GENDER IDENTITY, PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY, AND MILITARY CULTURE: CHALLENGES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GENDER POLICIES IN THE ARGENTINIAN ARMED FORCES

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Introduction

Gender policies in the area of defence in Argentina were created in 2006. They occurred in a context of the consolidation of democratization and modernization of the Armed Forces, which began when the last military dictatorship ended in 1983. This paper explores the complexities and intersections between gender identity, professional identity, and military culture in the Argentinian Armed Forces. I analyze the challenges in the implementation of policies aimed at achieving greater gender equality by looking at the hierarchy of women's positioning in the Argentinian Armed Forces (AAF) and their corresponding professional identities (Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers, Command Corps, Professional Corps). I examine the specific barriers faced by women in the command corps and discuss the institutional space that holds the most power and prestige within the AAF. To this end, I draw on the sociology of professional groups and feminist concepts of gender, masculinity, and gendered institutions.

This paper is the result of research work about women in the command corps carried out in 2018-2019 as part of the research project "Evaluation of Gender Policies in the field of Defense: advances, obstacles and challenges (2007-2017)" which was led by me and supported by the National Defense University, and of my own professional experience in the Armed Forces. My experience as a researcher, as a member of the Gender Policy Council of the Ministry of Defense (2007-2019), and later as Director of Gender Policy of the Ministry of Defense (since 2020) has provided me different points of view on institution and women’s privileged positioning when analyzing my research data.

I found that, within military culture, women who are part of the command corps, which is the most prestigious and powerful corps, do not identify with gender policies and do not want to make use of their benefits. From their perspective, these policies work against achieving their full integration into the institution, and the possibility of fully identifying with being part of the military culture.
In spite of differences in the contemporary historical timelines regarding the expansion of women's roles in the military, my analysis reinforces the impacts of shared foundational values, across the Canadian Armed Forces and other militaries, when the primacy of male heterosexual values-based hierarchies intersects with national policy calling for social change. This paper contributes to the development of gender policies focused on the transformation of military culture and the promotion of greater equality.

National Context

Since 1958, the Armed Forces of the Argentine Republic have been under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Defence; and since 1983, the ministers have been civilians. After six coup d'états during the 20th century and the end of the last military dictatorship (1976-1983), which resulted in the forced disappearance and exile of thousands of Argentine citizens, the elected democratic government outlined guidelines to democratize the Argentinian Armed Forces (AAF). The Trial of the Juntas that took place in 1985 condemned those most responsible for crimes against humanity committed during the dictatorship. From 1988 onwards, legislation was approved in favor of a new regulatory framework that separated national defense from internal security and laid the basis for the "civilian management of defense." However, this process was not easy. The 1985 trials were suspended by the enactment of two national laws, and a presidential decree did not resume until 2003. Within this context, gender policies within the defense sector were introduced in 2006 with the support from Argentinian civil society who promoted and accompanied, through the solid activism of the human rights movement, the process known as “Memoria, Verdad y Justicia” (Memory, Truth, and Justice). This is an example of how social factors (such as civil society demanding, through social activism, respect for human rights), in a political scenario in which the Armed Forces are discredited, influenced military policies on the integration of women.

In 2005, the first female defence minister, Nilda Garré, promoted a series of measures to deepen the democratization of the Armed
Forces. The most important were: a) the reform of the military justice law which abolished military jurisdiction (Law 26394); b) the regulation of the defence law passed in 1988 that prohibits the military from intervening in internal security affairs; c) the modernization of military education, with officer training programs to be approved by the Ministry of Education, not only by the Ministry of Defence; and d) the participation of the military in technological production and development in coordination with civilian research institutions and universities.

Gender policies were oriented towards the creation of institutional mechanisms, such as gender offices, normative transformation, spaces for debate and advice, and gender training programs. Gender policies also focused on the resolution of disciplinary cases related to violence against women and LGBTQI+ persons and the development of protocols for action on gender-based violence. In 2006, the Observatory for Women in the Armed Forces and the Gender Policy Council, an advisory committee to the Minister of Defense, was created. In 2008, a Gender Office was created for each branch of the military (Air Force, Army, and Navy) and in 2009, the Gender Policy Directorate was created under the National Directorate of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law of the Ministry of Defence.

In 2021, after 16 years of institutionalization of the first gender mechanisms, the gender policy was prioritized through the creation of a Gender Department in each branch of the military with a total of 16 Gender Offices and more than 150 focal points. Their functions are to receive inquiries and complaints of discrimination and gender-based violence, provide training, advise commanders, and build a statistical database. The Directorate of Gender Policies elaborated an Integral Plan of Gender Policies (2021-2023), approved by the Minister of Defence, which defines the fundamental concepts and common objectives for the three military services and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. To involve the highest ranks in the discussions, the Working Groups for the Mainstreaming of the Gender Perspective in the Armed Forces were created, which are composed of the general directors of
personnel, health, education, legal affairs, and the heads of the gender departments of each military service. Likewise, National Law 27499 (Micaela Law) is being implemented, which stipulates mandatory training on gender and gender-based violence for all the staff working in the public service as well as in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the government, including all armed forces personnel. In terms of formal education, two degrees are currently being offered in the armed forces, one exclusively for armed forces personnel and the other for civilians and military personnel, as well as a post-graduate program in Gender Policies in Institutional Management through the National Defence University.

That is to say, through the existence of a solid policy and by the means of different efforts sustained over time, all of these practices provided the framework in which discrimination and violence complaints are resolved. However, cultural change for the achievement of equality and inclusion of diversity is still a challenge. The Argentinian situation presents a similar picture to other armed forces like Canada, which is noted in the Final Report of the Advisory Panel on Systemic Racism and Discrimination for the DND/CAF (DND 2022). Some members have left the AAF because they are not willing to work towards a more inclusive society; some members are fighting against these cultural changes; some members "shut up and put up." They do not agree with the changes but resist silently, and many other members understand and try to adapt to this new environment. In short, there is a diverse situation of inequity for women and each situation must be analyzed in its own context, because not all women face the same types of obstacles in military culture.

Review of Women's Integration into the AAF

Currently, 19.5% of AAF military personnel are women and 80.5% are men. The percentage of women is relatively high compared to other armed forces in the world. However, the percentage of women varies with respect to their positioning within the institution. When I compare the number of women in the Command Corps to the
number of women in the Professional Corps, the percentage is significantly lower:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Command Corps (%)</th>
<th>Professional Corps (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Army</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>47.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navy</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Force</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>49.7</td>
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Table 1: Women in the Command Corps and women in the Professional Corps

The difference in the percentage of women in command corps and professional corps reflects the women’s long term integration process in the AAF. The integration of women into the institutional structure took place at three different points in time: the early 1980s, the 1990s, and in 2012. The first stage was in the early 1980s, during the last years of the military dictatorship and the Malvinas War, with the incorporation of female personnel into the Professional Corps (as nurses) and into the NCO Corps. The second stage was promoted by a democratic government and began with a reform in the recruitment of soldiers for compulsory military service. In 1994, The Compulsory Military Service was suspended and replaced by a Voluntary Military Service that also allowed the incorporation of women. Since the compulsory military service was one of the mechanisms of citizenship reserved only for males, the voluntary military service challenged these mechanisms, allowing women into military service. This stage was followed up in 1997 with the incorporation of women into the Command Corps. Both changes were extremely important in the way that they transformed the exclusively male identity of two very significant institutional spaces. The Army was the first element to allow women into the Command Corps, in 1997; but the last one to open all branches for women’s access. In 2012, the third stage led to the opening of the cavalry and infantry to women.
The representation of women's incorporation into the AAF shows that they initially accessed positions with less power and prestige; subsequently, they reached positions with greater professional opportunities. Currently, there are no restrictions on women's access in the AAF. However, reports of psychological harassment and the low retention of women in some branches, show that there is still resistance to the presence of women in the military.

Theoretical Framework

In order to describe the challenges for the integration of women into AAF, I will reflect on the feminist concepts of gender, masculinity, and gendered institutions. According to Joan Scott’s traditional definition of gender, in her article “Gender: A useful category of historical analysis,” gender is a primary factor in power relations. What I would like to add to this sociological definition of gender is Raewyn Connell’s considerations about gender as a sexual difference, concentrating on masculinity. Connell defines masculinity, as being inherently relational and only existing in contrast with 'femininity' in the modern European/American dualistic conception. Connell also states that women are certainly regarded as different from men, but different in the sense of being incomplete or inferior. Finally, she considers that to define masculinity we need to focus on the processes and relationships through which men and women carry out gendered lives. For Connell, 'masculinity' “is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these
practices in bodily experience, personality, and culture." With respect to gendered institutions, I draw on Joan Acker’s key text. She considers an organization to be "gendered" when advantages and disadvantages, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity are modeled through (and in terms of) a distinction between men and women, and between masculine and feminine.

In more recent work, Helena Carreiras considers gender as a significant element to understand the structure of advantage and exploitation in the military, along three dimensions. First, the military’s organizational structure is based on gender divisions, both in terms of opportunity and power (hierarchical divisions) and in terms of occupational structure (gender-based division of labor). Secondly, it is male dominated in terms of numeric representation, especially in the areas that are more closely related to the core functions of the institution, exactly those are that confer not only more prestige and rewards, but also possibilities to access the higher hierarchical ranks. Third, from the point of view of culture and the structure of cathexis, hegemonic masculine definitions of military conflate with hegemonic masculine culture and ideology.

To understand the specificity of the female command corps officers' experience, I will analyze the professional and gender identity, which is inherent to the culture of the AAF. Based on the framework of the sociology of professional groups and the aforementioned gender concepts, I will construct an ideal typology and assign positive or negative values to professional and gender identity, following the values of military culture.

Luc Boltanski’s work on cadres in French society, shows that we can only unveil singular, daily, and fleeting phenomena, which belong to the psychological order, if we know the history of the group we are analyzing and its structures. Only in this way is it possible to construct an argument about the formation and attributes of the cognitive instruments (schemas, categories, concepts, etc.), based on what people think about the group and their belonging to it. The
author quotes Eleonor Rosch to show that there is an important difference between practical taxonomies and constructed concepts. While in constructed concepts, each category is clearly differentiated from the other; in practical taxonomies, the cognitive process follows a different logic. These are organized around a core meaning, consisting of the best examples of a category, for example, those that are considered as "clear cases." Rosch shows that this category has an internal structure that is not composed of undifferentiated and equivalent elements. The cases that are considered as paradigmatic are covered by a sort of halo by the other members of the category; and that halo expands in an order of "decreasing similarity".

I will use these considerations as a starting point to analyze the core meaning of the military institution and its internal hierarchy. To this end, I will consider the professional identification, on the one hand, and the gender identification, on the other.

The Intersection of Gender Policies and Military Culture

My fieldwork and my experience as a policymaker showed me that women's involvement in gender policies depends on their position within the structure of the armed forces. That is to say, gender policies are more accepted among professional military women and NCOs than among officers in the Command Corps. I argue that this is because the former belongs to support bodies, while the latter are part of the "heart of the institution's identity."

The first internal difference in the military category is between officers and non-commissioned officers. All officers, both in the Command and in the Professional Corps, are hierarchically superior to the non-commissioned officers. However, within the Officers there is a distinction between Command Corps Officers (CCO) and Professional Corps Officers (PCO), which is based on the difference in training that translates into institutional legitimacy and into the possibilities of promotion to the highest hierarchies. The only ones who can "command" the Armed Forces are the CCOs, who have greater power and prestige over professions such as medicine,
By the same token, there are also distinctions within the CCO category. In each force, there is a career field that ideally represents the identity of the force. For the army it is the cavalry, for the air force it is the pilots; and for the Navy, it is the naval officers. If I take the air force as an example, a new distinction is applied within the category of pilots. Among them, the most valued are fighter pilots, to the detriment of transport and helicopter pilots. In short, in this example, the core meaning of the air force is fighter pilots.

Regarding the sex-gender identities, I analyze male and female identities, taking into account the exclusion of the women from the legitimate use of arms in the process of bureaucratization and professionalization of the armed forces. From that moment on, the identity of the armed forces was constructed exclusively as a masculine identity and opposite to the feminine identity, the former acquiring greater value than the latter. I will add to this what Françoise Héritier calls the "differential valence of the sexes." According to Héritier, these data are "at the origin of cognitive categories: operations of classification, qualification, hierarchization, structures in which the masculine and the feminine are enclosed." The author emphasizes that these categories, beyond the specific content in each culture, are extraordinarily durable. This is the case because they are inculcated through education and the cultural environment at a very early stage and are perpetuated through all the explicit and implicit messages and signals of everyday life.

Based on professional and gender identities, the paradigmatic example or the core meaning for the military is a heterosexual man in the Command Corps; and, depending on the force, he will be a cavalryman, a pilot, or a naval officer. In the following table, I show the values of the command corps and the professional corps, and of the gender identities in relation to the core meaning of the category.
Table 2: Values assigned to sex-gender and professional identifications in relation to core meaning

We can see, through the different examples that I propose in the following table, that in each position the signs are combined and the combination forms different identifications. I will call "pure" those for which the same sign gets together, whether positive or negative; and "hybrid" those for which the different signs are joined.

![Table 2](image)

According to this classification, there are two pure and two hybrid identifications. The pure ones, which are formed by the grouping of the same value signs are stable and they reinforce an ideal identity and are not disruptive in relation to the core meaning. Thus, the female Professional Corps Officers add up to two negative value signs (they are not men, and they do not come from the Command Corps) which means that they are positive in favor of the reinforcement of a feminine identity. The same happens with male CCOs, they add up to
two positive signs that place them in a central position in the military category. Hybrid identifications, for which the different value signs are grouped, are disruptive and they can produce contradictions and alterations. For instance, CCO women category have a negative value (women) and a positive value (Command Corps).

Based on my interviews, the treatment of CCO men (especially the older ones) towards PCO women is different than their treatment towards CCO women. In the former case, CCO men highlight PCO women’s sexual/gender identity as women over their professional identity as military. They usually call them by their first name instead of their family name and do not sanction them or reprimand them for the non-regulated use of the uniform (high heels, certain types of earrings, etc.). Since they are not considered "real military", their presence and appearance do not interfere, in a significant way, with the military’s core meaning. On the contrary, they can function as the contrast from which the military identity is reinforced.

In the case of female CCOs, with whom different value signals are associated, male CCOs find it difficult to treat them the same as the other male officers, but they also do not treat them the same as the female PCOs. For example, they tend to be stricter with female CCOs in wearing the uniform and keeping with their schedules. But on some occasions, such as the formations, they order them to be together with the women, most of them being the PCOs. For them, trained in the "military spirit," not being considered strictly as military is considered as "a form of degradation." A young female officer describes it as follows:

*In the first ceremony I attended in my time in the Condor Building, as an Ensign in my third year, I was to be placed among the male Officers. That's how I was used to it. That's what we learned in the [Aviation] School. Because we considered ourselves one of the Corps. Then a Chief Officer of the Professional Corps called me to tell me that the women were in a separate section (where they were all professionals). INCONCEIVABLE to me. But I left the men's section*
and went to the other section, which by the way I was in charge of, so that's what I did. (Subordinate Officer)

The interviewee used the word "degradation" which for her is considered as "very harsh." If we move away from the common sense meaning of the word (to dishonor, humiliate and degrade) and place it in the military logic, the meaning of "de-grade" acquires its full sense, which means "to remove the rank." This is the feeling that female CCOs experience when they are treated as PCOs. When CCOs identify them as women and not as military, the figure of the "military woman" as an oxymoron clearly appears. Faced with the constant demand to belong and the lack of their full recognition, they experience a sense of frustration and disappointment with the institution. Their presence in the CC is a wound to the heart of the identity of the institution. However, currently the experiences are varied and complex. While they are still rejected by some CCOs, there are signs of acceptance and assimilation by others.

In the case of the second hybrid category, that of the PCO men, as with the CCO women, gender identity takes precedence over professional identity. However, since in this case it is a positive value (masculine), their integration into the institution takes place in a climate of complicity and of camaraderie that does not generate major conflicts. As the interviewees say, the CCOs feel comfortable and relaxed when they are dealing with the male PCOs.

In such an institutional space where demands made on women are stronger and the possibility of recognition of them is lower, gender policies are resisted by women CCOs. Most of them, although they are aware of the existence of these policies, do not identify them as a tool intended for them, and somehow, consider the approach of the Gender Offices as branding that could discredit them. For those, who "do not want to be different," adherence to gender policies would mean accepting the difference. Drawing on the words of another of my interviewee, one expressed that, "We do not identify with gender policies because we adhere to the supposedly neutral concept of institutional places and we want to be part of it.” From their
perspective, gender policies, as they are conceived, affect the honor and the military values associated with masculinity. They instead sacrifice their femininity to these masculine values. Many have endured harassment and intimidation without making any complaints.

Although, at first, they denied any difficulty, during the interviews, some of them identified certain experiences as negative, and (often visibly distressed) they reported situations of harassment, bullying, and/or humiliation. Some have been asked to leave, others have endured in silence, without even thinking of resorting to the Gender Offices for help or advice. There is one fact that unfailingly connects CCOs to gender policies: motherhood. In this sense, it is essential to consider the importance of the bodily experience for them. It is the pregnant body that may show them the non-neutrality of the professional career path of the military. Nancy Taber (2011) analyzes how military women who are mothers learn to understand, accept, shape and/or resist personal, professional and organizational gender discourses and embody various ways of masculinity and femininity that enable them to negotiate in the military context. There is a big difference in the perception of CCO women between those who are not yet mothers and those who are going through the stage of pregnancy, puerperium, breastfeeding, and care. Those who have not yet become mothers maintain the illusion of assimilation, while those who have already had children wonder if there is a real possibility of being considered part of the core meaning of the institution in a career that is explicitly masculine, but which claims to be neutral. The position of CCO women in the AAF is an oxymoron, where everything in the CCO that denotes femininity is seen as a contradiction of terms. Therefore, it is not uncommon that the absences due to pregnancy and/or care are conceived as “abusive,” especially by senior male officers, but also by other women who have been in the institution without gender policies or who do not yet have children.
Conclusions and Recommendations

In this paper, I focused first on the context in which gender policies within the realm of defence were developed in Argentina. I show how these policies were shaped and constituted by civil society's demands to democratize the armed forces. These policies, which were developed for 16 years, and have been expanding, showed their limits when they were rejected by some of their beneficiaries: the female officers of the command corps.

The Argentinian case is useful to the Canadian Armed Forces as well as to other armed forces for several reasons. First, it shows the relevance of civil-military relationships for the achievement of cultural change in military institutions. A mobilized and active civil society demanding cultural change in the armed forces is a key tool for institutional transformation. Second, it shows that one of the limitations of the gender policies comes from considering "women" as a homogeneous category, without regard to the particularities of military professional identity and the different positions women occupy within the armed forces. It also shows that: a) the obstacles to women's full integration depend on the prestige and power of the positions they intend to access, b) that the most prestigious positions, which define the ideal identity of a military man, are gendered since gender identity takes precedence over professional identity, and c) that motherhood, as an experience of bodily transformation, is an obstacle for OCCs to access full integration through assimilation strategies that they use when they have not yet become mothers.

Therefore, the objectives of transforming the military culture through the incorporation of the gender perspective should take into consideration that the identity of military women is not homogeneous. Military women's interests and expectations change according to their positioning in the institutional structure. Most gender policies are usually designed through a gender conception which is based on a homogeneous female identity. This homogenous /monolithic conception of female military identity leaves out key
aspects of gender policies to achieve adherence and promote cultural transformation within the armed forces.

Not all women are integrated into the armed forces in the same way. Subordinate identities, whether for reasons of gender, sexual identity, or race, will assimilate more easily into subordinate positions within the armed forces, but if we want to integrate them into the core meaning of the institution, gender, anti-racist and pro-diversity policies must bear in mind the differences in power and prestige that exist in the institutional architecture. There is no single strategy for achieving equality. If we do not consider the subtleties and intersectionality of professional identities, there is a good chance that policies will be rejected even by their own beneficiaries. To achieve cultural change towards greater equality, it is necessary to combine different strategies that are articulated within the logic and values of the military.

The fieldwork that was conducted in 2018 and 2019 in the Army, Navy, and Air Force, and included semi-structured interviews, open-ended interviews, focus groups, statistical data, and analysis of situations of gender-based violence complaints. A first version of this paper was published in Laura Masson, *Militares Argentinos. Evaluación de políticas de género en el ámbito de la defensa* (UNDEF Libros, 2020).


In 2022, the Gender Department of the Argentine Army received 483 complaints from women (civilian and military) for gender-based violence. Of this total, only 25 were from officers, but none were from officers of the Command Corps (Data provided by the Gender Department of the Argentine Army).


The objective was that the defense policy should be a public policy decided by the Executive Branch with contributions from the Congress and the academic community. See Ruth Diamint, “La Historia Sin Fin: El Control Civil de los Militares en Argentina,” *Nueva Sociedad* 21, no. 3 (2008): 96. The laws approved during this period were the National Defense Law (1988); Internal Security Law (1991); Suspension of the Compulsory Military Service - Voluntary Military Service (1994); Armed Forces Restructuring Law (1998) and National Intelligence Law (2001).

After the trial in 1985, the *Punto Final* law was approved, which established the expiration of the criminal action against those who were accused as criminally responsible for having committed the crime of forced disappearance of persons. In 1987, the *Obediencia Debida* law was approved, and considered crimes committed by those below the rank of colonel are not punishable. In 1990, a presidential decree pardoned the civilians and the military personnel who had been condemned. Finally, in 2003, the Law 25.779 was enacted, which declared the nullity of the *Obediencia Debida* and *Punto Final* laws, and the trials were resumed.

The military obtained rights such as the impartiality and independence of the judge, the right to defense and the possibility of appealing the sentence, and together with the abolishment of the military code of justice. The death penalty was eliminated from all Argentinian legislation.

Minister of National Defence (MND), *Minister of National Defence Advisory Panel on Systemic Racism and Discrimination with a Focus on Anti-Indigenous and Anti-Black*
Racism, LGBTQ2+ Prejudice, Gender Bias, and White Supremacy, 2022.

11 MND, Advisory Panel, ix.
12 Data provided by the Ministry of Defence, Argentina.
13 Ministry of Defence, Argentina.
17 Connell, Social Organization, 71.
19 Helena Carreiras, Gender and the Military; Women in the Armed Forces of Western Democracies (London: Routledge, 2006).
22 Heritier, Masculino/Femenino, 27.
24 Callaghan shows that the approach currently being used to understand culture misses the nuances of how local-level subculture dynamics interact with the organization-level hegemonic culture of the CAF. See Walter Callaghan, “Masculinity and Culture Change in the CAF: Why a Focus on Hegemonic Systems-Level Organizational Culture Will Likely Have Limited Success,” (Ottawa: IUS-AFS, 2022).
25 Edna Lomsky-Feder and Orna Sasson-Levy, Women Soldiers and Citizenship in Israel Gendered Encounters with the State (Routledge, 2018): 9. In their analysis of military women and citizenship in Israel's military argue that, in that male organizational culture, women are placed in a dual position of outsiders within.
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Laura Masson holds a PhD (2007) and Master (1999) in Social Anthropology from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (FURJ), Brazil. She has been a professor at the National University of San Martín (Argentina) and member of the Gender Policy Council of the Ministry of Defence in Argentina (2006-2019). She is the author of Feminists everywhere: An ethnography of spaces and feminist narratives in Argentina (2007) and editor of the book Argentine Military Women: Evaluation of Gender Policies in the Defence Sphere (2020). She is currently Director of Gender Policies of the Ministry of Defence of Argentine.