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Article

"The thing with sexual exploitation": gender representations and the Brazilian military in an UN peace mission

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Abstract

Based on thematic analysis of 40 semi-directive interviews, observation in Port-au-Prince and Brasilia and following a standpoint feminist and international political sociology approach, the article aims to explore gender representations among Brazilian peacekeepers. Using the Brazilian experience in Haiti as a case study, the article seeks to show how the UNSC agenda on Women, Peace and Security is appropriated by actors on the field. It argues that peacekeepers seek to reduce dissonance between the existing military understanding of gender and UN expectations. UN "gender mainstreaming" is reinterpreted to accommodate naturalizing and traditional discourses on not only women, but also men.

Keywords: MINUSTAH; peacekeeping; gender; Brazil, military.

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Introduction

Approved by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution 1.542, from June 2004, the MINUSTAH (*Mission des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation d'Haïti*) lasted until 2017. At its peak, after 2010's earthquake, the mission had 8.940 military personnel on the ground. At that point, it was justified officially as a response to a humanitarian emergency.[1] Originally, though, Haiti was the first UN mission deployed under the banner of "democratic reestablishment" (Pouligny-Morgant 1998). After the end of the Cold War, UN peacekeeping missions progressively became a tool for the US and its UNSC allies to exert global influence in peripheral countries (Badie 2013; Coicaud 2007;

[1] "United Nations Security Council Resolution 1908, of 2010." Accessed on July 12, 2023. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/675259

Fassin and Pandolfi 2010; Prashad 2012). The Haitian post-authoritarian context, historically marked by US influence, was the scene for one of the first uses of chapter VII, allowing use of force by UN military, under the democratic justification that would later become a staple of US military intervention post-9/11.

MINUSTAH opened a new chapter in the way Haitian actors and interests intersected with those of the regional powers influencing them. This article zooms in in one of the new actors that entered the scene in this context: the Brazilian military.

Pouligny-Morgant (1998) proposes that we understand the complex play between Haiti and the countries intervening in it not as a question of "democratic breaks" or "coups", neither as a question of a "weak State" in which the UN intervenes to reestablish democratic health. Rather, she proposes that we see Haitian relationship with actors such as the UN as a series of compromises between local political actors and external actors, all trying to accomplish different objectives, related either to their foreign or their own domestic politics. The UN, and the Brazilian military contingent more specifically, appears as an actor replacing (simultaneously relaying and competing with) the American forces that were looking to control violence in Port-au-Prince peripheries in the early 2000s, where Fanmi Lavalas and the support forces of the ousted president Bertrand Aristide were mainly to be found (Sprague 2012; Hallward 2004).

For Brazil, MINUSTAH represented a "critical engagement". Under the Worker's Party, it searched for a bigger role as a representative of the Global South – it wanted to show how it could, at the same time, play a larger global role and offer an alternative to "usual" or "colonial" international problem-solving (Christiansen 2021; Stuenkel 2010; Harig 2015). This is how Brazil ended up heading the MINUSTAH mission and offering up close to ten thousand men to serve in it during its thirteen years.

Looking back, Brazil's participation in MINUSTAH has a quite different outlook in relation to how it was portrayed during its existence. According to Brazilian foreign policy actors, and the Brazilian military at the time, MINUSTAH was a highly successful case of post-colonial peacekeeping (Moreno et al, 2012). Some controversy surrounded it during President Lula first eight years in power (Cavalcante 2009), but mostly, Brazilian troops were seen as having successfully pacified their areas of responsibility. At some point, the mission was even lauded as "a model of accountability for sexual abuse cases".[2]

Since 2017, Brazilian political scenario and international action changed somewhat drastically, as did the MINUSTAH's evaluation. From a successful tool for an emerging power, MINUSTAH became the focus of criticism in relation to the circulation of counterinsurgency connecting Brazilian and Haitian peripheries, as well as the learning ground for a whole generation of generals that would, later, serve as support for the rise of the extreme-right in Brazil, and as ministers under Bolsonaro (Müller and Steinke 2020; Akkoyunlu and Lima 2022). What was

[2] Johnston, J. "UN points to MINUSTAH as 'model of accountability' for sexual abuse cases, *CEPR*, May 27, 2017. Accessed on July 12, 2023. https://cepr.net/un-points-to-minustah-as-model-of-accountability-for-sexual-abuse-cases/

formerly considered to be Brazil's "stellar record" regarding sexual abuse has been put into question ever since the end of the mission. Recent studies state the existence of "MINUSTAH babies" left behind by Brazilian peacekeepers who would have had relations with Haitian women, only to subsequently leave them and what they claim are Brazilian-fathered children unassisted (Lee and Bartels 2020).

This article follows the most recent critical trend, but having one particular focus, that I believe is also a particularly clarifying one. When Brazil was going for its global player moment in 2004 coincided with UNSC's approval of resolution 1.325 a few years earlier, in 2001. The resolution is supposed to mainstream gender in UN peacekeeping missions and combat sexual and gender-based violence in conflicts. In the above-mentioned resolution, signed by the Council, three elements define gender mainstreaming. First, a zero-tolerance policy towards soldiers who have committed sexual abuse. Second, respect for international humanitarian law regarding sexual violence by the parties to a conflict. Finally, the participation of women in national and international politics, and the obligation to parity in peace missions and local peace talks.

Sometimes, this resolution is described as the result of decades of mobilization by the internacional women's movement. Other times, it is described as the result of Global North feminists' ability to find a common denominator for action that have put them at the forefront of "international gender expertise", warranting these Northern activitis privileged positions in international administration (Joachim 2003; Harrington 2016). In any case, this has not only been translated into a series of policies and structures related to gender training in peacekeeping missions, but also into a myriad of studies and analysis about resolution 1325 and the normative structure that followed it, usually called "Women, Peace and Security" agenda (Otto 2017; Thomson 2019; Fritz et al. 2011).

A large body of feminist literature in international relations has focused on sexual and gender violence in conflict settings, and how what has been called "Women, Peace and Security" governance regime has been translated into practices and an agenda with which international law practitioners and agents on the field of humanitarian interventions interact (Shepherd 2020; Drumond 2023; Pratt and Ritcher-Devoe 2011; Kirby and Shepherd 2016). But less has been done to reflect on the ways humanitarian intervention might not be the solution of gender-based violence and, more importantly, little evidence exists to prove that these existing policies have done any real difference in decreasing it (Anholt 2016).

This article proposes to discuss the results of a qualitative field research with Brazilian peacekeepers, focusing on their understanding of gender and their interactions with the "Women, Peace and Security" agenda. More specifically, with gender training in the context of a military humanitarian intervention. The question of gender training for Brazilian peacekeepers is illuminating of what kind of negotiation between peacekeepers and the UN takes place on the field, what are the effects of gender training on those intervening in the name of democracy, humanitarianism and women's rights. On one hand, it clarifies how Brazilian actors and international actors such

as the UN interact and, as such, contributes to new understandings of MINUSTAH and the consequences of Brazilian intervention in Haiti for Brazil's domestic policy. On the other hand, it contributes to the reflection on how the UNSC work for combating sexual and gender-based violence has impacted peacekeeping missions.

Methodology

The beginning of the 2000s has expressively changed the relationship between humanitarian and military logics – at the same time peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations soared, also did the use of the humanitarian argument for justifying them. This change has also been accompanied by a change in the way to approach and explain what happens when a UN or other multilateral mission is employed to protect democracy or human rights in a conflict-ridden country. Daho et al. (2019) talk of a "sociological turn" to the study of peacekeeping and peacebuilding – a focus not, as mainstream IR has usually had, on what peacekeeping troops do to countries under their intervention, but, on the contrary, on "what the ground of intervention does to peacekeepers". This is done mostly by employing methodological assumptions, as well as qualitative methods, adapted from political sociology.

As Daho et al. (2019) also point out, these works[3] also share the assumption that international facts are social facts (Devin 2013), meaning that they share the same ontological qualities of what are considered "everyday facts" – which does not exclude anarchy (Waltz 1979) or a world order (Bull 1977) as distinct features of the international. Nevertheless, to conside international phenomena as ontologically social also means that: "international processes call for a banalized investigation that draws on the ordinary concepts and methods of political sociology" (Daho et al. 2019, 251). With them, I argue that international processes such as humanitarian interventions carried out by Brazilian military are shaped by ordinary logics of gender, and, as such can be studied using sociological methods and relying on empirical material such as fieldwork observation and semi-structured, open-ended, qualitative, interviews.

As stated by Caprioli (2004), the type of work that follows, based on qualitative data and claiming an empirical methodology, is sometimes regarded somewhat suspiciously by mainstream

[3] Daho G., La Transformation des armées : enquête sur les relations civilo-militaires en France, Paris, Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2016; Prévot E., « Mission et professionnalisation : de nouveaux rôles pour de nouveaux professionnels ? », Inflexions, vol. 3, n°4, 2006, pp. 209-214; Delori M., "Humanitarian Violence: How Western Airmen Kill and Let Die in Order to Make Live", Critical Military Studies, vol. 5, n°4, 2019, pp. 322-340; Jakubowski S., Cardona-Gil E., Eric Augé A. (dir.), Les Logiques de transformation des armées, Villeneuve-d'Ascq, Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2020; Thieblemont, André, Expériences opérationnelles dans l'armée de terre : Unités de combat en Bosnie, 1992-95, Tome I – Contextes politiques, militaires et tactiques, Les documents du C2SD, v. 42, 2001; Segal David R, Segal Mady Wechsler, Eyre Dana P, The Social Construction of Peacekeeping in America, Sociological Forum, vol. 7, n. 1, 1992, pp. 121-136; Carreiras, Helena, The sociological dimension of external military interventions: The Portuguese military abroad, Portuguese Journal of Social Science, vol. 13 n. 2, p. 129-149; Coton, Christel. "Briller sous l'épaulette". Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales n° 191-192, nº 1 (15 de abril de 2012): 14–27; Van Roekel, Eva. "Argentinian Peacekeepers and Moral Becoming in Cyprus". Critical Military Studies, 2 de novembro de 2022, 1–17; Hockey, John. "No More Heroes: Masculinity in the Infantry", The Criminology of War. Routledge, 2014; Higate, Paul, org. Military masculinities: identity and the state. Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2003.

feminist IR scholarship. It has nevertheless been widely used by gender sociologists working in the intersection with those advocating for a "sociological turn" in peacekeeping and peacebuilding studies. I identify it with a "standpoint feminist" approach (Harding 1995; Ackerly et al. 2006). Its main point of departure from Bigo's (2011) and Daho's international political sociology based on Pierre Bourdieu relates to the the contributions of gender sociologists and philosophers such as Sandra Harding and Donna Haraway. They have proposed the concepts of "strong objectivity" and standpoint epistemology as a way to factor in the researchers' relationship to the subjects of research in producing knowledge about the social construction of reality that pushes further the ideas of neutrality and objectivity of the researcher when compared to Bourdieu (Lépinard and Mazouz 2021).

At the end of February 2015, I spent one week living at MINUSTAH's Brazilian military base in the neighbourhood of Tabarre, in Haiti, where I observed the work of the Brazilian blue helmets during civil-military activities, patrol, leisure time, celebrations and training at the base. For three months after that, I worked with a Brazilian NGO who had its headquarters at Bel-Air, the neighbourhood inside the Brazilian responsibility area, and often collaborated with the Brazilian battalion.

I conducted twenty semi-directive interviews[4] with officers and enlisted soldiers about their peacekeeping experience. I had also previously conducted another twenty interviews with former MINUSTAH blue helmets, during a month of regularly visiting the Brazilian Army headquarters in Brasilia six months before.

In total, I conducted 40 interviews. Two women, thirty-eight men, officers, non-commissioned members, and conscripted personnel, between the ages of twenty-one and fifty-six. The grand majority of those interviewed belong to the Army: 18 infantry; 4 artillery; 5 cavalry, and 7 communication officers; 3 army police and 3 officers from the air force infantry. During the fieldwork in Haiti, I tried to focus on what are called operational positions, meaning middle- and low-ranked military that carry out the military operations under the UN banner.[5]

Interviews lasted for one hour and a half up to two hours. The questions were prepared based on the existing literature on the military's perception of peacekeeping and following the usual structure for open-ended interviews: first, descriptive questions were asked (name, age, position in the armed forces, how long have they been in the armed forces, what kind of training and previous experience). Then, biographical questions: parents' sociodemographic profile, why the choice of the armed forces, and why volunteering for peacekeeping. Finally, questions on

[4] The interview data is available at Harvard Dataverse through the following link: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/WXNZQP.

[5] Three different kinds of entry into the Brazilian Army are possible. There are combat officers, the ones who have gone through AMAN, *Academia das Agulhas Negras,* the equivalent of undergraduate studies that gives access to officer positions, starting from lieutenant. Specialized officers, such as medics or journalists, will be incorporated through specific exams. But most importantly, Brazilian Army is based on conscription. Every Brazilian man is to present himself to the army when he reaches the age of 18. Brazilian particularity being that are less places available in military than young men looking for employment by the army when they become 18. It is usually easy to receive dispensation. Those that are effectively engaged have one-year mandatory service and can renew their commitment to the army up to six times. Finally, subordinate rank positions (sergeant to lieutenant) are accessible through exams for men with a high-school degree.

how the training was conducted, what the everyday activities in peacekeeping were, how and if they affect their understanding of their profession; if they considered it a positive experience, and would they repeat it if given the chance; if they knew of the UN's work before volunteering, and of Haiti, and how their expectations matched up with the reality of the mission. The final question would always be: what it means to you to be a good peacekeeper? They were open-ended questions that left the possibilities for follow-up and demands for clarification according to each interviewee's answer.

All interviews were recorded with the knowledge of participants and subsequently transcribed to be analyzed thematically. Interviews were first analyzed individually, meaning each one was listened to, transcribed, and then systematized. First, in order to understand the singularities of the individual being interviewed, the processes and conditions of production of a narrative about themselves. In the second stage of analysis, the interviews were transversally analyzed: recurring themes, vocabulary and descriptions were identified and regrouped to identify regularities in the way of describing or identifying actors, actions, and processes. Following these two steps, data was then organized in two sets: vertical thematic analysis that allowed a synthesis of themes that were recurrent and similarly treated and horizontal thematic analysis, which allowed for understanding how the same theme is individually treated by particular interviewees. Data was then organized according to each theme and the following the criteria: a) vertical coherence (meaning that the theme is recurrent and treated along the same lines by all individuals in the sample); b) reasoning (how do the interviewees make sense of the world and explain it according to their own concepts and categories); c) conceptualization (data is organized and restituted in categories that allow for criticism and review); d) aggregation (all specificities of the same type of reasoning are present in the restitution) (Blanchet and Gotman 2007).

Concerning the representativeness of the sample, this research follows grounded theory principles.[6] In this vein, the sample used here is not statistically representative; the idea is for it to be a theoretical sample. Meaning that the researcher builds her sample to gather several contrasting situations that allow to build theoretical frames, and the research evolves as new situations and data is presented to the researcher by the interviewees and it stops when it reaches what is called a "saturation point", when new interviews don't add new information to the theoretical frames that have been elaborated.[7]

The sample does not allow for generalizations of a statistical nature, neither do they represent the points of view of the whole universe of Brazilian peacekeepers. They serve as initial analyses that opens some paths to understand a limited reality, from the perspective of a fieldwork that was also limited by the nature of the military object studied. This work does not intend to postulate hypothesis to be reproduced in other contexts. What this article tries to bring forward are empirical

[6] Glaser B., and A. Strauss « La production de la théorie à partir des données », *Enquête. Archives de la revue Enquête*, no .1 (1995): 183-195 ; Paugam S. (dir.), *L'Enquête sociologique*. Paris, PUF, 2010 ; Becker H., *Outsiders : Études de sociologie de la déviance*. Paris, Métailié, 2020.

[7] Barbot J., *L'Enquête sociologique*. Paris : PUF, 2012.

particularities shared by Brazilian military working as peacekeepers. It serves as initial exploratory work in systematization and categorization of the way Brazilian military understood their role in humanitarian interventions.

All interviews were conducted in the Brazilian Army installations, where I was accompanied by superior officers in the communications service. A small sample certainly allows for limited generalization, but also for more detailed and contextual analysis of how these broad, universalizing policies translate into everyday understanding and practices.

When approaching the military, I didn't explicitly talk about my interest in gender. Considering that the research was already conducted by someone young, civilian, and female, I expected to reduce bias by not mentioning gender in my interview script. I asked the men on the field how they understood and described their practical activities of military peacekeeping, as well as their opinions on UN rules and decisions. This approach proved itself particularly capable of providing insight on gender-related issues in peacekeeping military training.

"Gender training" and UN lines of transmission

The medal parade is a military ceremony that takes place at the end of the peacekeepers' third month of deployment. During my stay in Haiti, I was invited to the 21st Brazilian Battalion medal parade ceremony, where the soldiers receive medals that testify to their successful participation in the mission. The "parade" is actually a ceremony inside Camp Charlie, where the troops were stationed, around the main open area. This area holds the morning *formações*, where the troops receive their instructions for the day. In the evening of the medal parade, rows of chairs are lined around the Camp's main open area, a big screen is positioned, as well as a podium, where MINUSTAH authorities will go up to talk and congratulate the Brazilian soldiers for their work on the mission.

Images of Brazil will be shown on the big screen, while traditional *gaucho* dances are being presented by members of the battalion, in front of an audience of international civilian officials and military members of other national armies. The large-format image of Brazilian model Gisele Bündchen, born in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, was displayed on the battalion's walkways. The military is not only represented through strictly military rituals and parades, but also through folkloric *mise-en-scène*. On the evening of the 21st April, regional dances, as well as a performance with swords by soldiers from Santa Maria that composed the 21st Brazilian battalion, wearing typical clothing from the *pampas*[8] region, followed the parade and the actual distribution of medals.

[8] Pampas is the name used to describe the natural environment of the South American Southern Cone, covering mostly the extreme South of Brazil, Uruguay and northern Argentina. It is considered the "natural habitat" of *gauchos*, the agricultural worker and horseman that traditionally represents the region's culture.

At the Brazilian medal parade that I attended, a civilian official from the MINUSTAH Gender Affairs Department, also Brazilian, is sitting next to me. As soon as the soldiers show up in their gaucho costumes, waving swords in the battalion courtyard in typical southern style, she is shocked. The show is "too macho" in her opinion, which she voices pretty loudly, so as to be heard by the Brazilian higher-ranking officers seating around us. "All the work we do, and then finally, this", she insists. The civilian officer's irritation, which is just marginally disruptive to the event, serves as illustration of gender mainstreaming inclusion in UN arrangements. It is loud, but really not that disruptive, as I will try to show.

"All the work" that she does and that she refers to, is the work related to diffusion of gender mainstreaming rules and decisions by the UN related to the Women, Peace and Security agenda. In the 1995 UN Conference that approved the Beijing platform of action, rape was recognized as a war weapon. The international penal courts of Rwanda and Yugoslavia judged for the first-time war criminals for sexual war crimes, and they were instrumental in elevating the debate on sexual and gender-based violence during conflict to the the Security Council. In 2001, it approved resolution 1325, that was followed by four others, as well as a large normative architecture on the question of violence against women in conflict (Drumond 2023).

This evolution not only touched questions of international humanitarian law, in the sense of what became banned as inacceptable even in warrying contexts, but also touched questions of UN management of conflicts. During the 1990s, as UN peacekeeping operations soared, so did the complaints about peacekeepers' – who are for the most part, military personnel – behaviour towards the populations they were meant to protect. Since the 1990s, multiple accusations against peacekeepers surfaced. The response by the United Nations representative to Cambodia, Yasushi Akashi, to allegations of sexual misconduct from UN military – "boys will be boys" – became emblematic (Neudorfer 2014). Since then, and still today, the allegations are present.

Because women's organizations and academics try to find a response to the issue of violence against women during conflicts (and generally), and because UN peacekeeping operations depend on their ability to be perceived as legitimate efforts to ensure the security of populations, the Council's regularly renews its commitment to the theme of "Women, Peace and Security". In the documents signed by the Council, three types of response are to be found. First, a zero-tolerance policy towards soldiers who have committed abuses. Second, respect for international law by the parties to a conflict. Finally, the participation of women in national and international politics, and the obligation to offer them the opportunity to access positions related to peacekeeping and to participate in peace talks (Pankhurst 2016).

As Olonisakin et al. (2010) have pointed out, diffusion of gender training is based on two phases of transmission. First, UN Headquarters establishes rules and guidelines that are consequently transmitted to field-level operations. This means mainly a circuit interior to the UN bureaucracy and parallel to the national dimensions of missions.

Another second line of transmission is the national inclusion of gender training in peacekeepers' preparation prior to deployment, which happens in national centres in the troop-contributing countries. According to the UN Women global study on the application of 1325, UN peacekeepers should be "provided scenario-based training on gender mainstreaming, preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence and sexual exploitation and abuse" (UN Women 2015).

Brazilian training centre CCOPAB (from the Portuguese acronym for Brazilian Joint Centre for Peace Operations), created following the establishment of MINUSTAH and mostly to answer the needs created by Brazilian contribution to the mission (the first major one for Brazil), has a gender module under the "protection of civilians" preparation. This module is said to comprise "prevention of sexually transmitted diseases/hiv, sexual exploitation and abuse, sexual violence as a weapon of war, and gender-based violence".[9]

CCOPAB is run by the Brazilian military, like most peacekeeping training centres. Particularly, the CCOPAB's approach to pre-deployment preparation was one of "trial and error", with training being designed by Brazilian military having participated in previous operations (mainly Angola in 1994) and amended using feedback from those returning from the field after initial deployment in Haiti, according to my interviews. Preparation is nonetheless approved by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations and based on UN documents. Explanations relating to the structure and functions of the Security Council, international conventions and other UN-related matters constitute the initial, more theoretical part of the preparation officers receive. This is what they call the "blue bath". Officers will then go back to their platoons in the military regions chosen for service with MINUSTAH and pass this information on, preparing enlisted and non-commissioned personnel.

Gender training for MINUSTAH was first implemented based on the existing pre-deployment modules and date back to the beginning of the mission. A Brazilian gender expert has been invited to supplement the formation at least since 2011, the same year a memorandum of agreement (MoA) between the Brazilian Ministry of Defence and UN Women was signed regarding the Women, Peace and Security agenda. One of the provisions of the MoA was UN Women's participation in gender training at CCOPAB and Giannini et al. (2012) mentions that the UN agency has been the major proponent of WPS in Brazil, with civil society and the women's movement largely absent from the debate, for lack of interest from their part. This lack of national ownership is seen as largely due to the absence of official conflicts inside Brazil's territory or around Brazilian borders for more than a century. The national women's movement has not, then, being historically invested in discussions related to peace and conflict in the UN sense. The issue of women's participation

[9] DEPARTMENT OF PEACEKEEPING , DPKO/DFS guidelines for integrating gender perspectives into the work of united nations police in peacekeeping missions [online], June 2008, Biblioteca CCOPAB, last access: 17 March 2015. Available at: http://biblioteca.f59.com.br/documentos/Guidelines%20Integrating%20a%20Gender%20Perspective%20into%20the%20Work%20of%20the%20UN%20Military%20PK.pdf ; DEPARTMENT OF PEACEKEEPING, Support to Military and Police Pre-Deployment Training for UN Peacekeeping Operations, [online], 1st October 2011, last access: 3 April 2019. Available at: http://biblioteca.f59.com.br/documentos/Policy_on_Support_to_Military_and_Police_PDT-Eng.pdf

in the military is equally absent of the national feminist agenda. Brazilian approach to the WPS agenda and 1325 implementation seems to have been a top-down approach. What does this mean in relation to how soldiers on the field understand and interpret these UN commitments?

Gender training and representations amongst Brazilian peacekeepers

An officer told me that, after participating in MINUSTAH, he had become particularly interested in UN missions and asked to be transferred to CCOPAB. When I interviewed him, he was responsible for preparing other officers, and he explained how preparation for deployment worked. He spontaneously lists gender as the first of the specific lessons in the "blue bath" package he prepares.

> Officer: The military is already prepared for all of that the UN expect from all troops, not only Brazilian [patrolling, checkpoints, combat in urban areas, crowd control], but it also demands this 'UN filter', as they call it, these cognitive instructions that are particular to the UN, so the military can be ready. And then the military, all of us, people who already have some experience go there [to CCOPAB], with those instructions specific to the UN environment, the "blue filter" as they call it. So, these are instruction that range from lessons on gender [said in English], to human rights to the rules of engagement, so...
>
> Q: what do you mean by gender?
>
> Officer: It's a, a... when I say gender is because this is the name they give it, but they are instructions on gender [uses the Portuguese word for it], the United Nations are currently very concerned with some issues, with gender, right, with adding women to peace operations, that's one of the things, the other is being concerned about protection of civilians and particularly with women and children in conflict zones, these are all concerns for the UN and there are guidelines regarding them. So basically, it presents us with the guidelines of how a peacekeeper should behave with regards to certain elements of the population, children, women, and how is the treatment...[10]

The first thing the officer brings up is the issue of female representation in peace operations. This is, nevertheless, the only time the dimension of increasing female participation will be mentioned. In this case, being an officer that deals directly with preparation of other officers, there is a difference in the way gender training is perceived and described. This knowledge seems to find many bottlenecks trickling down.

Participation is scarcely mentioned, and the officer goes quickly back to equating gender with a "protection of civilians issue". "Gender issues" are also summarized as related to "how certain

[10] Interview with officer, Brasilia, 7/10/2014.

elements of the population should be treated". This UN particularity of restrain and respect for women and children is then incorporated in the discourse of peacekeepers as one of the fundamental parts of the peacekeeper's job. When talking to other military personnel interviewed, not so close to preparation activities, avoiding violence – sexual violence – against women is the main form the idea of gender is interpreted.

As I mentioned, to avoid bias, I didn't directly ask blue helmets about gender. I was interested in analysing exactly when gender, or elements relating to the Women, Peace and Security agenda would come up naturally in their answers and how it was understood. First illuminating element: women are most often mentioned by military in their interviews when they are talking about their wives.

During interviews, I would ask Brazilian blue helmets what they thought was the hardest thing about the mission. I had designed the question to maybe allow them to talk, in a matter-of-fact way, about the military operations they carried out in Port-au-Prince outskirts. Interestingly, their answers went in a totally different direction from what I originally expected. Instead of talking about military manoeuvres and the "use of force" (how the UN calls the use of violence in peacekeeping operations), they talked about home. Particularly in the case of enlisted personnel and low-ranked officers, the "hardest thing about being a peacekeeper" was being away from home and, consequently, missing family: wives and mothers.

> Q: And what were the difficulties?
>
> A: Family, girlfriends, you know, I think what affects them the most is the family and girlfriend aspect[11]

Women, rarely mentioned in interviews outside references to home, would come up in a second, different, kind of answer. When Brazilians serving at the MINUSTAH were asked "what has the UN training brought that was new to you?", they would answer this question in two parts. First, by mentioning that training had mainly allowed them to understand the general framework of the Security Council and its mandates; they would also mention some particularities relating to the UN's rules of engagement[12] that differ from usual training, either concerning use of weapons, proportionality, or specific tasks, such as organizing checkpoints and training for riot control. But often and with special emphasis, their answers would link UN with, in their own words, "the thing with sexual exploitation".

In one case, a young officer considered his participation in MINUSTAH a real lucky strike. Brazil's participation in overseas operations is rare. The country has been at peace with its neighbours for almost two centuries. Haiti represents the biggest contribution Brazil has ever made to a

[11] Interview with enlisted, Port-au-Prince, 27/02/2015.

[12] "Rules of engagement" is UN military jargon for the rules establishing how and when military personnel is allowed to use violence during the mission.

peace operation, not more than 10% of Brazilian officers served in Haiti. Thus, participating in MINUSTAH is seen as great distinction in a Brazilian military career. Contingents rotate regionally. This young officer whom I spoke to in Port-au-Prince was serving in a Southern barrack in Brazil, his first post as officer, when it was a South battalion's tour to be deployed with MINUSTAH. In his case, he considers himself to be especially lucky for he's in artillery, and this was the first time an artillery platoon served with mostly infantry personnel. When I met him in the Brazilian base in Haiti for our interview, he seemed eager to let me know that he had understood and retained information about peacekeeping and the UN from his training in the Brazilian centre, so when we got to the questions related to the UN in particular, and I asked about what the CCOPAB training had offered him in terms of novelty, he stressed and quickly mentioned differences between activities the Brazilian army usually performs on national territory and those of MINUSTAH.[13] He then carried on to emphasize how UN training had taught him what peacekeepers can't do to women and what peacekeepers should do in relation to, as he puts it, "this thing about sexual exploitation". He was also quick to say that, even though the UN has had problems with "it" in the past, this excludes Brazil, which hasn't had the same problems. He also stressed the idea that sexual exploitation is not simply related to rape or non-consensual relations, but everything related to transactional sex:

> So, the UN has had some problems, not with Brazil, but in general, in the time they existed, so they insist a lot on this thing with sexual exploitation, these humanitarian questions, because, for example, Haiti is a very poor country. So... our currency is very strong, and they'll get concerned with the fact that soldiers will stay confined, right, and then, women, this and that, so, you can't, this part has been stressed ferociously...[14]

Even though the young officer doesn't talk about sex work directly, he mentions the strength of "our" currency, Haiti's poverty and men being confined, particularly young men. UN peace operations for the military personnel I have interviewed become synonymous, at least at the level of their gendered representations, with controlling male sexuality and avoiding contact with women. Through the filter of the training received by Brazilian commanders, gender is mainly connected to this to a general rule about "avoiding women" or "what not to do to women".

Progressively, as I was more often confronted with this kind of answer about "avoiding contact with women", and this with the most important new element learnt in training, I amended my

[13] Brazilian military is normally employed in three types of missions, all three of them taking place within the national territory: the reception of recruits, registered for military service, which is compulsory in Brazil; border control, from the Amazon to the south of the country. Finally, but more recently, there are operations mandated by the Ministry of Defence and provided for in the federal constitution under the title of 'guarantee of public order.' Pacification operations in the communities of Rio de Janeiro, which since 2008 have seen the army intervene to fight against the drug traffickers in the territories of Maré, Alemão and Penha are understood as being of this third kind. MINUSTAH is the biggest peacekeeping effort Brazil has ever promoted, even though it usually employs military observers to different UN missions and has eventually contributed with troops for UN's mission in Angola in the 1990s and, more recently, to UNIFIL.

[14] Interview with officer, Port-au-Prince, 27/02/2015.

list of questions and added a follow-up to the question of what the UN had taught them that was "new". I would then ask why they thought "the thing with sexual exploitation" was so important to the UN. This intelligence officer that served twice in Haiti hesitated first, and then answered:

> You'll stay away from home for a long time, right, six, sometimes, seven months, and there is people that don't go back home, and... this contact with local population, I won't even single Haiti out, in any UN mission you're not allowed to have contact with local population, physical, sexual contact, I'll tell you why this is not allowed, sometimes because of diseases, and even if it is an UN rule, sometime a young 18-years-old, even us [officers], may think, oh, just a little slip it's not a problem.[15]

There's a meaningful ellipsis in his discourse that goes from mentioning this long period "away from home" and "sexual contact with the local population". Being away from wives and mothers is not the only "hard part" of the mission. When asking an officer, who has commanded a platoon in Haiti, what was the most difficult part of the mission, he will mention the fact that they must be isolated and confined for the length of the mission.

If this is the hardest part, I asked, why keep doing it? Why do military men have to be isolated? I asked why he thought that confinement was important. He explained the importance of control and discipline for soldiers: "that part that would go out, they'd maybe cause problems with international repercussion (…) sometimes the fellow, you don't know, from the start, we… young people, you know. We know."[16]

Once again, here, in *lieu* of an answer, we have a meaningful ellipse. Confinement and a taboo logic around contact with the civilian population is connected, but never explicitly said to be related to the possibility of men searching for commercial sex or, simply, sex; both things are framed as negative, and possibly inevitable without great cost for the civilian population. The link between military men and aggressive sexuality is in all cases considered as shared evidence.

The officer's answer about military confinement is very important for understanding gender representations among Brazilian military serving under the UN banner. Emphasis on command's control over soldiers is seen as an answer to problems that are related to "the thing with sexual exploitation". What interviews showed is that Brazilian military see women as wives and mothers (when talking about Brazilian women) or as sexual objects (when talking about the foreign "civilian population" to be "protected"). In both cases, they are excluded and exterior to their military activity. Also, Brazilian military identify information on sexual exploitation as important part of their training, of the UN concerns, and talk about it spontaneously.

At the same time, the "thing with sexual exploitation" appears as a problem and a concern particular to the UN, not generally connected to their military training, and also as the result of

[15] Interview with officer, Brasilia, 27/09/2014.

[16] Interview with officer, Brasília, 03/10/ 2014.

a shared, silent, understanding about aggressive male sexuality, particularly in young men. Finally, the answer to the "thing with sexual exploitation" is strict control over lower-ranking personnel.

How the UN and Brazilian military respond to and represent sexual and gender-based violence

The three points mentioned above confirm two different sets of criticism. The first one is part of an ongoing debate among gender specialists talking about sexual and gender-based violence in conflict situations. The second one is related to the Brazilian military more particularly.

As rape as a war weapon became an international political subject, and a problem to be solved by the UN, more specialists and researchers have focused on debating causes of sexual violence in conflict. Some of them have concentrated on explaining this violence by what has been dubbed the "opportunistic hypothesis" (Arieff 2009). Meaning that the explanation for soldiers using rape is attributed to a breaking down of social codes and controls during conflict situations, creating opportunity that soldiers would then seize. This model is based on a rational choice model of behaviour, and, moreover, one that sees masculinity much like the interviewees previously cited: as a constant drive to violently submit women sexually that must be rigidly controlled or otherwise inevitable. In less essentialist versions of this understanding, forms of social cohesion in military groups are seen as advancing or avoiding levels of sexual violence (Wood 2006; Cohen et al. 2013). These accounts do not explain why the military or militia would choose to use sexual violence as means of controlling populations and/or creating cohesion, *in lieu* of other kinds of violence, neither does it explain where this connection between masculinity and sexual violence comes from, or why military men's masculinity in general as a social category is generated. Even though this approach has been largely criticized (Drumond 2023; Freedman 2019), it still seems to be the main framework operating in the Brazilian military's minds when it comes to gender representations and applying UN rules and guidelines. Furthermore, I will argue that this happens because it allows minimum disruption for the Brazilian military usual relations between officers and non-commissioned military and/or conscripts, as well as structural relations between men and women, while, at the same time, allowing for these officers to paint a picture of Brazilian's army as a modern army, able to perform peacekeeping functions, as I will show.

This argument is supported, rather than weakened, by the absence during the time of MINUSTAH, as mentioned by Giannini et al. (2016), of complaints related to sexual abuse and/or exploitation against MINUSTAH's Brazilian military personnel. Rather than certifying its actual absence, it seems to point to a reluctance, by the Brazilian military, to incorporate or take seriously any criticism to their military training and practice. As of 2020, sexual exploitation and abuse were still not recognized as crimes by the Brazilian Military Penal Code (Drumond and Rebelo 2022). This allows us to wonder about the extent of the existing barriers to complaints

being levelled against Brazilian military personnel, rather than reassure us about Brazilian troops' stellar record.

More importantly, evidence gathered by Lee and Bartels (2020) on peacekeeper-fathered babies in Haiti claims that Brazilians military men compose a part of those that would have left *petit MINUSTAH*, as the children born from peacekeepers are called locally, behind. Among the participants in their study, 21,9% of the personnel having fathered Haitian children was identified as Brazilian, and 93,6% as soldiers. One specific narrative mentioned in Lee and Bartels (2020), shared by a single female from Port-au-Prince talks about her being only 14 years old and going out with a Brazilian, who got her pregnant and subsequently left her with no support.

Brazilian's incorporation of ideas about sexual and gender-based violence in their training seem to steam from UN's gender mainstreaming. This does not contradict or avoid their ability to sustain traditional gender representations of aggressive male sexuality. This apparent contradiction is explained if we understand that the Brazilian military's defense of the need to avoid sexual exploitation and abuse is less an end on itself, and more a means to proving that the Brazilian army is a capable and modern one in face of an international audience, meaning the UN bureaucracy and other armies participating in the mission.

Men proving themselves

Brazilian interpretation of "gender training" as "the thing about sexual exploitation" precludes any gained awareness relating to gender as differential power relations or masculinity, particularly military masculinity, as social construct (Connell and Messerschmidt 2013; Higate 2003; Withworth 2007).

As I mentioned, UN resolutions on the questions of sexual violence during conflict and gender equality post-conflict creates a series of obligations for UN troops. These are not only expected to refrain from committing sexual and gender-based violence themselves, as well as avoiding warrying parties to commit them, but are also connected to parity in different political and social levels. This means furthering women's participation in traditional political positions, and all levels of UN peace missions, which include military posts and troops. Kirby and Shepherd (2016, 374) state that the UN's gender policies for peacekeeping have a "mixed but generally disappointing record". Increase in female participation is said to have stagnated, particularly in police and the military. According to UN's study on the implementation of 1325, the number of military women in peacekeeping troops is 4,1%.[17] Critics of the UN gender approach to peacekeeping

[17] The information comes from the most recent document approved on the subject, Secretary-General Antonio Gutérrez 2018 Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy. See: Sacks Ferrari, S. 'Is the United Nations Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy on tracks to reach its goal?', *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, December 12, 2019. https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-backgrounder/2019/united-nations-uniformed-gender-parity-strategy-track-reach-its-goals#:~:text=Established%20with%20the%20objective%20of,to%20meet%20them%20by%202028 Last access on: 16/09/2020.

point out that the programme has been narrowly defined, mostly rhetoric and underwhelming in its accomplishments (*idem*).

Brazil has the lowest level of feminization among South America armies (Mathias 2009). Women represent less than one percent of Brazilian troops in peace operations (Giannini et al. 2016). Even if gender training has been included very early in CCOPAB training for MINUSTAH, Brazil's first "Women, Peace and Security" National Action Plan (NAP) dates back to 2017, the final year of the mission. National Action Plans are the national translation of the UN Resolution 1325 and follow the resolutions' decisions. Many countries who have UN peacekeeping as one of their military roles and mission have adopted one, such as Canada, France, Finland (according to UN Women, 105 countries had it in 2023).[18] Drumond and Rebelo (2020) criticize the "outward-facing" approach of Brazil and other South American countries that, emulating major UN donor countries, tend to focus exclusively on what is supposed to be done to "protect foreign women" when acting in external operations. They identify this tendency as a reflection of a "follow-the-leader" approach where, arriving late to the NAP formulation and adoption phase, countries like Brazil tend to merely "copy and paste" other countries' initiatives, and do so mainly as a strategy to "promote their international profile and legitimacy as good global citizens committed to the advancement of global norms and women's rights" (*ibidem*, p. 9). Giannini et al. (2012) explain the exceptionality of Brazilian low levels of feminization because of the traditional autonomy the Armed Forces have enjoyed in the country.

Brazilian army's autonomy, which we might more accurately call low accountability in relation to civil society and other branches of government, has allowed for Brazilian peacekeepers to posit as good students of gender training without having to modify or alter "business as usual" in the military. In the case of a national army such as Brazil's, their proclaimed ability to not lay hands on any woman becomes related to this basic concern of keeping Brazil's image intact and, moreover, to promote Brazil's image as a reliable and competent player in the international arena. In many of the interviews conducted, an acute sense of Brazilian military having to prove something will come up. As Ben Ari and Elron's (2008) have pointed out, peacekeeping may serve to reinforce nationalisms and the place of one's national society in the global order.

The ability to restrain soldiers, seen as potential aggressors when uncontrolled, but heroic peacekeepers when controlled by their superiors, plays a central role in Brazilian military interpretations of UN "thing with sexual exploitation".

During my first day at the BGB, the Brazilian military base, one of the communication officers, who had been accompanying me since my arrival, showed me a PowerPoint presentation, a sort of introduction to Brazilian peacekeeping. A couple of videos were part of this presentation, and he stressed one in particular: a United Nations white vehicle with the black logo on the side can be seen on the screen. A person enters the frame, approaches the jeep and then leaves.

[18] UN Women, *National Action Plans,* available at: https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/focus-areas/peace-and-security/national-action-plans. Last access: 12/07/2023.

I do not see it, but I understand that the person threw a rock at the jeep. A man, a soldier in camouflaged uniform, dressed in a bullet-proof vest that also carries the UN logo, gets out of the car and walks in the direction of the stone thrower, who is no longer visible on the frame. The soldier holds a weapon in front of him and walks until he is no longer visible. There are noises, kreyol screaming, and the sound of a gunshot. The Brazilian officer explains that this is a video of a Jordanian peacekeeper, as Jordan used to control the area that Brazilians now controlled. He uses the videos as an example of what peacekeepers shouldn't do, and of what Brazilians don't do, according to him,[19] pointing out Jordanians as unruly and violent, not able to incorporate UN directives (in this case, related to use of non-lethal weapons in face of lesser resistance, like a stone).

The American armed forces will occasionally appear as a source of admiration for Brazilian officers and soldiers, mainly because of the importance the military are accorded in the US, in comparison to Brazil. But Brazilian military will also, when talking about Haiti, point out how US troops will use excessive violence. This is mentioned usually to value not only Brazilian's restraint, but also communication skills and empathy.

In both of those cases, military peacekeeping emerges as national competition. The ability to restraint its soldiers will appear as very important qualities that put Brazil in the place of being able to carry out peacekeeping tasks as expected by the UN. Brazilians will not only appear as capable as other peacekeepers participating in the mission. Officers will go further and stress Brazilians' special capacity as peacekeepers to restraint, in contrast to countries with both big and smaller armies. Jordanians as well as Americans will be described as resorting to force where dialogue would have sufficed, which means these armies are uncapable of restraint, are less respectful of civilian population and, consequently, worst suited for peacekeeping.

This also becomes a way for middle powers and smaller countries to argue for recognition on the international arena through apt peacekeeping. These results, even though partial, offer new empirical insights that reinforce scholarly criticism of both UN's gender mainstreaming in peace missions, as well as Brazilian military position as competent defenders of "democratic peace" (Sotomayor 2014).

Conclusion

My conclusions are in line with True and Wiener's analysis (2019) on the dynamics of rhetoric and practice of the UNSC commitments to the "Women, Peace and Security" agenda. They compare provisions on the Rome Statue of the International Criminal Court about sexual violence,

[19] These claims are hard to corroborate, because the UN, nor the Brazilian government, divulge data on blessed and deaths by MINUSTAH. The *Iron Fist* operation, conducted by the Brazilian military, attracted international criticism for its long duration, suspected blessed and dead, and quantity of bullets fired. See: Dorn A. W, "Intelligence-Led Peacekeeping: The "United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), 2006–07." *Intelligence and National Security* 24, no. 6 (2009): 805-835 and Victor F. "Terra Desolada. O que o Brasil deixou pra trás no Haiti." *Revista Piauí*, no. 155, (2019). Access on January 01, 2023. https://piaui.folha.uol.com.br/materia/terra-desolada/

usually contested by States at the international level, and the United Nations Secretary General reports on the same subject. WPS provisions discussed by the UNSG, vaguer, receive a lower level of contestation. The authors argue that this would be so because they demand only a rhetoric commitment and can be, as this research shows, accommodated to already-existing patterns of control and hierarchy.

With little pressure exerted on confronting these rhetoric commitments to military peacekeeping practice, and little accountability from Brazil's side, Brazilian peacekeepers can claim awareness – not contest the "thing with sexual exploitation" – while changing little in their practice. In the Brazilian case, studied here, participation in peacekeeping includes in the military's vocabulary the idea of UN participation as being necessarily tied to controlling soldiers and avoiding contact with women, represented as completely exterior to the mission. This type of relation to women is a top-down rule, that will be taken seriously only to the extent that it is necessary for the national Armed Forces to "look good" and be seen as the "right kind of peacekeepers" in the eyes of the international community represented by the United Nations. It has had, for now, little impact concerning changes, for example, in the unmentioned low levels of feminization in the army and represents no subversion or modification to traditional gender roles as military men see them.[20] So, in one hand, gender policies seem to be submitted to a "pick-and-choose" approach, where Brazilian military puts emphasis on the dimension they are willing to comply with *rhetorically*, because they demand little adaptation, and ignore those that do (increase in number of female peacekeepers). The dimensions that are then encamped in discourse are so in particular ways that allow for producing an acceptable image of the military without actual accountability or debate on the subject.

In Davies and True's (2015) analysis of resolution 1325 diffusion, the idea that discipline and control are the major factors in avoiding sexual and gender-based violence doesn't seem to be exclusively military. Their research shows that the same ideas found amongst Brazilian military hierarchy are shared by other military, but also researchers and civil deciders. Loss of command appears as main cause, or opportunity, for perpetrators in conflict situations. But if we consider that cross-national quantitative approaches to conflict-related sexual violence also points to gender inequality and discrimination as structural causes for sexual violence in conflict, Brazilian peacekeeping and optimism related to the "Brazilian way" of keeping peace should be regarded extremely carefully.

Brazilians see themselves as good peacekeepers, in the sense that they are perfectly complying with that is expected of military peacekeepers. This article has tried through *thick description*[21] expand on detailed empirical knowledge of a limited reality.

[20] Giannini et al. (2016) will mention, for example, how, in the discussions leading to the 2017 Brazilian National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security, military representatives would still employ arguments relating to gaps in physical strength or threats to group cohesion as reasons not to adopt policies for raising the number of women in the ranks.

[21] See Oakes, T., and P. L. Price (Orgs.). *The cultural geography reader*. London: Routledge, 2008.

Considering the limits of my research, this article represents an initial understanding of how Brazilian military negotiate with gender training. I hope that the possibilities opened by the approximation between political sociology and IR will pave the way for us to expand and elaborate on what this very exploratory work has shown, and will motivate further qualitative, as well as more quantitative, research on the topic of the Brazilian military and its international projection.

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