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Militarization as Conviviality

How Women Define and Resist

Gendered Everyday Violence and Discipline in Brazil

Izadora Xavier do Monte



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Militarization as Conviviality: How Women Define and Resist Gendered Everyday Violence and Discipline in Brazil

Izadora Xavier do Monte

Abstract

This working paper uses Mecila's conviviality framework to advance a gendered analysis of Brazilian militarization. Drawing on ethnographic vignettes, it examines how three distinct women's movements in Brazil – mothers opposing state violence, women from the landless worker's movement, and women in São Paulo's urban student movement – perceive and resist militarization. Their perspectives diverge from traditional definitions of international relations scholarship. Moreover, they provide critical insight into dimensions of militarization often overlooked by the "pluralist normative" framework and other anthropological approaches to urban violence in Brazil. The paper demonstrates that these movements' interpretations of militarization align more closely with feminist perspectives. Building on these feminist interpretations, the paper conceptualizes militarization as conviviality, framing it as an everyday process with differential impacts on men and women. This process is both material and ideological, shaped by the influence of men with guns on politics, but also extending beyond and affecting women in specific ways. Recognizing these varied impacts is crucial to effectively challenge and oppose militarization within Brazilian society, its economy, and its politics.

Keywords: militarization | feminist perspectives | Brazilian social movements

About the author

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1. Introduction

“Do you think reparation for what they did to us will come from the pens of professors? It is easier – and just as widespread – to kill with a pen as with a gun”. I am downstairs at a newly opened museum space in downtown São Paulo, listening to Débora Maria da Silva, a researcher from the Forensics Anthropology Department at UNIFESP and coordinator of the Movimento Independente Mães de Maio.¹ She is speaking at a panel on racism and democracy during a literary event (Silva et al. 2022). Her talk begins with the story of how the movement she coordinates was born – when her son was killed by a police bullet while returning home after buying antibiotics for a toothache. I notice the woman in the older couple seated in front of me getting emotional, her hand clutching her partner’s arm tightly.

In Brazil, gun production and exports have increased sharply, with the Brazilian small arms company Taurus claiming to be one of the biggest producers in the world (Campaign Against Arms Trade n.d.). There has also been a significant rise in the number of Brazilians carrying firearms, which doubled in 2022 to nearly 3 million (Lisboa 2023). “But the guns that kill the most are the pens of lawmakers”, Débora Maria da Silva says. Their pens are responsible for increased military budgets and more flexible gun laws, and they are wielded to serve the dictates of the Brazilian gun industry, she denounces.²

“Why do you insist on researching us? Go research your own fathers and where their tax money is going”. When Débora Maria da Silva shifts from recounting her son’s death to posing pointed questions to the audience, the older couple in front of me remains still. “It is the white pen, the Largo do São Francisco pen, which is guilty. We live a militarized life”,³ she continues. “Democracy does not exist in Brazil, because it is not accessible to Black people, women, and the working class. For now, our sons pay the price; soon enough, it will be your own because this militarization will spill over”.

1 In May 2006, the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC), São Paulo’s largest narcotrafficking group, killed 40 police and state agents. In response, São Paulo’s military police amped up their already often repressive police operations and attacked São Paulo’s peripheries in a wave of violence that lasted five days and left between 500 and 600 dead in the Baixada Santista. Mães de Maio was created in response to what the collective has called the Crimes of May. At the head of Mães de Maio is Débora Maria da Silva whose son, Edson Rogério da Silva Santos, a 29-year-old street cleaner, was killed by police in 2016 (Laboratório de Análise da Violência 2008; International Human Rights Clinic and Justiça Global 2011; Movimento Mães de Maio 2011; Defensoria Pública do Estado de São Paulo 2015; Caramante 2016).

2 “The recent expansion of Brazil’s defence sector was enthusiastically supported by a small clutch of politicians. Weapons companies aggressively courted members of Brazil’s national Congress and state legislatures, with 30 candidates receiving \$530,000 in contributions during the most recent presidential campaign in 2014. Twenty-one of these were elected. Nearly \$200,000 alone was passed on to 16 politicians from a single firm, the Brazilian Cartridge Company, the country’s premier firearms ammunition producer and one of the largest in the world. These same lawmakers are also hoping to loosen domestic gun legislation to vastly facilitate gun access to Brazilians – this in a country with about 42,000 gun deaths a year” (Muggah and Thompson 2017).

3 Largo do São Francisco is a traditional law school in downtown São Paulo.

In this paper, I would like to reflect on killer pens and the spillover effects of militarization.

This reflection builds on my PhD research, during which I interviewed and observed Brazilian military personnel in the UN's peacekeeping mission in Haiti (Xavier do Monte 2022, 2023a, 2023b). My work engages with a growing body of literature in international political sociology that seeks to understand how the increase in humanitarian missions and the transformation of global conflict affect the military's conception of what it means to be a soldier.⁴ It challenges conventional international relations (IR) and political science approaches to peace and conflict, which often take a top-down perspective – focusing on national strategy and interests, and geopolitical blocs. Instead, I sought to understand military missions by inquiring into the mindsets of Brazilian soldiers and exploring the meanings they attributed to their humanitarian operations. The objective was to capture the discourses, ideas, and conceptions of Brazilian soldiers engaged in peacekeeping operations in Haiti. (While this may seem elementary to sociologists and anthropologists, a brief review of IR or political science journals – searching terms like “local turn” or “sociological turn” – reveals how contested and complex the discussion remains in international politics.)

Using the same critical framework I employed to study Brazilian military personnel in Haiti, I then began to look at other Brazilian security dynamics to understand how gender intersects with Brazilian perceptions of peace, war, security, and militarization.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 I was particularly focused on gendered approaches to Brazilian militarization. My research was inspired by a connection presented to me by the (all male) military personnel themselves during interviews: that their actions in Haiti were not fundamentally different from their actions in Brazil.⁵ At that time, I came across videos, Instagram posts and YouTube livestreams about “Mothers Against State Violence” which ultimately led me to the event at the museum described earlier. As I kept going, I found an abundance of academic articles and texts about these women – predominantly Black women who had lost family to police

4 See in particular: Olsson 2015; Daho et al. 2019; Delori 2019; Fassin and Pandolfi 2010; Bigo 2005; Ambrosetti 2012.

5 Since 2006, the Brazilian army has participated in the “pacification” effort in neighbourhoods of Rio de Janeiro. In other words, it has been employed in “law and order guarantee operations” provided for in the 1988 Constitution (and designated in Portuguese by the acronym GLO for *garantia da lei e da ordem*) but never implemented before the 2000s. The army operating under the GLO mandate acts in support of police forces in reclaiming territories considered by the state to be under the control of drug-trafficking groups. Given the similarity of activities carried out in Rio de Janeiro under the GLO and in Haiti under humanitarian operations (territory reclaiming operations, patrols, checkpoints), comparisons between Rio de Janeiro and Haiti are numerous. Some specialists and policymakers speak of a “synergy” between the two spaces, given the fact that the army is employed in similar “theatres of operations” with close objectives. See: Müller and Xavier do Monte 2024; Xavier do Monte 2024.

or army violence. These women criticized the military and police presence in their communities and denounced Brazilian public security and militarization.

The work of Juliana Farias, which I will discuss in subsequent sections, offers valuable insights into this field. She identifies a growing body of research on mothers' mobilization, tracing its roots to scholars such as Márcia Leite, Patrícia Birman and Adriana Vianna (Farias et al. 2020). In a 2020 article, Farias and her collaborators highlight how the mothers' mobilization has been a source of reflection for Brazilian fields of urban anthropology, anthropology of the state, law, violence, sociology of health, and social assistance.

As I kept an eye on those debates, I realized that the collaboration between collectives and academia is not without its tensions. Women in mothers' collectives are often wary of universities. Concerns abound: too much is written and said about them, too many diplomas awarded on the back of their stories, and too many academic profiles expanding with little tangible change in how police, armed forces, and the government treat their communities. There remains a glaring lack of accountability for state agents who kill those they are meant to protect.

When I met one of the coordinators from these movements in person for the first time in 2024, someone I had interviewed previously, she asked pointedly: "What came of that interview we did?" I sheepishly admitted: "Nothing yet". This conversation occurred just a couple of weeks after the acquittal of the police officer accused of shooting her 19-year-old son as he walked to his grandmother's house. She looked at me sternly and said, "Yes, that's the university for you".

Perhaps she had hoped that the interview would help change the verdict, which might explain why she agreed to speak with me in the first place. It didn't.

A few months later, I attended a Conference at Universidade Estadual do Rio de Janeiro organized by the Instituto Memória, Direito e Justiça Racial (IMDJR). Since 2021, I have taught a short course on critical security studies at various institutions. Initially offered as a winter course at Universidade de São Paulo, it was later adapted for a group of activists from Baixada Fluminense, a region with very high levels of police, militia, and narco-traffickers' violence. IDMJR conducts political work in this area, focusing on defunding the police and criticizing militarization and I also collaborated with them by participating in their conference.

During one of the panels, after I presented my work on gender, race and militarization, a participant took the microphone. She said she didn't need the university to tell her what it means to be a mother who has lost a son to state violence, but she acknowledged that, "That doesn't mean what you (academics) do doesn't have a purpose". She spoke about how learning about laws and rights and being empowered to confront the police

had changed her interactions with the state and asked those present for more of that type of output.⁶

These demands extend beyond mothers' mobilization. As I carried on my junior research project with Mecila in São Paulo, I began to notice that militarization is a common thread connecting very different women's groups.

It was late afternoon at Armazém do Campo in Campos Elísios. The ample, well-lit space situated in a more popular area than the dim museum where I had earlier heard Débora Maria da Silva speak, hosts a bookstore, a café and a market selling goods from the Landless Workers' Movement (Movimento Sem Terra, MST). I occasionally shop here for organic rice and beans, and produce cultivated by MST farmers. In my left-leaning progressive queer neighbourhood, MST apparel has become a symbol of coolness. But I wasn't here to shop; I was meeting someone from the gender section of the MST.

My interest in MST women arose from my broader focus on Brazilian women resisting militarization. Each year, on 8 March, International Women's Day, MST women organize a series of nation-wide actions. "Actions" is perhaps a more accurate term than "events", as MST regularly engages in direct actions aimed at confronting land-grabbing and other enemies of the working class, in accordance with their Marxist-Leninist ideology. In 2024, they chose to commemorate International Women's Day with an all-female protest outside of Taurus's São Paulo showroom. Taurus, Brazil's largest gun manufacturer, is blamed by Débora Maria da Silva for fuelling the militarization of Black and poor communities.

During our meeting over agroforestry-grown coffee, members of the gender and international section explained that armed violence has been a major concern for MST since the Eldorado do Carajás massacre – a rural conflict in the 1990s that saw 19 activists killed by the police in the Northern state of Pará (Amnesty International 2016). Recently, after a comrade was killed by her partner and the Brazilian Public Security Forum published data indicating increased gun violence in rural areas (and particularly against women), the Movement's peasant women began connecting the gun industry with their struggle. These discussions culminated in the 8 March protest.

We shared a heavy, cheese-filled *tapioça* while discussing how militarization manifests in both rural and urban areas, and how it comes down to who holds the gun and who

6 It is funny to go from studying the military to studying those who claim their lives have been militarized – I never asked myself what I owed to the military by writing about them. I figured, on the contrary, that they control enough of what is said about them for me to be free to write anything I felt was relevant. When I interviewed the military, they also considered as evident that what I would write would serve them – either I was supposed to be a military psychologist, coming to check up on how they had been, or I was sent away with words of "you tell them how hard we have been working".

gets to be on the other side of the barrel. It's not just a question of police violence; it's about armed men everywhere – whether police, hired gunmen for landowners, or others. We marvelled at how ineffective this widespread militarization is at making women feel safe, and how vital gender is to understand what makes for that dynamic, specifically.

Five months after the MST women took to the sidewalk in front of the Taurus showroom, and about 14 kilometres away, young people gathered under São Paulo's shy sun at Praça da República. Among them were four young women, part of the student movement Juntos, affiliated with the Socialism and Freedom Party (Partido Socialismo e Liberdade, PSOL). They spoke against what they have dubbed "school militarization", a São Paulo government policy that follows a recent Brazilian trend: using education budgets to hire retired military police for administrative work and teaching ethics and discipline in state schools. Standing behind a banner reading, "My School is Not a Barrack", they denounced the policy as a repressive project aimed at curbing dissent, imposing militarized control over students' bodies and subjectivities, and ultimately replacing education with racist and heteronormative understandings of discipline, hierarchy, and authority.

These vignettes illustrate how Brazilian women – rural and urban, young and old, Black and white, mothers and those that question pre-assigned gender roles – are naming and resisting various forms of militarization. But what exactly is militarization and why does it concern Brazilian women? Queer and feminist perspectives in critical security studies have highlighted how our societies are built on the unequal distribution of violence and protection. These theoretical perspectives have much to offer – and much to gain – from Brazilian women's mobilizations. They could help define militarization more clearly and empower movements and scholars to better organize against it.

Why and how do such diverse groups of women use the same word – militarization – to describe the problem they have come up against? What do all these understandings have in common with the existing specialized literature on the subject? And how might gender provide a lens for analysing militarization "from the bottom up"? How can the concept of conviviality (Costa 2019) help us understand militarization from gendered, sexualized and racialized perspectives, uniting the varied groups mentioned here: Black mothers in peripheral communities, rural landless women, and young urban non-conforming women in the student movement?

When I talk about militarization as conviviality, I am not suggesting that militarization might equal harmonious coexistence. Conviviality, in this context, is not about harmony but about the dynamics of "living together" and the inequalities inherent in those dynamics. Women in Brazil have insisted that militarization deeply shapes their

everyday interactions, their living together with others, affecting how they carry out their roles and live their lives as women.

As we will see in the first section of the working paper, IR and political science literature usually focus on militarization as the control of the state apparatus by the military, or on the use of existential threats to a nation's security to curtail the rule of law. Militarization usually has to do with how police is trained, or state budgets. Since Jair Bolsonaro's rise to power, militarization has come back to the political science lexicon in this same vein, of discussing generals' influence on politics, and the fragility of civilian control over Brazilian democracy. Brazilian urban anthropology has tried to update the concept by bringing it closer to the debates on conviviality, focusing on the ideological dimensions of militarization and how it impacts the everyday lives of peripheral Brazilians.

Militarization is then clearly a major political concern in the specialized literature. But these approaches fail to dialogue with the political practice and concerns of the movements opposing militarization and fail to understand what exactly in their experience is important to social movements opposing militarization today. Even when they focus on militarization as going beyond the State apparatus, militarization appears as recent, or exceptional and a deviance from a normal way of dealing with state violence.

That is why in the second section I will present some feminist IR ideas on militarization. I believe that these insights from feminist IR can help us to better understand women's mobilizations in Brazil against militarization. And, conversely, by focusing on feminist IR concepts of militarization, we can perhaps also be more useful to the movements opposing it.

This is an analytical move that also converges with conviviality debates. It situates militarization as a contextual, historical process involving a series of institutions beyond formal state ones. It also allows us to think of militarization beyond the military, as everyday dispositions and logics. That is why I think conviviality raises critical questions for thinking about militarism – and helps to better grasp these women's collectives' contributions to talking about militarization.

But to add to the conviviality framework, I propose that we see militarization and conviviality as gendered phenomena. To do this, we not only have to be interested in the lives of women and in their political work (Enloe 2007), but also in a gendered analysis of those lives and work, especially on how these are impacted and defined in relation to the hierarchical opposition between masculine and feminine as an ordering principle of conviviality. A gendered analysis considers that the lives of women are a product of power relations defining one set of possibilities and social places for men and the masculine, and an opposite one for women and the feminine. Understanding

how this happens has a bearing on undoing the hierarchies upon which society is based. Understanding this also has a bearing on our understanding of politics and militarization.

2. Definitions of Militarization

The concept of militarization emerges in the political science literature to describe the rise to power of military leaders in US-backed authoritarian regimes in Latin America in the 1970s (Bigo and Guittet 2004). It also has roots in a process that took place in the United Kingdom in the 1980s. During the miners' strike, confrontations between miners and police – where the latter were overwhelmed – led to the transformation of civil protection units into police support units. Alongside special patrol groups originally tasked with controlling poor London neighbourhoods, these units began training with military principles and materials (Jobard 2008).

“Para-militarization” is the term employed in the criminology literature of the 1980s to describe this process under Thatcher's administration. It involved a shift towards “a philosophy, a training and a quasi-military organization of the police”, accompanied by a new emphasis on “crowd management” in both activity and function. This represented a departure from the traditional conception of police in metropolitan Great Britain as unarmed, civilian-controlled and intentionally distinct from the military.⁷ The focus moved from population protection to public order protection – a repressive turn that included more violent training, instilling more discriminatory mindsets in British police officers (Jobard 2008). In this context, militarization is linked to the institutional shift of policing towards hierarchical command structures. Police officers, previously trained to judge individual situations and mediate them, became increasingly submitted to hierarchy and discipline, a shift that is seen as correlating with an escalation in police violence.

Since then, and especially after 9/11, the concept of militarization has been developed in political sociology literature to describe how liberal democracies in Western Europe and the United States have responded to the “War on Terror”. In this interpretation, militarization is associated with attacks on civil liberties and due process, justified by the perceived existential threat of terrorism. It appears as the opposite of the rule of

⁷ Julian Go's work on police in the United States takes yet another point of view on militarization and imperialism. He defines militarization of police as an evolution on tactics and objectives that is owed, in the case of US police, to the experience of the American-Philippine war in the late 19th century. Veterans imported their imperial techniques to local police forces, Go argues, due to what he calls “field homologues”, meaning that the presence of non-whites in certain metropolitan territories would inspire the use of the same forms of control by the police as the American army had used in colonial territories. See: Go 2020.

law. Bigo and Guittet (2004) argue that militarization involves the political use of an overwhelming threat to justify restrictions on justice and individual rights. This opens the way not only to the “militarization of the police”, but also to an increased involvement of the military in internal security affairs, blurring the roles of police and armed forces. With both dynamics relying on a discourse of exceptionality, this “establishes a general war climate”.

This trend is presented as novel in the case of Western Europe, but the novelty resides in upholding an official discourse of the armed forces’ submission to civilian authority while simultaneously expanding the use of military practices previously employed mainly in the colonies (Go 2020). In any case, the focus here is on the discourses on political exception being used to inscribe in everyday practices modes of functioning that are assumed to be a last resort in extreme cases. Although post-9/11 discourses attribute these practices to the fight against terrorism, Bigo and Guittet, alongside other scholars studying cases in the UK, France and Italy, argue that much of this militarization logic predates 2001. In the specific case of the UK, the Northern Ireland conflict is often cited as the starting point of these colonial logics being applied domestically to the metropolis – and, ever since, any new threat is construed as exceptional in order to justify military interference and exceptions to the rule of law. The primary concern in this debate is the efficacy of anti-terrorist measures, especially in light of their significant encroachments on liberal democratic norms.

In a different vein, the Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies maintains a Global Militarization Index to measure military spending relative to state budgets (Bonn International Centre for Conflicts Studies 2022). Here, militarization refers to increased investment in war preparation, characterized by higher spending on weapons and soldiers relative to GDP and other metrics such as comparing the size of armies with the amount of doctors per capita in a country.

In Brazil, since Jair Bolsonaro’s rise to power, some analysts have focused their attention on the renewed influence of what has been called the “*partido militar*” – the “military party” – in national politics. In a throwback to the original definition of militarization, this analysis highlights the resurgence of military officials to the central stage of state politics. During Bolsonaro’s incumbency, eleven retired generals were chosen to act as ministers, and military personnel were appointed to various levels of public administration at an unprecedented rate since Brazil’s return to representative democracy in 1989 (Ferraz 2022).

Part of the political science literature in Brazil has explored militarization as an obstacle to the country’s “civilianization” – meaning complete civilian control of the state – and as a legacy of the authoritarian period (Akkoyunlu and Lima 2022; Nobre 2020; Leirner

2020). However, this approach faces the same challenges seen in broader studies of violence in political science and international relations. This focus on the high politics of national defence, homeland security, or state apparatuses assumes the state to be a homogeneous, rational entity driven by national interests, and therefore overlooks more nuanced dynamics. But another way of conceptualizing militarization has come up in dialogue with the study of conviviality.

The “violent pluralism” or “legal pluralism” approach attempts to move beyond this idea. It tries to show how, especially in Brazilian peripheries, individuals are usually negotiating with many different logics of conviviality beyond state ones.

Gabriel Feltran conceptualizes militarism as one of the “discursive elements of a mass movement” which, together with anti-intellectualism and entrepreneurial monetarism, has become part of the everyday lives of Brazilians across different classes (Feltran 2020b: 13). He defines militarism as popular support for police torture and humiliation of the population. While I believe we need a more rigorous definition of militarism/militarization in the Brazilian context, Feltran’s work on conviviality provides a valuable lens though not through use of the word “militarism”.⁸ He analyses how, “in Latin America, the pragmatic of everyday life – or conviviality – structures the management of violence distribution through different, plural, and unequal social orders” (Feltran 2020a: 1). Rather than using militarism as something that describes popular enthusiasm for police violence, I believe he is closer to an analysis of militarization as conviviality when he expounds on the way urban conflict results from different normative regimes not being shared by people pragmatically living together. Especially in the sense mentioned above: by shifting the analysis from comprehensions of the state as a coherent system and idea to understanding violence in relation to the state as a process. For him, this means moving away from normative concepts such as democracy, citizenship and a republic to explore the violent dynamics and conflicts operating in Brazil. His proposition of militarism as an ideological concept that sees political processes from the bottom up will reverberate here.

However, as Anne-Marie Veillette argues, the normative pluralism framework fails to incorporate gender into its analysis (Veillette 2020). Incorporating gender is not the same as incorporating women. For example, Gabriel Feltran’s work on conviviality

8 This lofty definition of militarism as a set of values is also found, for example, in the work of Vladimir Safatle, professor of philosophy at USP. In an article published in the journal *Crisis & Critique*, “militarism” and “fascism” are the name of the same social logics defined as: “a society organized by periodic administrative massacres through police slaughters aimed at reminding sectors of the population of their condition as ‘killable without tears’ needs to justify its violence through the imaginary of constant risks against ‘good citizens’. It needs to evacuate fear to a central political affect. This works as a justification for organizing society in the form of a ‘right to self-defense’ and, ultimately, in the form of armed militias. On the other hand, this same logic feeds indifference and social disaffection. It creates a block on any possible emergence of generic solidarity, naturalizing the logics of social predation” (Safatle 2024: 125).

and violence references a central female informant, Maiana, without gender being considered as a category to reflect upon (Feltran 2020a). He employs the narratives told by Maiana as well as her life story but does not analyse what they say about unequal *gendered* distribution of violence and plural normative regimes in Brazil. Maiana reports on the lives of her sons, whose conflicts and trajectories can allow the reader to understand the real “third element” outside the normative framework established for debate in the public arena: young men who turn to crime. Maiana’s political work, her various simultaneous negotiations with state institutions and agents, as well as with illegal and informal actors, her ideas about family morality, about a mother’s (as a typically gendered) role are mentioned for context but not considered worthy analytical elements in themselves.

Maiana’s position as a broker navigating different regimes seems to me to reveal that rather than being completely morally and normatively separated, these systems share a patriarchal quality that place her in the very particular position she holds, both inside and outside of all of them. Maybe there is something gendered about militarization that this literature is missing?

3. Feminist Definitions of Militarization

Cynthia Enloe is one of the first authors to have problematized the absence of women in the study of international relations, and to criticize how so-called “international” phenomena are approached. In her books *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarization of Women’s Lives* and *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, she shows that the apparent absence of women from the “international scene” is the result of focusing exclusively on the “front of the stage” (Enloe 1983, 2014). By examining those who support the protagonists of high politics – conventionally defined as issues of war, diplomacy, and political economy – Enloe shows how women appear on the sidelines and behind the scenes. She also reveals that international politics is not limited to major milestones – battles, conferences and summits – but is, on the contrary, an everyday affair. Women also make war, and war makes women, particularly through their daily lives.

This approach appeared marginal during the 1980s, when the arms race and the nuclear scare monopolized the discourse. The collapse of the Soviet Union, which came as a surprise to more than one international political scientist at the time (Lebow 1994), revitalized Enloe’s ideas, which grew even stronger over time. While leading professors at Yale and Harvard heralded “the end of history” or the “clash of civilizations”, Enloe and other scholars turned to her concept of militarization and described it as what distinguished the post-1989 era.

For Enloe, militarization is the social and everyday process by which society and individuals become dependent on the military. This process is accompanied by a deepening dependence on gender binarity, positioning men as warriors, and women as beings to be protected. In Enloe's view, the end of the Cold War and of the competition between superpowers did not signify the "end of history", a return to European wars, or the "clash of civilizations" predicted by Francis Fukuyama (1989), John Mearsheimer (1990), or Samuel Huntington (1997). On the contrary, she shows that militarization, as an international norm, establishes the need to create existential threats and strengthens the links between masculinity, militarism, and foreign policy. Her predictions have proved more accurate than those of her contemporaries mentioned above and provide more convincing explanations for phenomena such as the internationalization of the Syrian war (Balanche 2013; Gani 2021) and Russian expansionism (Clément et al. 2022; Poast 2022).

Feminist definitions of militarization in IR have since focused on broader societal norms connecting militarization and gender in what Enloe would call the "everyday lives of women", a concept we could just as well call conviviality. These perspectives begin by challenging the idea that preparation for war exists because enemies of the state exist – such as the idea that US militarization during the Cold War was a result of the undeniable threat posed by communism. Instead, Enloe proposes that militarization is a process resulting from our gendered understanding of politics; more particularly what she would call a masculine understanding of politics. Militarism and militarization are understood as social norms, a complex package of ideas that propagate military values both in military and civilian life.

Enloe, despite her critique of the usual ways in which American academia studies war, nevertheless ends up reproducing the Anglo-Saxon IR tradition of theory-building, i.e. a heavier focus on theorizing with a rather loose approach to empirical research. She, for example, draws inspiration from international women's networks, but does not analyse them empirically. Her interest remains in theoretically criticizing concepts of power, security and so on (Humphreys 2012; Sabaratnam 2020).

In a seminal feminist IR text, Enloe uses Campbell's soup as a paradigmatic example of the militarization of American society during the Cold War. Famously immortalized by Andy Warhol for its distinctive label featuring the drawing of a tomato, Campbell's began commercializing its products with Star Wars characters, particularly Jedi knights. Enloe uses this example to illustrate American society's increasing dependency on the imaginary of war, which begins to infiltrate even the commercialization of basic products such as soup.

A recent debate in feminist IR has questioned whether militarization is an issue specifically tied to the Cold War or if it is more pervasive than previously acknowledged by predominantly white, U.S.-based feminist scholars. Going back to the Campbell's soup example, Alison Howell points to the fact that militarization did not begin with Star Wars imagery; the science of logistics and the idea of canning soup itself were products of war-related innovations in the 19th century (Howell 2018).

The feminist IR debate on militarization is, in its recent iterations, an attempt to come to terms with two crucial elements previously absent from the larger IR debate on war, violence and security: race and coloniality (Barkawi 2016; Gani 2021; Manchanda and Rossdale 2021). Howell's criticism, in particular, focuses on exposing the ways in which the civil space is a liberal myth – as is the distinction between civil and military affairs. To practice a “feminist curiosity” in IR now becomes asking not only “Where are the women?” but also, from a situated, empirical and historical point of view (Harding, 1995), “What has been built as distinctively civil or military, for whom, and on what basis?”.

To make this clearer, we can return to the Brazilian context. In my work with Brazilian peacekeepers, I try to show how the Brazilian military created their own idea of “militarity”, and how this idea is, for example, widely different than the idea of “militarity” for the French army (Xavier do Monte 2020). For Brazilians, peacekeeping is “real war”, fought abroad, in opposition to the “law and order guarantee” operations that they usually perform inside national borders; for the French, it is a respite from war or a remedy to it, as it is a far less intense theatre of operations than the war on terror bombardments that they carry out in the Middle East. These competing understandings do not stand as “false” versus “true” but, sociologically, as a way of understanding that there is nothing inherently military about the things that may seem the most evidently military: using guns to protect a political collective against a perceived threat depends on a series of qualifiers and historical experiences to make sense even to those wielding the guns.

But returning to Howell, she refutes the idea that certain domains were militarized solely by the competition between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. She shows that areas like anthropology, nursing sciences, and logistics, as I have mentioned, were shaped by 19th century connections to war and colonial violence. Her particular concern with the cases of the police and universities in the U.S. demonstrates how war and politics are profoundly connected in a way that challenges the notion that militarization transforms a supposedly civil and liberal sphere into a militarized one.

Howell criticizes Enloe's concept of militarization for underestimating the extent to which war is ingrained in everyday life. She questions the very existence of a space in

contemporary society that can be truly dissociated from war. The civil space is a myth according to her (but not only her), and a ruse of liberal politics to hide its own violence.

So, in Howell's account, militarization is not a process in which different aspects of civilian life becomes increasingly dependent on the military, as Enloe suggests. Instead, Howell proposes that if we look closely, especially if we look at it from the perspective of racialized people, and all the Others within the liberal order, spaces yet unaffected by the logic of state violence are nearly impossible to find. Militarization, then, is the process of maintaining borders and control through violence. As Chris Rossdale puts it:

The conventional (and always questionable) notion of a clear separation between military and civilian, war and peace, is less tenable than ever. Instead, we confront a social world in which the production of organized political violence is a remarkably quotidian process, and in which few if any social domains can claim innocence (Rossdale 2019: 53–54).

In Brazil, many different women have been trying to call attention to the fact that militarization extends far beyond the *partido militar* or the ideological support for violence. Militarization, as they describe it, encompasses the everyday practice of negotiating with and resisting men with guns, and the social value attached to organizing society to their benefit. This is connected to experiences of gendered and sexualized violence perpetrated by state agents and the permanent war-like logic that governs Brazilian urban peripheries; it is connected to the increased gun trade that exacerbates gun violence against women in rural areas; it is connected to the imposition of military police and ideology in schools and school curricula. I argue that these dimensions alone all point to *militarization as conviviality*: to militarization as a particularly gendered way of being together, where men with guns – whether state agents or not – are given power over society, shaping the roles and positions of women within it.

While asking why women insist on the convivial dimension of militarization, we may also uncover why IR “conventionalists” and other political scientists and actors insist on the idea that militarization is an exceptional part of politics – something that happens “before” politics or outside of it, way up there in the “high politics” sphere. Or are women simply missing the target when they label banal everyday occurrences militarization?

4. Women and Militarization in Brazil

4.1 Militarizing Motherhood

Anne-Marie Veillette (2020) has sought to map out what police actions in different *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil mean to women specifically. Through focus groups, participant observation and biographical interviews, she has identified the particularly gendered effects of “violent pluralism”. Women are less likely to suffer physical harm and be killed, but they report other forms of abuse: invasive domestic searches, sexual violence and harassment (e.g., being called sluts), racist and homophobic attacks, threats from the police, and physical violence – all explicitly justified by the presumption of their complicity with *traficantes* (drug dealers), implying a submissive position and attitude of women towards men in their communities. These women describe the police as reducing everyone in the *favelas* and *periferias* to two gendered groups, both equally guilty: the men as thugs to be shot down, and the women as either victims or submissive/complicit companions.

This illustrates how conviviality can be said to be militarized in a specific way – if militarization has a subjective, ideological dimension, besides a material one, this binary and enemy-focused way *favela* residents describe being seen by the police also qualifies as militarization – specifically a gendered militarization: people are not only seen as “the enemy” but broken down into “the enemy (assumed to be male)” and “the enemy’s women”.

I would also like to propose a renaming of what Veillette and Elsa Dorlin call “dirty care” – we could perhaps call it *militarized care* (Dorlin 2017), which refers to the work performed by women in response to the police violence perpetrated against men close to them, especially young men. This includes providing emotional support to traumatized family members, tending to those injured by violence, visiting and supporting those who are incarcerated, organizing funerals and memorials, and conducting legal and investigative work when the state is negligent. This permanent vigilance also carries an added layer of maternal guilt: if a child is killed by the police or recruited by narcotraffickers, mothers are blamed for failing to raise them properly. It should be noted that to have a son become a policeman or soldier makes, on the contrary, a good mother. In a sense, the job of “cleaning” a son’s image is also an act of cleaning the mothers’ own self-image. These maternal roles – what makes a bad or a good mother – are militarized along ideological lines of supporting or resisting state violence.

This is another dimension of militarization as a set of relations, and logics – women’s assignation into domestic and caregiving roles take on militarized forms and meaning that relate to the way organized political violence is prepared and carried out.

Juliana Farias has written about the now outlawed *autos de resistência*, (“resistance reports”), an administrative provision inherited from Brazil’s dictatorship era that allowed police to classify any death they caused as acts of resistance, precluding any further investigation or accountability (Farias 2020). There are cases of resistance reports being recorded against victims as young as two years old, attesting to their rampant, unaccountable misuse (G1 Rio 2019). Officially, however, the existence of resistance reports allowed state statistics to confirm a description of the conflict in Brazilian peripheries as a more or less symmetrical conflict between bad guys and good guys.

Farias’s work, as she describes, adopts the mothers’ position as an epistemological stance. This point of view allows for a look at state practices that recounts a different dynamic of violence. Thanks to this anthropological but also epistemological choice, militarization takes on a double meaning. From the state’s perspective, militarization appears as the process of arming men and exerting dominance over a territory. This is the police and army’s perspective, one that presents what happens in Brazil’s peripheries as the result of a clash between equal and opposing forces: one being the state, and the other exterior and opposite to it.

From the epistemological viewpoint of women, however, militarization represents a logic that renders citizens like themselves and those close to them – Black and poor individuals either in conflict with the law or not – “killable” without accountability. Militarization is thus a logic, a way of seeing the world and a mode of governance, one that keeps a part of population under permanent siege, rather than a measure of how many military men are in power and what institutional tactics are used. It is what separates good and bad mothers, Black and white, defines those whose caring role is also the role to keep on caring for the dead against institutional decisions and discourse that keeps killing people after they are dead, because it keeps on killing symbolically by putting forward an image of their dead as non-sacred, killable enemies.

4.2 Militarization as a Gendered Continuum of Violence

A video opens with images of women dressed in black, their heads and faces covered. One of them is wearing a Palestinian *keffiyeh*, and they are running along a sidewalk (Movimento Sem Terra 2024). Overlapping this scene, a newspaper article with the Taurus logo and a caption stating that Taurus is the “largest company in its sector” in Brazil. Next, there’s an image of women with covered faces holding red flags and

banners – one of them reads “Every 7 Minutes a Woman is Murdered in Brazil,” another says, “Free Palestine Now”. In the background, we see the Taurus logo on a building façade.

The red flags bear the emblem of the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (Landless Worker’s Movement, MST), and the women have their faces covered with green scarves patterned with flowers. The camera shows red stains, resembling blood splatters from gunshots, but they are visibly red paint splattered on the black walls of the façade in a symbolic act of protest.⁹

Another newspaper headline appears, stating that firearms are the main instrument used to kill women in Brazil. Additional headlines follow, echoing what is being said by the voice-over. Images of the individuals being called out by the voice-over alternate with blurred footage of the group of women holding banners on the sidewalk in front of the Taurus showroom.

The title of the video, as it appears within the footage, is “Mulheres Sem Terra denunciam Taurus por aumento do feminicídio no Brasil” (Landless women denounce Taurus for the increase in femicide in Brazil). The caption for the video reads, “Mulheres Sem Terra em ato na Taurus” (Landless women in protest at Taurus), published by the Movimento Sem Terra profile on social media (64,100 subscribers) on March 8, 2024.

The voice-over says:

The Landless Women are here today at Taurus to denounce this murderous company, a sponsor of genocide not only in Brazil but around the world. We, the people of the countryside, rivers, and forests, face this systematic violence daily that kills us. And it’s not just because of the weapons they produce, which take thousands of lives, but also because of their owners, who are true enemies of the working class. They are invaders of Indigenous lands in Brazil, coup supporters, deeply connected to the pro-gun, pro-agribusiness, and pro-death caucus in Congress, and they fuel coup campaigns such as those of Ricardo Salles and Luís Felipe de Orleans e Bragança from São Paulo’s PL party.

During Bolsonaro’s government, which facilitated access to firearms, Taurus quadrupled its revenue. We are living in a perverse moment in which the arms industry, authoritarian forces, and agribusiness join forces to sustain this model of destruction—of our bodies, our territories, and the environment. Today, we

9 The imagery of this action is reminiscent of other protests against war and the arms industry, such as the image of three activists for Palestine who were arrested in New Hampshire, United States while protesting against Elbit Systems, an Israeli arms manufacturer. In a post on the Instagram account @anti_imperialist_resistance dated 18 November, one can see the Elbit Systems facade, which has colours and fonts similar to Taurus, also covered in the same shade of red paint.

are also here to denounce femicide. Remember that firearms are responsible for 51% of the murders of women, and among these women, 70% are Black.

This action today is for life—for the lives of all women. It is for the life of Nega Pataxó, for the lives of Palestinian women murdered in Gaza along with their children and babies, and for all Indigenous women who have already lost their lives in the fight for land (Movimento Sem Terra 2024).

At this point, a chorus of female voices, which had already been part of the video's soundtrack, overlaps with the voice-over. The chorus repeats twice the words from one of the banners: "For our bodies and territories, not one less [Ni Una Menos]".¹⁰

In this action, Taurus, a firearms manufacturer, was targeted for being a central part of a process described as "a model of destruction" and "systematic violence". Palestine and rural conflicts in Brazil are conflated – in the sense that they are expressions of the same violence, but everyday violence against women and international violence are also denounced as manifestations of the same profit-driven logics of the gun industry.

MST women echo an argument made in the 1990s by the Colombian women's movement Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, organized during the international debates that led to the establishment of 25 November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Observing that Colombian women, especially Indigenous and rural women, were caught in cycles of violence between the FARC, paramilitary and government forces, the movement decided that it was not enough to combat private violence. They felt it was necessary to also position themselves in relation to the civil conflict and its global geopolitical implications. Adopting a stance of "active neutrality" toward the political forces implicated in the conflict, they would also denounce "virilistic violence", a term they used to describe the patriarchal roots of gender-based violence, but also violence in general in Colombia. A coordinated effort by union women, intellectuals and feminists, the first march united over 600 women coming from different parts of the country (Michel and Falquet 2012). The Ruta not only advocated for the pacification of the country through negotiations and political talks (which would take more than two decades to materialize), but they also enjoined participants to stop having the children of violent men, stop cooking for them, and stop offering their reproductive labour for war. The Ruta understood war as a masculine institution based on politics as violence, and feminism as a necessarily anti-war movement. As such, they advocated a rebellious position against not only the exclusion of women from public affairs, but also against this particular, violent, way of conducting politics.

10 Ni Una Menos is a South American feminist campaign against feminicide (Ni Una a Menos n.d.).

Women from the landless movement may not have called for a “reproductive strike”, but they do identify a continuum between violence against women and systemic international violence. La Ruta, mothers’ collectives and MST women agree on one thing when it comes to militarization: they oppose it because they cannot circumvent what is part of their daily lives. It has a direct effect on the process that makes them understand themselves as women. Militarization is not exclusively a high-level dynamic determined by public security policies and arms industry CEOs; it is sustained in everyday conviviality practices that value masculine violence, guns, and politics as the ability to single out an enemy and overpower it to violently control a territory. Its daily effects are not secondary but central, because this is where this practice impacts them as women: by determining the circumstances in which they can carry out – or make it more difficult to carry out – their roles as women.

4.3 Militarizing Schools

The faculty restaurant at USP is called Sweden, not in Portuguese, but in English. It’s one of the places I have visited the most during my time in São Paulo – and it was not until I proposed to my interlocutor, someone from Juntas, that we meet there for coffee that I realized most USP students were not at acquainted with the existence of Sweden in the heart of Butantã. That’s when I understood it was primarily a faculty restaurant.

I was introduced to my interlocutor through a friend formerly affiliated with the Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL). I told him I was interested in the students movement’s use of “militarization”, particularly through the lens of the women’s collective, and he found me a contact who found me a contact. My interlocutor, a young woman sporting a sticker for the PSOL candidate in the local elections, felt out of place in Sweden, so we took our drinks to the stone tables in front it, framed by trees, modernist buildings and a parking lot. She asked me right away what I was researching, and I told her I was interested in understanding what militarization meant to her. She began by tracing her trajectory as a young feminist who decided in school that she wanted to be a leftist and went “party-shopping” until she found PSOL a little later. She told me that after the big 2013 rallies that swept Brazil (Saad-Filho 2013), and echoed in the students’ school occupations (Bento 2017), there followed what she called a repressive response that has been twofold: first, there were legislative initiatives, supported by the Bolsonaro government, against the teaching of “gender ideology” in public schools (a movement know as *Escola sem Partido*, opposing what its proponents see as ideological influence in schools, Fraga and Souza 2020). Second, the state promoted a project for including military police as part of the school personnel – a policy the student collective was quick to label the “militarization of schools”.

Militarization's main objective, she tells me, is to "mould subjectivities". It is a response to a politicization of students that demand more freedom be incorporated into their formation – freedoms that include gender equality, free expressions of sexuality, and ethnic and racial diversity. The problem with militarization it is not only the "military dictatorship nostalgia". This project is dubbed militarization by its opponents, particularly young women, not only because it tries to shun any critical thinking associated with "leftism", but because its main focus is aimed at students' subjectivities: particularly, barring young women from politicizing their gender identity, and LGBT people from living openly. It is an ideological and subjectivising process aimed at the basic everyday process of education. It is a discipline, in the Foucauldian sense, of creating subjects that are "in tune" with authoritarian, profoundly gendered understandings of politics and society.

For Juntas women, militarization also impacts the lives they live as women – and, more importantly, it is a direct response to the possibility of disrupting established meanings for what a woman is and does, and how she behaves. Militarization is a reaction to young women in the student movement experimenting with other ways of understanding and being a woman, which means defying, for example, sexualized moral imperatives, but also by taking part in politics. Defying militarization in this case adds to the previous understandings of militarization as men with guns limiting women's everyday experiences as women. Defying militarization is not only about denouncing armed men and the authoritarian political values they embody, but also about resisting the imposed traditional gendered roles that frame women as silent victims and/or protected ones.

Juntas's headquarters are located in central São Paulo, near Largo do Arouche. I have passed by this street dozens of times and have never noticed the building with the PSOL candidates' posters – maybe because a lot of buildings have them around here. I help this young woman, fresh out of high school, to lift up the heavy metal door. We sit at opposite sides of a wooden table, the only furniture on the second floor of this downtown store that serves as headquarters for the PSOL movement. She became one of the leaders of the student movement against school militarization when her school in the Northern part of São Paulo was placed on the governor's list to become part of the "civil-military" school program. She came home profoundly aggrieved about what that meant and was moved by a need to do something about it. Her aunt and uncle, already members of the party, brought her to a meeting and proposed that she join the youth section. This is how she came to lead a successful campaign against the implementation of the program in her own school and became a representative of the student movement against militarization in Brazilian public schools. Even though, she says, they talk about militarization because they recognize a strong component

of dictatorship nostalgia is present in what they see happening, she summarizes militarization as an ideological project of creating support for far-right politics.

She also talks about the cases of sexual harassment that have been denounced in other states, where similar projects have been approved and begun operation. She says that in her case, she thinks that her group – mostly made up of women – was successful in convincing her schoolmates because a lot of them are young peripheral men, who are in contact with the military police and subject to its disciplining power in their everyday lives. Public schools in working-class areas actually represent a respite from this, unless the civil-military project were to be approved. In the context of public schools in working class areas, beyond harassment or violence, what is considered the undue presence of military police would also mean control through pedagogical disciplinary tools. Which takes us back to the pens and the spillover effects of militarization and to our conclusion.

To summarize, the mothers' movement understands militarization as descriptive of a mode of governance in peripheral areas. One that has very clear racial and gendered lines: they not only target Black people but also classify Black women along very clear gendered codes of good and bad motherhood. It is also a mode of governance that makes the experience of being a Black woman in some Brazilian peripheries into that of a person living under a conflict logic similar to war, outside of the "civilian logic" of normal liberal democratic functioning.

To the MST women, militarization is the name of the continuum of violence mediated by the relationship between men and guns, and the profit-making logic of the gun industry. It connects international global conflict to the experience of femicide in rural Brazilian areas.

To activists from Juntas, militarization is not only the presence of military police in their schools, but it is a presence that seeks to assert a discipline on students coming from a poor background. They seek to discipline them in the most classical sense of the term, but also assert an ideological control that values militarism, binary views of the world and of genders, one that is hierarchical and opposed to Black, gay and women's liberation.

Today, women across Brazil are organizing to oppose and resist very different phenomena that they all define as militarization, because they are a "militarization of their everyday lives". Opposing militarization most certainly owes its roots to the idea of generals' control of the state, but has, in these cases, clearly taken a turn to describe an everyday logic that has a particular effect on people according to their gender. These women argue that militarization is not an exceptional political event, but a constant social logic that makes up Brazil; it holds Brazil together – far beyond

the institutional spaces of formal politics. It is ideological, and not exclusively material, even though it is both. It does not only concern high-ranking armed forces officials, but it also goes beyond the question of tactics and logics used by police and other state agents. It is nonetheless connected to these things, and how military logics seep into other, seemingly unconnected parts of everyone's daily lives, but in differential ways. They are not only opposing militarization, but opposing militarization as conviviality, and they are opposing it as women. Because for them, militarization is conviviality, and it is gendered.

5. Conclusion

What does "militarization as conviviality" mean? Does this proposition help us understand these different uses of militarization in women's political rhetoric? Is my proposition useful more broadly?

The conviviality framework has proven useful to approach the larger issue of women resisting militarization in Brazil – meaning, what are women in Brazil resisting when they claim to be resisting militarization? Could this line of thinking prove useful not only for women in those movements, but also to other fields – such as urban anthropology and critical security studies – concerned with issues of militarization?

A gendered analysis of militarization as conviviality is not only interested in the material processes that enable the production and distribution of arms or the mobilization of soldiers for warfare (even though these are critical elements). It is also more than analysing the uses of the military and/or militarized police to maintain "public order" in the face of existential threats to the state or community. And it also goes beyond the visible presence of generals and military figures in formal politics (though it is also that).

A gendered analysis of militarization as conviviality bears on an array of social and subjective processes that organize society for preparing and conducting organized political violence (Rossdale 2019). This means that popular support for police violence, military-style operations, and the torture and humiliation of peripheral peoples in Brazil may be integral components of militarization in Brazil. However, Brazilian militarization is also more than just the material processes by which weapons are produced and circulated, the use of military police or how armed violence is deployed as a tool of urban or political management. To all of that, we must add that militarization as conviviality includes a subjective dimension: it gives meaning to relationships between people, which are negotiated, reproduced or contested in specific social situations.

Militarization therefore appears first and foremost as a daily and permanent political process, not merely as an exceptional response to war or unusual threats. It is a part

of “micro” politics and everyday life. Secondly, while militarization undeniably involves arming the state to control territories and perceived enemies, it also produces broader social effects, affecting the dynamics of security or insecurity, and creating social relations of inequality (Michel and Falquet 2012).

These processes are deeply connected with the gendered way societies are organized. Shared ideas about what it means to be male or female profoundly influence how violence is organized politically and determine the relative social power and positions men and women occupy in society. Militarization cannot be conceived as a process with gender-neutral effects. It operates within patriarchal understandings of who is worthy of protection, and how domestic/public violence share origins and legitimation in patriarchal gender regimes (Rossdale 2019).

In sharp contrast to the gender-blindness of security policies presented as being universal, the militarized conviviality concept seeks to engage with the question of differential forms of violence with which different forms of social and political life are confronted.

As a feminist intersectional concept, militarization as conviviality contributes to uncovering how violence and security policies are not monolithic experiences but affect groups, communities and individuals in varied ways. This is only further elaboration on a common thread already set in motion by a diverse and rebellious group of Brazilian women.

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