

# **Women's *Integration* into the Argentine Armed Forces and Redefinition of Military Service. What does Military Democratization mean?**

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## **Introduction**

In 2006, the distinction between “recruiting” and “integrating” women into the Argentine Armed Forces became part of the political agenda of the Ministry of Defense. In 2007, the ministry created the Gender Policy Council for the Defense (the Council) where military officers, and NCOs, academics (mostly women) and members of non-governmental organizations debated at length on the signification of female recruitment, advancing and supporting different forms of “integration”. The members of the Council agreed it was necessary to shift the discussion from the incorporation of female military personnel according to vacancies and vacancy distribution to the conditions that hindered female integration into military life. Also, the debate drew attention to a wider question: to what extent could the social and cultural values of the civil sphere be transferred to the military profession?

Discussions on female integration into the armed forces reflected the current trends about the military profession in Argentina, and showed the significance that the gender issue had won in this sphere. Also, they prompted reflections on the nature of the military role, until now considered institutionally as encompassing family and private life. It seemed clear that without the “autonomization” of the female military from the concept of motherhood as essence, it became impossible to limit inequities. We shall see here the issues discussed, as well as the

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different positions: those that supported extending the protection of rights, gender equality and labor regulations of other social areas to the military sphere, and those others that defended the uniqueness of the military,

I was then a coordinator of the Council, an advisor to the ministry and a researcher of the Anthropology Department of the National University of Quilmes, and I had the opportunity to take part in the discussions. Two alternative senses of the military career were exposed: the military profession as a public function, or as a *service*. The two interpretations supposed different relationships between private, domestic and professional life. This differentiation can be recognized in studies that address the transformation of the military profession into a profession, or occupation like any other (Moskos, 1977), that was marked later by the organizational and symbolic changes brought on by the post-Cold War (Moskos, Williams and Segal 2000; Böene 2003). Argentina's case is not the same, as it was the human rights perspective there that reinforced the value that family life and private life should no longer be subject to military rules, and that the law governing military staff should correspond the one governing public employees.

If the military were considered public servants, those different planes of life, domestic and professional, remained distinct, and the possibility of having the rules of military life govern the domestic life and the private life was avoided. In this case, the symbolic boundaries between the military and the civilians were erased, and gender issues in this area remained permeated by the recognition of the right to private life from a human rights perspective. The other position believed the military profession to be first a *service* and a way of life; seeing it otherwise meant promoting civic engagement, therefore changing the essence of the military profession. According to this view, that at the beginning of the XXI century could still be found among the older generations of military personnel on active duty, private and domestic life had to remain completely regulated and subsumed under military life, to carry out the military functions in a war. It was actually at the Council that the discussions about how far the military profession could be governed by public labor laws took place.

At the same time, the debate on the integration of military women showed, on the one hand, the deep-rooted conception of family life in the military and its dependency on the career of the military male, and on the other, the significant changes in the military family life, as well as the emerging views on the compatibility between military functions and family life. The changes within the couple, and between parents and children, of other social areas had

disrupted the family structure (already analysed by Elizabeth Jelin (2008, 2010)<sup>1</sup> and Wainerman y Geldestein (1993) among others), putting an end to an idealistic perception of family life. They had also had important and specific repercussions in the military sphere. The obligation to behave always according to the rules of the family authority was gradually giving way to the respect of the wishes and ambitions of the other family members, affecting the scheme of family organization traditionally favored by military hierarchy (Frederic and Masson 2015). Also, as in other areas of society, the military wives were not only entering the job market, but also beginning careers that often prevented them from following their spouses.

The debate at the Council not only revealed the trends on the professional profile of the military, showing the contrasting views, but also provided a space to reconcile these positions: the military as a *public servant*, the new forms of family organization, the human rights, and the military role. Thus, we share with Christopher Dandeker (2003) the argument that the functional requirements that the war imposes are not defined objectively, but are based on the values of those who define them, whether military or civilian. In this way, the organization, operation and meaning of the military service in times of war, or of peace depend on the state, in accordance with those values.

A brief review of female military integration in Argentina points out that women first entered the armed forces as NCOs in the areas of support in the 1970s; they joined the professional corps as lawyers, engineers and doctors in the early 1980s. Later, in the midnineties, male compulsory military service was suspended and women were allowed to enlist in the voluntary soldier corps. At the end of that decade, the Army, and then the Navy and the Air Force finally admitted women as officers of the command corps. Their incorporation was regulated by a quota system that limited the proportion of women to roughly 15% of all entrants, even if in the process of selection the academic performance of women was proportionally better. However, the difficulties of male military recruitment boosted the opening of the quotas as women's interest in joining the Forces grew. The Navy canceled the quota system in 2009, and increased the percentage of enlisting women up to almost 40% of all aspiring NCOs, and up to 25% of the cadets of the Naval Academy. Until 2011, the only existing restriction to women

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<sup>1</sup> According to new research by Elizabeth Jelin (2010) on the basis of data compiled by CEPAL, female participation in the Argentine labor market increased from 35.9% to 51.4% between 1990 and 2010, whereas male participation decreased between 77.4% and 74.6 % during the same period. A growing rate of divorce and other factors contributed to the introduction of the 'dual earner' family that progressively replaced the traditional 'father provider' model (Jelin 2010:65).

was ground combat positions; both the Infantry and the Cavalry lifted this ban for the graduates of class 2012. From 2008, they could also train as marines, submariners or pilots in the Navy and Air Force, respectively.

## **The perspective of human rights and the integration of women into the Argentine Armed Forces**

To conceive the military man or woman as a public employee presupposed granting them the same rights the civilian public employees enjoyed. This form of reasoning prevailed in the Ministry of Defense because of the emphasis on the human rights perspective. The Code of Military Justice in 2008 limited military jurisdiction and homologized the military and the civilian citizen, confirming this viewpoint. The human rights perspective gradually gained ground in the early 2000s, and permeated the nature of the civilianization of the armed forces and the conception of the military service. As a result, new topics were added on the Council's agenda: for example, all complaints, including gender issues, were typified as discrimination. The Human Rights Direction, created by Defense to, among other, makes background checks on military staff eligible for advancement, and to direct the investigations about the crimes committed by military personnel during the last military dictatorship (1976-1983), held almost all policies on gender from 2006. Accordingly, all actions carried out by the ministry regarding the integration of women, such as the Observatory on the Integration of Women in the Armed Forces (the Observatory) and the Council, previously reported directly to the minister, were now falling under the scope of the Human Rights National Direction and International Humanitarian Law, including the creation, in 2008, under the aegis of the latter, of the Gender Direction.

One of the ways to consider and regulate the integration of military women into the armed forces involved subsuming the labor law and the principle of gender equality under the perspective of human rights. The civilian authorities of the ministry supported the repeal of all existing military rules that affected such principle, conferring to military women the rights enjoyed by other public-sector employees, under international and national legislation. Public employment in Argentina had been governed by the Public Service Law since 1999; however, the members of the armed forces were regulated by the Military Personnel Law, not updated since its enactment in 1971; what is more, each branch of the forces had its own regulations. In

2006, the Ministry of Defense conducted a review of the military law of personnel, finding rules that contradicted the ongoing normative and legislative reform started at the end of the last military dictatorship in 1983, aimed at an increasing expansion of rights. Internal discriminatory norms against military women such as the ban on the enrollment of women with children and/or married and the dismissal of female cadets, or applicants because of pregnancy or maternity, as well as others that denied men the right to paternity while training at the educational institutes of the forces were all revoked. Also, seeing that the military personnel had no right to union representation, labor welfare measures like paid sick leave and paid family leave, which in other sectors were a union concern, were promoted. Finally, all forms of violence typified as « gender violence » perpetrated by military men, both in their families or in the workplace, were pursued, and so was sexual abuse and harassment.

Conversely, those who defended the military institution's capacity to use the personal and family life as a parameter of professional regulation referred to the functional requirements of the armed forces as the institution of the state responsible for intervening in war. As an essential and permanent service, the need to preserve the authority, discipline and hierarchies demanded not only the regulation of working hours, but also of all other areas of life, particularly the domestic life. To the more orthodox, it was the behavior in these other areas that defined the moral quality of "man" as military. Moreover, a basic education system fostered a set of values aimed at forming the character of its members; a whole array of complex military regulations enforced the belief that behavior outside the barracks should follow the disciplinary requirements imposed by the service<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> There are in fact Social Sciences studies on other areas of past and present society familiar with this debate. Among them are: a) classic research on how domestic life can be expressly, or tacitly regulated by different levels of the public sphere and the state (Wright Mills, 1959), b) more recent studies that show how modern organizations (armed forces, companies, etc.) can adopt the domestic regime to regulate aspects of their operation (Boltanski and Thevenot, 1991), c) the trends towards the increasing separation between 'home' and 'work', and between the domestic life and the world of work that have been taking place since the industrial revolution, strengthened after the women's massive entry into the labor market (Jelin 2010; Flandrin, 1976). These approaches show articulations that, even if at the level of the representations and the practices of actors confirm the separation between work and home, the public and the domestic sphere, they also make clear the structural conditions that the regulations on the public sphere impose on the domestic area.

Such contrasting native perspectives on the extent of the professional regulations of the family life refer to, as we have previously mentioned, an emerging trend towards an increasing separation between home and work, and between family life and the military profession. The gradual breakdown of the family pattern of subordination of the family life to the military community remained a tendency. As recent studies point out:

The more the military profession becomes a job like any other, the less will partners be integrated into the military community... Service personnel's partners are much more likely to have jobs and circles of friends of their own. They are no longer morally obliged to participate in the military community (Moelker, Andres, Bowen and Manigart, 2015: 11).

Nevertheless, the recurring concern of part of the civilian authorities was the "gender violence". The human rights perspective and the many complaints of harassment, abuse and other forms of psychological and physical violence that reached the minister prompted and legitimized the great emphasis on this question. It also explains more clearly the overlap between gender and human rights, as it also meant systematically repairing in the present grievances of the past military dictatorship. Both the Observatory, set up as a tool for the diagnosis of the situation, and the Council, created to decide the necessary measures, which I coordinated for two years, shared a human rights perspective whereby the integration of women implied the prevention of any form of abuse.

When the Observatory was set up, I proposed the approach adopted by the armed forces of England, France and the United States, analyzed in several studies (Segal, 1995; Dandeker and Segal, 1996; Woodward and Winter, 2004, 2006; Mc Sally, 2007). Second, as an anthropologist, I understood that the emphasis should be on the personal visions that the military women had of their own careers. Therefore, I proposed the Council as a space of discussion and development of nonbinding recommendations to the minister. The results of the interviews of 2006 showed how deeply interested the women were in being involved in the decisions that concerned them. At the same time, the position that imagined or suspected military women of being victims of abuse of authority had been gaining significance, and the authorities of the ministry had requested that the interviews and surveys also looked into the matter. The first assumption of the civil authorities, firmly committed to the protection of human rights, was that military violence against women was widespread. Female officials in the area believed that the threat of sanctions and the weight that military hierarchies carried inhibited the reporting

of such episodes. Therefore, the minister wanted the matter investigated to introduce the necessary penalties and complaint mechanisms.

However, in the first survey of military women, anonymous and conducted by the Observatory, few admitted to sexual harassment. This surprised the civilian authorities who estimated necessary to provide adequate reporting channels bypassing military corporatism and the disciplinary regime. The survey was adapted from one made in the United States, where, from the perspective of the Argentine military, sexual abuse is a more widespread problem than in Argentina.<sup>3</sup>

The area of Human Rights believed that the Council could function as a means of revealing sources of violence and discrimination, sidestepping the silence imposed by the constant abuse of authority. As a minority, women in the military were considered potential victims of human rights violations; they were also unquestionably presumed innocent, as violence in the military institution was immediately associated with men. It was probably the fact was that there had been no military women involved in the crimes against humanity during the state terror (1976-1983) that promoted a morally positive image of them. In addition, the definition of violence against women as gender-based violence became a public agenda item in the civil sphere. In 2009, a law was finally enacted to prevent, punish and eradicate it<sup>4</sup>.

The public servants in Human Rights believed that military women, not being themselves perpetrators of violence, would in turn be more responsive to the perspective of human rights. This approach, that acknowledged the present as a scenario of restorative attempts to repair harms of the past, saw as only logical that the gender approach remained subsumed under the perspective of human rights. The guarantees provided by international and national legislation on human rights for the protection of victims were invoked to deal legally with the problem of the exercise of violence by military men against their female comrades.

Nonetheless, it was the issue of inequity, or the pursuit of equality, that was most widely discussed in the Council during its first two years in existence. Many of the military women there believed that gender-based violence and discrimination in the military sphere did not differ qualitatively from happened in other professional groups, for example, in health, while the civilian women mentioned workplaces in the civil area, such as the area of justice, where

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<sup>3</sup> See Harrell and Miller (1997).

<sup>4</sup> Comprehensive Law on the Prevention, Punishment and Elimination of Violence against Women in their Interpersonal Relationships (26.485 /2009).

even stronger and more entrenched practices of negative discrimination could be observed. Military women asked for equal access and on equal terms. Access to decision-making or leadership positions was linked to the levels of professional commitment to the junior staff that the superior officers set, that the women could not always meet because of their family and private life demands. As the higher military authorities saw it, maternity, “natural feature of womanhood”, conditioned such commitment. Prolific and intricate regulations carried this conception, and imposed strong inequalities between the careers of men and women, such as the fact that female soldiers spent more time in service before grade promotion, or the combat-exclusion policies that imposed limits to career advancement, among others. Senior officers supported many of such regulations, affirming that the condition of women as mothers needed to be protected. The identification of war as a male activity, common in other countries too, pushed women into tasks considered menial, or of « support ».

### **Construction of the gender agenda in the armed forces: abuse of authority, maternity and work conditions**

The Council consisted of two officers and two NCOs of the first classes of graduates of each force, and eight academics from universities and NGOs <sup>5</sup> of the public sector, representatives of state dependencies. All the members were women bar one, an anthropologist in military training. Its functions were pointed out in the founding resolution:

To develop proposals to improve the conditions of access, permanence and advancement in the military career, aimed at removing obstacles and promoting actions to ensure real equality of opportunity for men and women according to the results of the Observatory on the Integration of Women in the Armed Forces. (Defense Minister Resolution 247/07)

The Council gave the military women a voice, empowering them, to some extent, before the commanders; it was a sort of compensation for the restrictions to the higher ranks. Furthermore, it was a means to settle the issue of the integration of military women with other public institutions, a space of forces and military bodies hierarchically differentiated, to exchange ideas and make decisions. The Army female officers, a doctor Lieutenant Colonel, a

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<sup>5</sup> Among them were represented the Institute for Gender Studies of the University of Philosophy and Arts, the Center for the Implementation of Policies for Equity and Growth, the Institute for Comparative Studies in Criminal and Social Sciences, the Foundation of Study and Research on Women, the National University of the Center of the Province of Buenos Aires, the National University of San Martín and the National University of Quilmes.

lawyer Captain, a first Lieutenant of Artillery and a quartermaster Sergeant, debated among themselves without challenging the existing hierarchy.

The Council started meeting in April 2007, creating a context of discussion as a basis for the subsequent decision-making. Here, civilians deliberated about aspects that were new to them, and endogenous to the military institution. The first discussions were about the development of a work agenda, and we agreed on using the results of the study of the Observatory as a starting point. The survey of military women had left several concerns; during the meetings others were added. The urgent issue of sexual and/or workplace violence did not permeate the eventual definition of the topics, but ran parallel through bureaucratic channels.

The ministry preserved these two channels: on the one hand, the Council as the place where the civilian members together with the military women defined the agenda and made the recommendations to the minister; on the other, as the area in charge of protecting and extending human rights to all military and civilian personnel of the armed forces, the Council had to present and address two issues: the so called « tensions between work and family life », and domestic violence.

The Nursery and Responsible Paternity National Plan, designed to build nurseries for “civilian and military workers”, was the answer to the first, making maternity and the military career compatible, while the “Joint Work Plan to promote a comprehensive policy to detect, attend and register cases of domestic violence”, responded to the second. The area of Human Rights first proposed building nurseries in the garrisons, which the military refused to accept referring to the dangers of having children in the garrisons. Thus, the nurseries used by the civilian personnel of the public administration were enlarged. Also, by 2008 the reference field for the “prevention of violence” was extended to include labor, men as well as women, through the implementation of a survey that sought to detect the sources of violence in both military and civilian workplaces. Some of the answers I reviewed showed that military employers posed a greater threat and were more likely to exercise workplace harassment than civilian employers.

There was a marked contrast between the significance that the gender issue carried and the indifference of the female military members of the Council towards the matter. The Council replicated the prejudices between the military and, especially, the intellectuals from the Social Sciences.<sup>6</sup> What was exactly the position of the military women on violence and use of force?

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<sup>6</sup> In the ethnography *Las Trampas del Pasado. Las Fuerzas Armadas y su Integración al Estado Democrático* (Frederic 2013), I consider the sociopolitical roots of the mutual mistrust between the military and certain

During the period in question, all matters of violence were directly diverted as “cases” to the area of Human Rights, whereas I, as the coordinator of the Council, received almost no complaints. In the few circumstances I was asked to intervene, the situations of abuse, or assault were referred to discreetly and confidentially and never admitted during the meetings. As well as being careful about the possible disruptions in the chain of command that any indiscretion might cause, the women believed these cases exceptional and unrelated to the nature of the military institution they belonged to, of which they were proud. As part of the first classes of military women to graduate, they spoke about their careers as paths opened with enormous sacrifice for future military women. Both sacrifice and suffering, especially during the training period, were, as already noted positive values to the military and necessary to forge the character, although by then there were arguments within the institution about the scope and limits of such values.

The point of view of most military men or/and some of the women was that emotional vulnerability was “bad” for military integration. They shared the idea the cases of abuse of authority reported were the direct result of an inability to adapt to what was typical of military life. From this perspective, women who complained about being mistreated, or treated “roughly” were seen as favoring their own fragility, or weakness, over military professionalism, pushing superior officers into harsher ways. The argument supporting “harsher treatments” was that treating female soldiers differently was contrary to the principle of equal treatment of men and women, and that it could eventually affect discipline and the chain of command. That is, it was not only unfair to the military men if the women were treated more tolerantly, but also undesirable from a disciplinary point of view. While this viewpoint may seem tautological, it reflects the critical view that some of the military women had about what they saw as a dramatization of the female weakness that disregarded equality. This position brushed aside the stereotypical masculine and feminine traits, favoring a more severe treatment of the female soldiers, and although they called it professionalism, what they asked was in fact a more masculine approach<sup>7</sup>.

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groups from academic circles, particularly from the Social Sciences, or with an activist background. Some of them were survivors of the state terror. I also point out the effects of the memories of that violence on the present days’ visions of the civilians currently leading the armed forces.

<sup>7</sup> Catherine Lutz (1988) elaborates at length on the Western worldview that attributes emotionality to women as opposed to rationality and reason in men.

Therefore, some of the military women criticized a light-touch treatment of the female soldiers, affirming that while many women took advantage of the kindness and the paternalism shown by the superior officers, others resented receiving preferential treatment, and demanded equality. In the interviews conducted in 2007, two junior officers pointed out the differences that they saw among them:

“Many of the women get angry because they feel overprotected, but then you also have the other women that like being mollycoddled, and take advantage.”

“Because you treat women more gently, you are overprotecting them. This bothers many of the women, but many others like it.”

“Sometimes women can seduce you into being more permissive, then, if you are tempted, there are the others, who will accuse you of discrimination.”

These divergences in the positions showed the different parameters about the standards that should govern equal treatment and gender differences. For some, the correct institutional conduct was the way men were treated, and they rejected all differential behavior based on gender. These positions that favored male standards, seen as the proper criteria of assessment of their professionalism, emphasized the military function of war.

Excluding violence, the Council agenda included: 1) “family life and maternity”, 2) “relationships of command and abuse of authority”; 3) “general work conditions: quotas, promotion and clothing, among others”. Each item comprised different aspects that the debate sought to differentiate according to importance, and determine the feasibility of introducing modifications, considering the perspectives of the military women, and the impact on the functions proper to the armed forces. The task required civilians and military to devise means of understanding languages and/or experiences until now ignored by both.

The first item included: female access to positions of responsibility within the armed forces; insertion problems produced by the conflicting tension between work demands and family and maternity demands: work schedules and child care timetables, child care subsidy; suspension of the principle of availability (24 hours a day) in peacetime; introduction of paternity rights ; elimination of any principle of rating, valuation and evaluation of professional performance based on family life, sexual orientation or gender identity; freedom of choice by pregnant mothers- on medical prescription- of the period in which to use the pre-and-post natal ninety days of maternity leave. The second covered only the prevention and punishment of different forms of abuse and aggression in the context of the labor/command relationship, while the

third point included: female access to combat arms, banned at the time (Infantry and Cavalry in the Army and Marine Corps in the Navy); the definition of female quotas for missions and opportunities abroad; regulatory changes to the quota system of admission by specialty and promotion (e.g. for nursing); the introduction of mechanisms of consultation about working conditions: costume, infrastructure, etc., and adequacy of the standards of physical (and socio-cultural) performance in recruitment, training and promotion of military women under the principle of gender equity.

The list indicates the most critical issues; it shows the clarity of the definition of each of the points, and also allows us to notice the questions not taken into account. For example, the point related to the prevention and punishment of abuse under the command relationship was the one less clearly defined. In contrast, the other two included a detailed list of subjects that, to a greater or lesser degree, clarified current problems. We will analyze next the discussion on some of the central issues, where we can see more clearly how the patterns that regulated the labor conditions in civilian matters, including restrictions, were taken as a reference for the military field.

### *Military mothers and fathers: compatibility between private, domestic and professional life*

As soon as the Council started meeting, the impacts from incorporating a gender perspective were felt. A series of resolutions and measures eliminated the restrictions on mother or father access to voluntary service and to the academies for officers and NCOs; they also prevented the dismissal of female soldiers during the period of basic training on the grounds of pregnancy; and banned the restriction that excluded married people from the military career at any level (officer, NCO or soldier) was removed. Finally, in February 2007, Ministerial Resolution No.113/2007 called for the Chief Commanders of the Armed Forces to adapt regulations “so that pregnant and/or nursing military women would not be required to carry out activities—such as combat, close order drill, shooting and/or any other unless duly approved by a qualified practitioner- that would pose a danger to their lives or health”.

The purpose of “autonomizing” the domestic life from professional life, and restricting the institutional control of the former, started to gain ground with the preceding measures. As a result of the Observatory study, the Council presented several recommendations that were adopted, corresponding the military and public administration periods of maternity and

paternity leave and introducing breastfeeding and adoption leave. Without these measures, the « terms of service » made the conditions far more difficult; moreover, the measures imposed a restraint on the superior officers that would otherwise disappear. Some perverse mechanism, which in turn led to the dependency on the military institution, encouraged harming its male and female members, and these rules were fundamental to disable it.

The military women of the Council warned Defense about existing regulations that prevented the full exercise of the right to private life, and granted the high command the power to evaluate private and family life professionally, while giving the professional performance little attention. These rules, adopted in the previous decade, allowed for the regulation of the professional life with a view on the domestic life. Probably, these regulations were introduced after the enactment of a number of laws that some of the military saw as promoting individual rights, like the law of divorce, and as attacks on military leadership and discipline, necessary even in peacetime. The 1997 edition of the Regulations for the Administration of Navy Personnel (RANP) included: “Staff should be aware that cases of *concubinage*, childbirth or pregnancy outside marriage shall be particularly considered from the disciplinary point of view” (art. 9, vol. ii, Junior Military Personnel), repealed in November 2007. Also, an Army directive considered the connection between the family situation (classified as “regular” or “irregular”) and the professional evaluation, and assignment of postings and appointments was similarly repealed in 2008.

The criteria of assessment, which all members of the force had to know, on the specific family situation of the military personnel will be used by the respective assessment boards as guidelines to evaluate promotion or dismissal, and to assign postings and appointments (art. 2, Resolution 862/05).

It also said that should the staff be in an “irregular family situation”, for example, a case of wrongful cohabitation, their professional assessment would be postponed and they would have up to one year to “regularize the situation”. This applied to all junior and senior military staff, excluding the Air Force, which was not subject to this regulation.

Two other regulations that epitomized the military family life regime were revoked in 2007. One of them restricted marriage between officers and NCOs, although the number of couples within this segment still increased. Senior officers justified the organizational purpose of this regulation, explaining the difficulty- in the case of staff shortage- of combining two postings to allow the couple to stay close, but not in the same unit.

The other rule required the junior staff to have the permission or authorization of the authorities to get married, regardless of whether their spouses were civilians or military. If the spouse was a civilian, his or her family and social circles were investigated, to protect sensitive information concerning national security. Thus, from this viewpoint, a foreign spouse was seen as a potential risk.

Once the new compatibility between military and private life was established, the effects of the regulations on the administrative, or operational performance of the units became more apparent. Significant differences arose among the female military members in the Council; the women who abused or misused family or sick leave, and/or got pregnant constantly, increasing the workload of their male and female comrades, were strongly criticized. They were accused of misrepresenting the particular nature of the military profession as a *service*, and of turning it into a job like “any other public job”, as they persisted in saying.

In a way, these women of the officer corps were asserting their own professional achievements; they were also aware of the great personal and family sacrifices they had made to advance in their careers. Even if they refused to go back to the institutional control of the domestic life, they still vindicated the distinctions between themselves on the basis of the fulfillment of their duties. Therefore, they promoted a military legislation on private and family life that distinguished between peacetime and war.

Still, family and sick leave remained unregulated; from the perspective of human rights to do otherwise represented a step backwards in the *democratization* of the armed forces. Therefore, the discussions in the Council revolved mainly around two issues: on the one hand, to distinguish between the personal sacrifices of the staff during peace and war, and to relax the conditions of service during the former; on the other, to transfer the field of competence for the complaints on gender issues to the armed forces, with the creation of the gender offices, respecting the hierarchical order and the military discipline.

*On loonies and on Sacrifice. The distinction between times of peace and times of war in the definition of the attributes of the military service*

The discussion about the conditions of the military service led to the recognition and acknowledgment of a critical distinction that the military women in the Council defended: an exhaustive differentiation between peacetime and wartime, finally defined in the code of military discipline. This distinction implied that the armed forces needed different rules for

each of the situations. Therefore, prerogatives, rules and rights from the civil sphere in general, and from the public administration in particular –as members of the armed forces were considered as a unique state employee- were included.. The authorities of Defense insisted on viewing the military as public servants and citizens.

It was, in fact, not unusual, to hear some of members of the different ranks of the military speaking up in defense of a differentiation of wartime and peacetime conditions, playing down the concept of personal sacrifice as an ideal, only needed in times of armed conflict. In the anecdotes about training exercises in the mountains, or in extreme weather, or with explosive materials, they stressed that these were just exercises and not war, reinforcing the distinction between one and the other. In particular, they illustrated the different positions between those who too often forgot that the *manoeuvres* were, ultimately, a simulation of war, and subjected the junior staff to unnecessary risks (frequently causing real physical damage, and sometimes even death), the *loonies*, and those others who tried to keep the loonies in check, as they supported the belief that, the value of the care and protection of the body and of life took precedence even over the value of sacrifice and of suffering for the cause or the service. This dispute existed in different military areas, and it often confronted military officers, and military officers and NCOs. Although not an institutional matter, safety rules, as well as judicial intervention in case of accidents, supported this belief, and the high command took certain precautions to keep the *loonies* away from the soldiers. However, the safety regulations were not enough as there were no written sanctions for this type of behaviour. The story below reflects the situation.

One day, after I had finished interviewing officers for posts in the main military academies, Colonel Fernando Marras<sup>8</sup>, one of the *liaisons* who acted as links between the Army and the ministry, said he wanted to speak to me about one of the lieutenant colonels I had interviewed, a veteran of the Malvinas War, a specially trained command with techniques that included severe abuse of cadets, even to the point of permanently disabling some of them. He told me:

“Now, that one, as you see him, is a total *loony*. The things he’s done, he’s unstoppable. For him, the war is not over yet. When he was second chief of unit, he drove the soldiers crazy. Right in the middle of winter, he woke everybody up at 2 am, and drilled them really hard, till they could take it no more....no, really ...he is a *loony*. You do what you think best, but

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<sup>8</sup> This is not a real name.

that one he's real nuts. The guy is good in combat, but he can't see we're not at war any more."

The Army had given this officer assignments in the academies, but he only taught senior officers. As he had no record of disciplinary sanctions, he was still in the military.

Along the same lines, the debate on gender acted as a catalyst that led to broader changes in the treatment of the members of the armed forces. It promoted precisely the institutionalization of the difference between the conditions imposed by war and by peace, while the gender integration enabled the expansion of the labor rights of the civil sector to the military field. Some of the military saw this as a threat to the military discipline, an essential aspect of institutional administration that had to be preserved unquestionably. Although this view might have not been represented in the Council, the military women questioned it there, as they were faced with this concrete issue every day.

The military women believed that the work schedule was excessive and unjustified, and brought up this concern in the Council, recommending a legislation that differentiated service conditions in peace and in war. In fact, the male soldiers also complained about the working hours, which they deemed excessive and irregular. There were even cases of officers and NCOs that required junior staff to remain on duty whenever their superiors were present. This was a rule in the Chief of Staff building of the Army and to disobey it was considered an infraction, and could have a negative impact on the annual evaluation of the junior personnel performance.

According to the women, besides the regular working hours, there were also three and even four monthly services with up to 24 hours on duty in some units, plus the « week services » that required personnel not to leave the workplace for a full week, the « field trips », the training courses, the service commissions, the participations in protocol or ceremonial activities, support in elections, support in humanitarian emergencies, among others.

The 24-hour duty was considered right and necessary in the case of war, but not in peacetime, except in an emergency (natural disasters, for example). Unlike men, who were more likely to avoid complaining institutionally, and came up instead with different tactics to resist, or evade 24-hour shifts, military women deemed that abuse of authority should be reported because they interfered with the demands of family life, which paradoxically represented a moral value to the institution.

The distinction between wartime and peacetime also made the conditions of the civilian and military working life more homogenous. In December 2007, the Council presented the minister a document that included the « Regulation of Working Hours in the Provision of Service », as well as the « agreements and recommendations » made in the first year. The text was based on the standards of two international agencies, as well as broader social and cultural transformations. It had been drawn up by civilian and military women, and argued for the reduction of service hours.

The abovementioned recommendations were grounded on the valuation of the social rights of the population, civilian or military, over the “cultural” aspects of the organization. Thus, the defense of a certain military idiosyncrasy remained in a secondary plane, unless it undermined the “functions” required. The principle of full participation in the labor market was a novelty in the armed forces.

The Council presented a number of points concerning the workday that made the military and the public administration fields more alike, as it challenged the full availability concept of *service* (24H), and established a distinction between ordinary and extraordinary day. The text also proposed: to review the regulations regarding the periods of active duty during peacetime; to post the information about daily workday supplementary services in advance [...] “to better organize the workload of home and family care”; the provision of a means to record overtime, and the rightful “distribution among personnel” of overtime, to prevent it from « fully falling on the junior staff, where women are mostly found »; and, to offer “compensatory time off” among others.

Finally, the text mentioned “the complexity” of “such changes for the institutional culture and the internal organization of work”, thus recognizing the delicacy and sensitivity of the issue. Nonetheless, it supported the recommendations as they dealt with the aspects of “the labor dynamics of the armed forces that most affected gender and family relations, impacting also on the performance of women”, thus, placing them “within the policy of professionalization of the services of the armed forces that the ministry has strongly developed throughout this management”. (Document on Agreements and Recommendations, Council of Gender Policies: 2007).

After a long period of nonintervention of the Argentine Armed Forces in internal, or external armed conflicts, this differentiation between times of peace and times of war resulted almost unavoidable. A year later, the new code of military discipline had an “annex” called “Military

Criminal Proceedings in Times of War and other Armed Conflicts”, whereby war was considered an extraordinary time.

Although no resolution was adopted to regulate working hours, genuine progress was achieved. The institutional channels were restored, and the gender offices of each force, formed by female military staff and dependents on the directions of personnel of each force enabled the application of the principles of labor law, and of the broader field of human rights.

### *Changing the Context: Who Defines Abuse of Authority and Violence?*

In fact, the concept of command and authority, as well as the definition of the boundaries outside which it became excessive or abusive depended on whether the context of use was military or civilian. The complaints of abuse of authority and violence were received by the public servants in Defense, who classed them as “problematic”, or “serious”. As of 2006, the context of the definition had changed systematically from the military to the civilian field, and the ministry had taken on the task of determining what was abusive, or violent. The death of conscript soldier Omar Carrasco in a military unit in Neuquén in 1994 was still fresh in the public mind. It was automatically assumed that if a case ended up in the ministry, the military authorities had done little about it.

From the military women’s viewpoint, the huge impact of many of the cases of abuse was due to the military authorities’ failure to address them in time. Like their male comrades, many of the military women believed that treating the cases outside the channels of the military hierarchy undermined the nature of institutional relationships, governed by a different disciplinary system. . The allegations that “jumped the chain of command”, directly into the minister’s hands were seen as a threat to the hierarchy and authority of the military, causing harm to the institution, especially to the superior-subordinate relations.

The issue of the command relationship and abuse of authority changed significantly in 2008, when the field of competence was transferred to the armed forces from the Human Rights area of Defense. This transference, or increase in the levels of autonomy of the armed forces, carried out on the initiative of the Air Force Personnel Direction, led to the creation of the Centralized Office for Women, dependent on on the Personnel Direction. The purpose of the Office for Women was to become a “program of prevention, monitoring and response to complaints of discrimination, sexual, or workplace harassment, mistreatment and abuse of authority”, engaging the bureaucratic structure of each force in the subject. Its functions,

initially established by the Office of the Air Force, were: 1. prevention/risk reduction; 2. reception of preliminary complaints; 3. attention of complainants; 4. provision of emotional and *liaison* support; 5. treatment and monitoring of the cases submitted; and 6. Provision of a hotline to offer advice on the submission requirements.

A ministerial resolution later mandated the Navy and the Army, generally reluctant to accept ministry interference in their personnel policies, to create their own offices of gender. The role of the Gender Office, now part of the organizational structure of each force, was to intervene in the first instance in all the situations of abuse, workplace harassment, or any form of arbitrariness to prevent the aggravation of the problem, in the absence of military authorities to deal with the situation.

The Human Rights area of Defense saw the need to approve specific working rules a system of operation for the gender offices, and to ensure the appropriate profile of the staff (lawyers and psychologists),<sup>9</sup> and raised the issue in the Council. It was regulated under a ministerial resolution approved at the end of 2009. In the paper “The Gender Offices in the Armed Forces”, three female officers discuss the significance of these tools in preserving what they call the “operational functions of the military institution”:

It should be emphasized in turn that the ministerial regulation solves also the forms of access to the gender offices, and states that the interested party may appear in person, without going through the official channels, in which case the members of the offices must communicate and redirect the submission, as appropriate, all the while taking part in the proceedings. This aspect is important because it creates a mechanism to advance the treatment of the cases and consultations without affecting the chain of command specific to the operational functions of the institution. Finally, this legislation also seeks to ensure the confidentiality of the information. (Perdomo, Zicre and Sotelo, 2010).

The emphasis is on finding answers to the identified problems in the framework of the “operational functions of the military institution”, according to the capacity of each of the forces, transferring the field of competence from the civilian to the military sphere, to preserve the relationship of military command and leadership.

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<sup>9</sup> When in February 2009 I formally assumed as Under-Secretary of Education, the then current Director of Gender of the Ministry of Defense became, by decision of the Minister, the coordinator of the Council of Gender Policies.

However, the sacrificial logic, and its inextricable connection to the function of military leadership and command made the institution an “effective mechanism for producing personal problems”, that were, in turn, necessary for the exercise of command to exist in the awareness and “containment” of these problems. To disable this sort of vicious mechanism and work towards a professional objective associated to functions and the effective discharge of duties was not easy. In fact, the work overload, which the military tried to justify with the value of “personal sacrifice”, caused many of the gender issues. The care and support of the junior staff was one of the functions of leadership, and without this space of attention and containment of the junior personnel, one of the areas where leadership and command were exercised ceased to exist. With the gender offices, the military authorities would try to prove that they could correct the mistakes of the past, and restore the chain of command, dealing with the complaints of violence and abuse in the first instance.

## Conclusions

The gender policies introduced by the ministry -the Council- or in collaboration with the armed forces -the gender offices- propelled the military women and the women from the areas of human rights, labor law and feminism to orientate the sense of the military service towards a more professional *niche*, determining the nature of the measures, the policies and the gender approach. The integration of the military women in the present, set about by the transformations of the domestic life, challenged the traditional order that subsumed the family and private life under the professional life –like the absolute and self-sacrificial character of the service in times of peace. Moreover, the abovementioned women promoted the creation of an area within the armed forces for gender issues, putting the competence back in in the hands of the military institution.

Indeed, the debate and the proposals showed that military women not only defended their professional competence and the effort made to get where they were, but also insisted on their right to adapt those values and rights themselves –the gender perspective.

Thus, the idea of integration that the military men held, and evoked whenever they narrated how they had modified the infrastructure available to accommodate women, was challenged. Concepts from the field of labor law, human rights and feminism permitted the identification of the cores concepts of patriarchal valuation that privileged those who exercised them at the expense of the men and women promoting different approaches. The space for debate created

by the Council gave the military women access to this new insights, and contributed to the comprehension of the obligations and responsibilities these awareness engendered.

As we have mentioned, Dandeker argument (2003) about how the demands of the military function are only defined objectively through the values of the leaders of the institution can also be applied here. As never before, the debate on the rights and duties of the military women that took place in Argentina at the beginning of this century subjected certain military values and standards to public criticism, increasing the « permeability » of the female military to a universe of socially available values. Consequently, the idea of a military profession no longer encompassing the private and domestic life gained strength among the military women, and also, through them, among the military men. However, the main issue was the fact that military command and leadership remained attached to the logic of sacrifice, fuelling problems and situations that in turn needed the attention and the care of the officers. The civilianization of the military profession was, therefore, one of the trends, among other. Because of the particular form that the democratization of the Argentine Armed Forces took, for some of the senior officers the question was how to change that sense of the military command attached to this sacrificial logic, manufacturer of problems that required the attention and guidance of the superior officers.<sup>10</sup>

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