing its impact on "family time." Prior research suggests that reservists should, and can be, very good at compartmentalizing given that they "constantly move between dimensions of space and time and mediate social contexts of involvement and knowledge," from the workplace to the military to home (Lomsky-Feder, Gazit, and Ben-Ari 2008, 598). However, several interviewees recounted struggles with compartmentalization and military service often seeped into the home. In this struggle between reservists and their women partners, cracks in the military's reliance on the readiness of both begin to show. For many reservists, compartmentalization works in one direction: in deference to the Army. As Dom revealed:

I find it quite difficult to pull out my phone and think about my other life interrupting green, because I've kind of got that ingrained 24/7. I've taken the Queen's shilling today; it's the Queen's day. Whereas the other way round if the phone rings and the Adjutant's got an issue I'll answer it ... [and] get on with it straight away.

Compartmentalizing reserve service has become increasingly difficult with increased commitment expectations by the Army, but also technological change that makes reservists more "reachable." Whereas in the past, geographic dispersal might have meant Army business could only take place "on site" on encrypted machines, Scott told us that reservists are now issued with "MOD Blackberry's with ... email capacity" and that this was "a double-edged sword, because it's great because you can stay in touch, but it's also bad because people at battalion headquarters expect you to be in touch." Similarly, women partners also pointed to technology as a vehicle

for reserve service seeping into home life and destabilizing compartmentalization. For Harriet:

It's the phone calls, into the evening, on a night when it's not a Reserve night and we've been out, we're out on a walk or having dinner and he's had to take a call, well he feels like he has to take a call so I think it just infiltrates into every aspect.

Whilst the imaginary of the hearth and home as a space apart from military service can be important in sustaining gendered notions of what military power protects, military power routinely seeps into home and hearth. Whereas this "boundary" has always been porous for the women partners of regulars (Gray 2016), it is less normalized for those of reservists and the irregularity with which the military intrudes in this way could lead to withdrawals of their support. A common tactic among reservists for ensuring that the women in their lives will continue to put up with such interruptions is to promise that at some amorphous future date, "quality time" together will be forthcoming and recompense for time spent with the Reserves. As Roger stated, "When I had leave I was full on with the family and we would do sort of very special things to compensate for the fact that I was away a lot." Some reservists also promised to alleviate some of their women partners' pressures to pursue their own ambitions, albeit at a later date:

We negotiated that really before I started [i.e., command], but there have been re-negotiations ... "It's only two and a half years and then you can concentrate on going out and do your walks in Peru or whatever". So, there's been horse-trading (Matthew, Reservist and Commanding Officer).

Whilst recent survey data suggests that 87 percent of reservists believe their family values their military service (MoD 2017d), our research suggests that maintaining this often involves reservists engaging in "horse-trading," as Matthew admitted, or other forms of financial or moral "bribery" such as promising that the annual bounty reservists receive in exchange for dedicating a set number of days per year to the Army will be used to pay for something beneficial to the family. Tanya, one of the women reservists we interviewed, did just this to maintain the support of her husband. She admitted that,

I use it to my advantage, because what I've always done with the extra money that we get. It always goes into a separate account and it's the holiday fund ... The Army money is always family money, because actually without the support of my husband I wouldn't be able to do it anyway. So, we all get ... holidays with it.

Tanya's experience is a useful reminder that gender does not always map neatly onto bodies and that whilst it is important to acknowledge that home and hearth are usually "where the women are" or are at least expected

to be (Enloe 1989), this is not always the case. Tanya serves in a combat unit, which is dominated by men, and it is her husband who frequently picks up the slack.

Such experiences of “horse-trading” suggest that partners’ objections can be surmounted by reservists, enabling them to continue to serve rather than destabilizing their ability to do so. Nevertheless, the promised benefits to partners of the financial perks of Reserve service are often offset against continued concerns about the lack of time spent together, which can take their toll on relationships. For example, Harriet’s partner tried to sell a deployment to her as a source of extra income, but as she told us:

He was saying, “this is going to be a tour, but I’ll be able to get a decent sized deposit” [for a house]. To be honest, my thoughts were, that’s brilliant, but it’s not about the money. I would prefer to have you around for the next six months.

These pressures can be difficult even in relationships where both members are reservists. Whilst Rebecca is herself a committed reservist who understands the pressures of the role through her own experience, she still found herself supporting her partner’s reserve service and juggling her own commitments:

- Rebecca: I remember when it was just him in the Reserves and I stayed at home and that wasn’t very nice, because I didn’t feel like I had anything to do whilst he was doing all this stuff. I guess I resented it that way.
- Interviewer: So, it was having an impact at that point on how you felt?
- Rebecca: Yes. I think it still does to be honest. I do understand, because I think he has more pressures than I do because ... I think he wants to be promoted. They rely on him a lot more ... He’s been very busy recently, which has been quite hard.

Similarly, Tara relayed that these tensions could often affect other family members and the relationship between spouses:

I can’t say that we didn’t have arguments about it, but we’ve been able to work it out, but I’ve got really supportive parents. So, I suppose we didn’t have many of those because I’d be able to ring my mum up and say, “Oh, we’ve both got to go on this weekend, can you have the children?” It’s a bit like my mum and dad’s been in the Reserves as well.

The voluntary nature of Reserve service – the fact that reservists can “vote with their feet” at any time to draw on an expression frequently used by reservists – makes the emotional contingency of military readiness more marked than in regular military service. As Enloe (1989) has shown, the wives of regular soldiers are arguably more in control of their contributions to sustaining the military than some scholarship suggests, and family federations have utilized this knowledge to gain recognition and support for their unpaid labor that non-military women and reservists’ women partners can only dream of,

from schooling and childcare support to subsidized travel, adult education and training. Whilst many of these services are not available to reservists' partners, the voluntary nature of Reserve service, and their lack of reliance on the Army for housing and other basic needs, means they arguably have more scope to determine when and how to withdraw their labor, should they wish to. In several interviews, we indeed detected that spousal support was often predicated on the understanding that reservist commitments are voluntary and, thus, could be negotiated. As Pam stated, "the regular Army, they normally all live on the same base and they all move around together and the wives and the families just ... toddle on behind them, that's your lot." This is not how she or other women viewed their own experiences. Indeed, some women saw their partner's service as more of an opportunity than a burden. As Lesley acknowledged: "I've now learnt to enjoy my space ... I like it when he comes back, but I also like it when he goes away ... I can be myself and I can meet my friends."

One key milestone for some women was having children. This was regarded as something likely to affect their support for their partner being in the Reserves. As Kerry asserted: "I think if we had children it would be different. I think it would be very different if he was going off for two weeks, it would be a different story." However, whilst the prospect of having children raised similar issues for Harriet, the draw of Reserve service for her partner meant she was unsure who would sacrifice what:

If we have kids and he leaves for a long spat of time, I don't think it would be fair on the kids to not see him for ... but ... I would fully support him if he wanted to go for it and he was serious about ... going with the TA [sic] ... but ... if it was in an area of conflict then ... to be totally honest, I would be petrified and I would tell him that I would be just really worried at the thought of him going. At the end of the day, I would support him wholeheartedly ... but I would like to think ... if there were kids he would feel more of an obligation and a responsibility to be there for them.

Thus, the negotiation of expectations of military readiness in Reservist families is complex. There is greater potential for Reserve families to elevate family needs over military service than the families of regular personnel. Yet, Harriet's account demonstrates some of the complications when women's labor is in emotional forms such as understanding the desire to serve. The potential for disrupting war and war preparedness through withdrawing support for reservists may, thus, be much more accidental and contingent than deliberate, especially considering that most of the women we interviewed were broadly supportive of their partners' military service. Nonetheless, these accounts of negotiation and unease begin to unsettle the discursive divide between women's everyday labors and military power (Chisholm and Stachowitsch 2016) to some extent. Regardless of whether or not these women are fully aware of just how dependent military power and their partners are on

their labor, their knowledge of the volunteer nature of Reserve service, their refusal to “toddle behind” partners like the wives of regulars are expected to do, and their use of their partner’s military service as an opportunity, all suggest these women are not merely subjected to geopolitical power, they are agents of it.

## Conclusion

The British Army’s greater reliance on reservists ceding their “spare-time” to conduct military service relies on reservists’ women partners to “pick up the slack” and enable their men to serve. The notion that what the Army requires foremost is reservists’ “spare-time” conceals the wider significance of the unpaid, often invisible, labor of their women partners. By highlighting the specific forms of labor reservists’ women partners do and how it depletes them, we have instead sought to contribute to wider attempts to recognize women’s work in order to challenge this invisibility (Rai, Hoskyns, and Thomas 2014) and its co-optation. Whilst previous work on military families suggests that, “the more the military services adapt to family needs, the more committed will be both service members and their families to the institution” (Segal 1986, 34), our research suggests that not adapting to Reserve families’ needs could be more beneficial to the Army, because it can assume that a certain level of support from families will be forthcoming, that women will “just get on with it.” Nevertheless, it is also important to acknowledge that reservists’ women partners often have considerable agency over their labor and when to withdraw it. Whether they see how their labor sustains military power or not is not the issue, nor is the fact that many of these women would also be most likely to withdraw their support for pragmatic and personal reasons rather than lofty ideals like “disrupting war.” What is most interesting is that in examining the details of their lives it becomes possible to overcome tendencies to cast women as either passive receptors of geopolitical power or active opponents to it; to see the potential for disrupting and reconfiguring the geopolitical in the stuff of everyday life. Their potential for disruption is significant precisely because of its fluidity and contingency. At a time when the Army must adapt towards a greater reliance on reservists due to public spending cuts, bound up with wider neo-liberalizing tendencies to further labor market flexibility, the contingent nature of these women’s support suggests that the reproduction of military power is by no means inevitable. The invisible, yet significant, reliance on these women to allow “spare-time” to be constituted as such, to “pick up the slack” left by the absence of their reservist partners, and to take on additional labors generated by the military, is precarious because military power is contingent upon reservists’ women partners doing all this whilst tolerating their partners engaging in what is essentially a voluntary activity. Both the Army’s reliance

on the labor of reservists' women partners, and the agency these women have over their labor, demonstrates that war is not just the business of states and statespersons, but is also in the details (Lutz 2006). War is made possible by a multiplicity of everyday power relations including the unpaid, unacknowledged, and often invisible, labor of women in hearth and home.

## Acknowledgements

The authors want to thank the editors at IFJP and the three anonymous peer reviewers for their generous insights and critical engagement with the article. We would also like to thank participants of Cardiff University's Work in Progress series, Anne Harrington, Morten Ender, Marsha Henry, Louise Simpson of the Army Families Federation, and Nathan Ditton from the Army Welfare service. Their feedback and guidance on our research assisted us greatly in writing this article. The opinions expressed in this publication are solely those of the individual authors and do not reflect the views of the funders. Ethics approval for this study was obtained from the Ministry of Defence Research Ethics Committee and all participants gave informed consent before taking part (Protocol no. 583/MODREC/14).

## Notes

1. All names have been changed.
2. Though reservists engage in various activities other than "war," such as homeland defence and support of civilian infrastructure, these can contribute directly to the state's ability to wage war by "freeing up" regulars to be deployed. Moreover, the ability to wage war at will means maintaining a standing military. So, simply by virtue of enacting military service, reservists facilitate war and war preparedness.
3. Whilst reservists are initially "enlisted" for 12 years or up to the age of 55, they are not obliged to serve for any specific period and can leave at any point, unless compulsorily mobilized.
4. In 2011, the British military began giving new regular (not reserve) recruits the option to disclose their sexual orientation through the Recruit Trainee Survey and the Officer Cadet Survey. Ninety-five percent of respondents to the 2016–17 Recruit Trainee Survey and 97 percent of respondents to the Officer Cadet Survey reported their sexual orientation as "heterosexual/straight" (MoD 2017a, 2017b). A 2016 response to a Freedom of Information request stated that since November 2014 "all Service personnel have ... been encouraged to declare their sexual orientation, since this will give us a better understanding of the composition of our Armed Forces and help ensure our policies and practices fully support our personnel," which presumably include reservists. The same response is clear that the statistics only provide "a partial picture of the diversity across the Armed Forces as it is not compulsory to record the information on sexual orientation on our Joint Personnel Administration database and only 11 percent of members of the Armed Forces have chosen to do so." Of those 11 percent comprising 22,860 people, 570 or 2.5 percent identified as gay men, 530 or 2.3 percent identified as Gay women/lesbian, 290 or 1.2 percent identified as bisexual, and 21, 470 or 94 percent identified as heterosexual/straight.



5. According to the UK Armed Forces Biannual Diversity Statistics as of 1 October 2017 (MoD 2017c), women comprise 13.2 percent of Army reservists, compared to 9.1 percent of regular Army personnel. There are also more women officers in the Army Reserve (17.9 percent) than in the regular Army (11.8 percent). Both the regular Army and the Army Reserve remain dominated by men. It is also worth noting that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic personnel (not disaggregated by sex) comprise just 10.6 percent of the regular Army and 5.8 percent of the Army Reserve. Declaring ethnic origin is not compulsory, but 99.2 percent of regulars and 98.9 percent of reservists declared this information.
6. See note 4.
7. Four out of five reservists (80%) are either full-time, part-time or self-employed (MoD 2017d). Given these high levels of employment, we purposively sampled reservists who have to balance some form of employment with their reserve service.
8. At what is defined as the “peak” of operations in 2004, reservists made up 20 percent of those serving in Iraq and 12 percent of those in Afghanistan (MoD 2014).
9. It is important to note, however, that the MoD has tried to mobilize only those reservists who have stated a willingness to voluntarily deploy, rather than rely on a compulsory Call-Out Notice.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Funding

This study was jointly funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ES/L013029/1) and the Ministry of Defence.

## Notes on contributors

**Dr Victoria M. Basham** is Senior Lecturer in International Relations at Cardiff University. Her research interests lie in the field of critical military studies at the intersections of feminist international relations, critical geopolitics and international political sociology and she explores the co-constitutive relationships between war, militarism and everyday life.

**Dr Sergio Catignani** is Senior Lecturer in Security and Strategic Studies in the Strategy and Security Institute (Politics Department), University of Exeter. He is the Principal Investigator for the ESRC-MoD grant (ES/L013029/1) titled “Sustaining Future Reserves 2020: Assessing Organisational Commitment in the Reserves,” which has funded the research project underpinning this article.

## ORCID

Victoria M. Basham  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8829-5119>  
Sergio Catignani  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6627-2477>

## References

- Army. n.d. *Reserve Spare-Time: Your Guide to Joining the Army as a Soldier in Your Spare-Time*. London: MoD.
- Basham, V. 2008. "Everyday Gendered Experiences and the Discursive Construction of Civilian and Military Identities in Britain." *Nordic Journal for Masculinity Studies* 3 (2): 150–166.
- Basham, V. 2013. *War, Identity and the Liberal State: Everyday Experiences of the Geopolitical in the British Armed Forces*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Baxter, J., and J. Eyles. 1997. "Evaluating Qualitative Research in Social Geography: Establishing 'Rigour' in Interview Analysis." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 22 (4): 505–525. doi:10.1111/j.0020-2754.1997.00505.x
- Brickell, K. 2012. "Geopolitics of Home." *Geography Compass* 6 (10): 575–588.
- Bryson, V. 2007. *Gender and the Politics of Time: Feminist Theory and Contemporary Debates*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Chisholm, A., and S. Stachowitsch. 2016. "Everyday Matters in Global Private Security Supply Chains: A Feminist Global Political Economy Perspective on Gurkhas in Private Security." *Globalizations* 13 (6): 815–829. doi:10.1080/14747731.2016.1155796
- Coser, L. A. 1974. *Greedy Institutions: Patterns of Undivided Commitment*. New York: Free Press.
- Dekel, R., H. Goldblatt, M. Keidar, Z. Solomon, and M. Polliack. 2005. "Being a Wife of a Veteran with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder." *Family Relations* 54 (1): 24–36.
- Dowler, L. 2012. "Gender, Militarization and Sovereignty." *Geography Compass* 6 (8): 490–499. doi:10.1111/j.1749-8198.2012.00509.x
- Elias, J. 2011. "The Gender Politics of Economic Competitiveness in Malaysia's Transition to a Knowledge-Economy." *The Pacific Review* 24 (5): 529–552.
- Elias, J., and S. Rai. 2015. "The Everyday Gendered Political Economy of Violence." *Politics & Gender* 11 (2): 424–429. doi:10.1017/S1743923X15000148
- Elias, J., and A. Roberts. 2016. "Feminist Global Political Economies of the Everyday: From Bananas to Bingo." *Globalizations* 13 (6): 787–800. doi:10.1080/14747731.2016.1155797
- Elshtain, J. B. 1981. *Women and War*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Enloe, C. 1989. *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. London: University of California Press.
- Enloe, C. 2000. *Manoeuvres: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Erikson, R. J. 2005. "Why Emotion Work Matters: Sex, Gender, and the Division of Household Labour." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67 (2): 337–351. doi:10.1111/j.0022-2445.2005.00120.x
- Gray, H. 2016. "Domestic Abuse and the Public/Private Divide in the British Military." *Gender, Place & Culture* 23 (6): 912–925. doi:10.1080/0966369X.2015.1034247
- Harrison, D., and L. Laliberté. 1997. "Gender, the Military, and Military Family Support." In *Wives and Warriors: Women and the Military in the United States and Canada*, edited by Laurie Weinstein and Christie C. White, 35–53. Westport: Bergin & Garvey.
- HM Government, UK. 2010. *The Strategic Defence and Security Review: Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty*. Norwich: The Stationery Office.
- Hockey, J. 1986. *Squaddies: Portrait of a Subculture*. Exeter: Exeter University Publications.

- Hooper, C. 1999. "Masculinities, IR and the 'Gender Variable': A Cost-Benefit Analysis for (Sympathetic) Gender Sceptics." *Review of International Studies* 25 (3): 475–491. doi:10.1017/S0260210599004751
- Hoskyns, C., and S. Rai. 2007. "Recasting the Global Political Economy: Counting Women's Unpaid Work." *New Political Economy* 12 (3): 297–317. doi:10.1080/13563460701485268
- Hyde, A. 2014. "Remembrance and the Reserve-Reserve Army of Labour." *Open Democracy*. November 19. Accessed 27 March 2017. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/alexandra-hyde/remembrance-and-reservereserve-army-of-labour>.
- Hyde, A. 2016. "The Present Tense of Afghanistan: Accounting for Space, Time and Gender in Processes of Militarisation." *Gender, Place & Culture* 23 (6): 857–868. doi:10.1080/0966369X.2015.1058759
- Keeling, M., S. Wessely, and N. T. Fear. 2017. "Marital Status Distribution of the U.K. Military: Does It Differ From the General Population?" *Military Behavioural Health* 5 (1): 26–34.
- Lomsky-Feder, E., N. Gazit, and E. Ben-Ari. 2008. "Reserve Soldiers as Transmigrants." *Armed Forces and Society* 34 (4): 593–614. doi:10.1177/0095327X07312090
- Lutz, C. 2006. "Empire is in the Details." *American Ethnologist* 33 (4): 593–611. doi:10.1525/ae.2006.33.4.593
- MoD (Ministry of Defence, UK) 2014. "The Contribution of the Reserve Forces over the Last Century." Accessed 29 March 2017. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-history-of-our-reserves/the-contribution-of-the-reserve-forces-over-the-last-century#the-cold-war>.
- MoD (Ministry of Defence, UK) 2017a. *Recruit Trainee Survey: Financial Year 2015/16*. London: MoD.
- MoD (Ministry of Defence, UK) 2017b. *Officer Cadet Survey: Financial Year 2015/16*. London: MoD.
- MoD (Ministry of Defence, UK) 2017c. *UK Armed Forces Biannual Diversity Statistics: 2016*. London: MoD.
- MoD (Ministry of Defence, UK) 2017d. *Tri-Service Reserves Continuous Attitude Survey 2017*. London: MoD.
- Osborne, H. 2016. "Tiny Proportion of Men are Opting for Shared Parental Leave." *The Guardian*, April 5. Accessed 29 March 2017. <http://www.theguardian.com/money/2016/apr/05/shared-parental-leave-slow-take-up-fathers-paternity>.
- Oxfam. 2016. "Women Spend Two Days a Month More than Men on Housework and Childcare in UK, Survey Finds," online article, March 4. Accessed 29 March 2017. <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/media-centre/press-releases/2016/03/women-spend-two-days-a-month-more-than-men-on-housework-and-childcare>.
- Pateman, C. 1988. *The Sexual Contract*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Peterson, V. S. 2010. "Global Householding amid Global Crises." *Politics & Gender* 6 (2): 271–281. doi:10.1017/S1743923X10000073
- Peterson, V. S. 2013. "Informal Work." In *Handbook of Research on Gender and Economic Life*, edited by Deborah M. Figart and Tonia L. Warnecke, 169–182. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Rai, S., C. Hoskyns, and D. Thomas. 2014. "Depletion." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 16 (1): 86–105. doi:10.1080/14616742.2013.789641
- Sasson-Levy, O. 2003. "Feminism and Military Gender Practices: Israeli Women Soldiers in 'Masculine' Roles." *Sociological Inquiry* 73 (3): 440–465. doi:10.1111/1475-682X.00064

- Segal, M. W. 1986. "The Military and the Family as Greedy Institutions." *Armed Forces & Society* 13 (1): 9–38. doi:10.1177/0095327X8601300101
- Skidmore, P. 2004. "A Legal Perspective on Sexuality and Organization: A Lesbian and Gay Case Study." *Gender, Work and Organization* 11 (3): 229–253.
- Tickner, A. J. 1992. *Gender in International Relations*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Yuval-Davis, N. 1997. *Gender & Nation*. London: Sage.