MILITARISED MASCULINITIES

Identifying Causes, Manifestations, and Strategies for Change

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REPORT IN PARTNERSHIP WITH GENEVA GRADUATE INSTITUTE AND WOMEN’S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR PEACE AND FREEDOM
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"It will be a great day when our schools get all the money they need and the air force has to hold a bake sale to buy a bomber"

WILPF, 1979 leaflet
TRIGGER WARNING

Please note that the following report includes mentions of violence, sexual and gender based violence, rape, mental trauma, torture.
Executive Summary

Challenging the root causes of violence and conflict is the indispensable task needed to achieve global peace.

The Research Team had the pleasure to work with the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) to give our contribution towards the achievement of this goal. As such, we have engaged within the scope of WILPF's multi-year, multi-country project “Militarised masculinities: identifying causes, manifestations and strategies for change”. For our contribution we decided to identify the root causes of militarised masculinities by way of highlighting how gender norms operate within society, vis-à-vis other systems of oppression (particularly race and sexual identity) that influence the complex structures of militarisation and masculinity.

After recognising the challenge of investigating this on a global scale, the research team decided to introduce the United States (US) as the instrumental case study, due to its role as a historical global hegemon in exporting and co-construction of patriarchal gender norms specifically through military intervention.
Given the large scope of WILPF’s project, the Research Team (RT) has chosen to focus specifically on formal military recruitment as a fundamental form of generating, upholding, and exploiting structures of militarised masculinities.

**Generating**

The RT found that the US military, through its prominent societal role, is key in generating notions of masculinity. Its influence permeates all layers of society as its diversified incentive structure attracts potential recruits for a variety of socio-economic and ideological reasons. It positions itself as a societal entry point by facilitating access to employment, education, healthcare, and welfare services alongside societal recognition and prestige associated with idealised militarised values. Simultaneously, it promotes an ideological appeal to join related to common conceptions of military heroism and patriotic sentiments. An elaborate military-entertainment-industrial complex, characterised by cross-sector cooperation in emanating militarised gender norms, further strengthens the ideological appeal to join the military.

**Upholding**

Military recruitment in relation to the military-entertainment-industrial complex also plays an important role in upholding militarised masculinity as a prominent feature of US culture. Recruitment strategists have sought to adapt to societal change whilst maintaining an ideological appeal to join the military linked to militarised masculinity. A variety of new avenues for recruitment have been appropriated for recruitment purposes as can be seen in the case of social media recruitment campaigns and the involvement in the videogame industry. The military attempts to maintain the prevalence of militarised masculinity by reinventing its recruitment strategies as an adaptation to societal changes, thus catering to a changing target audience.

**Exploiting**

The exploitation of militarised masculinity, and the underlying systems of oppression, on behalf of recruiters is a pertinent feature of US military practice. It is characterised by the targeted promotion of military service with emphasis on either its socio-economic or ideological incentives dependent on the respective audience. Marginalised groups are proportionally overrepresented in the military vis-à-vis their hegemonic counterparts, which can be linked to their limited opportunities and prospects in other sectors of employment. Intersectionality is an important lens to employ in this context, when looking at the underlying strategies of targeted recruitment practices. Whilst especially those of lower socio-economic status with ethnicised background constitute a popular target of recruitment efforts, other characteristics non-conforming with militarised masculinity may limit access to the military.
Understand that the root causes of violence are poverty, climate change, gender inequality, lack of education and healthcare, and so invest in meaningfully tackling them; Educate the public that a militarised notion of security only benefits political and economic elites; Call for new international legislation to regulate new technologies of warfare.

A brief comparative analysis between the instrumental case study and the four cases of Afghanistan, Cameroon, Colombia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which experienced various degrees of US intervention, was also provided. This was done to highlight how militarised masculinities in the countries, similarly to the case of the US, are being used to incentivise military enlistment. The cultural association of masculinity with features of militarisation renders military enlistment attractive from the perspective of meeting the societal ideal of a militarised masculinity. Furthermore, militarised masculinities constitute a root cause for the militarisation of society, thereby facilitating the perpetration of violence in the aforementioned countries, and, more generally, constituting one of the root causes for violence and conflict across the globe.

Consequently, the RT has developed the following set of recommendations to facilitate the departure from militarised gender norms and move towards feminist peace:

**Human security**
- Understand that the root causes of violence are poverty, climate change, gender inequality, lack of education and healthcare, and so invest in meaningfully tackling them;
- Educate the public that a militarised notion of security only benefits political and economic elites;
- Call for new international legislation to regulate new technologies of warfare.

**Social movements**
- Build strong alliances between feminists and decolonial social movements that critique imperialism, masculine, and nationalistic rhetoric of security i.e. of control and protection;
- Reaffirm previous commitments to ending Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) and centering decision-making around survivors’ voices;
- Support men’s resistance to militarism, both from the digital space and from movements against mandatory conscription.

**Abolition**
- Recognise military recruitment and urban policing as key domains of capitalist militarised accumulation sites;
- Align with antiracist, disability, and queer organizing for prison abolition by recognizing that many institutions are central to “martial politics” (because they are war-like and “of war”) (Howell 2018, 131);
- Create more spaces of localised redress and activism that can learn from post-conflict projects of transformative justice.

The RT recognises the pathology of moving towards feminist peace and proposes to problematise security by providing a platform for social movements to achieve abolition. It furthermore reiterates the importance of dismantling WILPF’s “Giant Quadruplets” of Militarism, Capitalism, Racism, and [Hetero]patriarchy.
Reflections and Mobilisation beyond Research

This research project is the result of the alliance between WILPF’s fight for feminist peace and our RT’s commitment to this struggle. As a team, we believe that informing and raising awareness in our communities is the first step to achieving peace. Understanding how gender norms and social forces cooperate in reproducing militaristic ideologies is crucial when pursuing peace. Undoubtedly, the complex social, cultural, economic, and political system that fuels violence can only be challenged and dismantled if acknowledged in its multiple facets, gender norms being amongst them.

Albeit the academic component of the project being fundamental to us, we decided to go beyond the conventional pedagogical requirements, and actively promote our findings and knowledge. Hence, through Instagram @militarised_masculinities we created our own platform where we could share thoughts, news, and findings with wide audiences in order to raise awareness as well as cultivate our own knowledge by interacting with other social media activists’ content. Moreover, benefiting from our presence in International Geneva we had the golden opportunity to dually broadcast our project: first, as a Geneva Peace Week 2021 digital series contribution; secondly, as part of the shared event “Fresh perspectives on Peace and Security” organised by the Capstone Academic team at the Geneva Peace Week 2021.

In addition, we have organised an event entitled “Is Peacekeeping Gendered?” with several guests including Maria Butler (Director of Global Programmes WILPF), in collaboration with several IHEID student initiatives, where we brought our expertise as well as WILPF’s vision forward.

While conducting research, it is often difficult to remind oneself that, as researchers, we too are subjects to the social and cultural forces we are studying (Chisholm 2017, 100). As young students in western countries, we are aware that we have access to and reproduce a certain kind of knowledge and understanding of reality. Whilst our social position being a possible constraint to our research, we believe that it has also allowed us to breach certain conventional academic norms: for instance, part of our research was inspired and nourished by the informal internet culture with which our generation has grown up.

Finally, this has been a genuine learning adventure: we have met remarkable people that dedicate their lives to peace; we have collaborated with young students unafraid to dream big; and we have walked away from our comfort zone, experimenting with new strategies and tools.
# List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AI</td>
<td>Artificial Intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARP</td>
<td>Applied Research Project/Capstone Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>BIR</td>
<td>Bataillon d’Intervention Rapide</td>
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<tr>
<td>DADT</td>
<td>“Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”-Act of 1993</td>
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<tr>
<td>DDR</td>
<td>Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration</td>
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<tr>
<td>DoD/DOD</td>
<td>United States Department of Defense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRC</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of the Congo</td>
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<tr>
<td>FARDC</td>
<td>Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICRC</td>
<td>International Committee of the Red Cross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IS</td>
<td>Islamic State</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGB</td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGBTQ+</td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer + all other identities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCLB</td>
<td>“No Child Left Behind”-Act of 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMSC</td>
<td>Private Military and Security Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>RDPC</td>
<td>Rassemblement Démocratique du Peuple Camerounais party</td>
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<td>RT</td>
<td>Research Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>SGBV</td>
<td>Sexual and Gender Based Violence</td>
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<td>US</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
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<td>WILPF</td>
<td>Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom</td>
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1. Introduction

1.1 Project Background

Challenging the root causes of violence and conflict is the indispensable task needed to achieve global peace. For this purpose, as the oldest women’s peace-making organisation in the world, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), has engaged in a multi-year partnership with MenEngage Alliance - a global network of organisations promoting men’s support for women’s rights and gender justice - to address masculinities and militarism as determinants of violence. Through multi-level research, alliance-building, and advocacy, WILPF’s project challenges the normalisation of militarised ideologies and masculinities, questioning men’s trajectories into militarised identities and forwarding the possibility of mobilising men for peace. WILPF’s research will be conducted globally and grounded locally in the conflict realities of Afghanistan, Cameroon, Colombia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The Research Team (RT) had the pleasure of contributing by providing a blueprint that could be functional as an analytical tool to facilitate research in local contexts, namely for the WILPF’s focus countries. Within the extensive research framework provided by WILPF, the RT decided to focus on military recruitment’s use of militarised masculine identities by state actors. To facilitate the development of this understanding, the RT will study such trends in the specific context of the United States (US).\(^1\) We have selected this country as an instrumental case study to analyse the role it plays in promoting war economies, interventionism, and militarised masculinities around the globe and within its own borders. Understanding the historical hegemonic role of the US is instrumental to study root causes of violence and manifestations of militarised masculinities at a global level, also providing an opportunity to critique its imperialistic attitude to this day.

1.2 Research Question and Objectives

“How do US military recruitment efforts generate, exploit, and uphold militarised masculinities?”

The main research question of this project will allow us to focus on the ways specific ideas of manhood facilitate and relate to recruitment in the US. Addressing recruitment enables us to identify the significance of the instrumentalisation of gender norms as these are used to perpetuate participation in conflict globally. Concentrating on US state military recruitment

\(^1\) We acknowledge the Indigenous nations who have cared for Turtle Island (North America) from before the arrival of settler peoples until this day. For the sake of clarity, we will use the name “United States” throughout this paper.
helps with analysing the role that state institutions play in perpetuating and internalising militarised masculinities in their structure. This is important to understand as it can help in the task of explaining the motivation behind violent state activities.

The relevance and originality of this research stems from an intersectional approach that facilitates the understanding of how different systems of oppression overlap and how dominant culture shapes and frames the discursive strategies that are available to construct masculinities. More specifically, we will focus on four systems of oppression: gender and class discrimination, racialisation, and heteronormativity. In addition, this research will include a study on the changing nature of the “man-warrior” in the “West” and its contemporary understandings in an era of artificial intelligence, video games, and killer robots.

Beside the policy and academic relevance of our research, we aim at producing a study useful to WILPF, to other civil society actors and international organisations interested in this field. Indeed, the quest for a peaceful world emanates from the social realm where emerging sites of anti-war struggle mobilise to promote an anti-war social ethos (Mirrlees 2018) and pursue the unfinishable work of demilitarising perception in militarised societies (Mazali 2016).

1.3 Theoretical Grounding: Militarised Masculinities

Before diving into the main corpus of research, we elaborate on key concepts with the purpose of providing a theoretical blueprint upon which further analysis will be built. The political entity of masculinity comprises a set of behaviours, attributes, roles, and values used to outline the definitional characteristics of men. These “standards” for what constitutes and defines a masculine identity are generally not fixed but are dependent on contextual temporal, geographical, cultural, and historical factors.

Among varying definitions of masculinity, pertinent to this research will be the theorisation of “hegemonic masculinity” and its “toxic” traits (Connell 1987; Connell 1995).2 The hegemonic nature of this type of masculinity however borrows from the Gramscian oeuvre, insofar as all aspects of social reality are moulded by, conditioned by, and in support of one group (Mayo 2020, 26), in this case of men.3 This idea of masculinity is heavily reliant on mechanisms of othering that define the dialectic of gender dynamics, with hegemonic men at the top of the hierarchy (see Appendix - Figure 1).

The socially constructed gender norm of hegemonic masculinity associated with power, violence and control is constantly performed, produced, and normalised in different ways and through different interactions with other identities (Butler 1990). Moreover, hegemonic masculinity requires all types of masculinities - even if “competing, contradictory, and mutually

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2 This is the system of power and practices that allow men (mainly white, cisgender, heterosexual, and non-disabled) to hold a dominant position in society and justify the subordination of all of those who do not conform to this definition of masculinity, including other men, women, and non-binary individuals (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 832; Connell 1995, 77).

3 Gramsci conceptualises this form of power, borrowing from Machiavelli, as being exercised through two interrelated and co-constructive means: force and consent, critical in creating, maintaining, and supporting configuration of power (Mayo 2015, 41-42).
undermining” or “protest masculinities” - to position themselves in relation to the violent notion of “ideal man” it promotes (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 832; Walker 2006). This is directly related to weapons use, which becomes a sort of “prosthesis” to the display of muscularity and toughness, almost cyborg-like (Nayak and Kehily 2006; Russell 2020; Preciado 2018). Such armament culture and the “weapons fetish” features within different loci of militarised masculinities which became “the nexus point for cultural fantasies of righteous male violence and camaraderie” (Salter 2014). This masculinity is socialised, normalised, and valorised also through the generation, exploitation, and upholding of militarised masculinities, through the “martial politics” of institutions such as the army, the weapons industry, and political elites (Howell 2018). Indeed the sites associated with war and the military are where masculinities are constructed, reproduced, and deployed most directly (Morgan 1994). From the latter three verbs emerges the main question of this research: “How do US military recruitment efforts generate, exploit, and uphold militarised masculinities?”

The research question will consider Kimberlé Crenshaw’s intersectionality theory. This will facilitate the understanding of how different systems of oppression (gender and race discrimination, heteronormativity, and racialisation) overlap, and are in a co-constructive relationship vis-à-vis hegemonic and militarised masculinities. Intersectional scholarship also encourages studying militarised masculinities as plural, fluid, and practised in contingent and contradictory ways in diverse military departments, but most importantly in many empirical contexts as shown by recent literature on conscientious objection, fratriarchal bonding, acts of torture, and vigilantism (Henry 2017).

The analysis will start with a brief introduction on the operational framework and the definitional boundaries of militarised masculinities, together with a case study rationale. Subsequently, a theoretical framework on the US in contemporary times will be presented through a focus on American exceptionalism and geopolitical hegemony, on the discriminatory nature of the US military, and on the modernisation of its soldiers. A second section will illustrate the interplay between ideas of hegemonic masculinity and the US military and how the latter generates, exploits, and upholds militarised masculinities by way of recruitment strategies.

The literature on militarised masculinities is continuously expanding with the evolution of the feminist agenda, which continues to debate whether or how to engage men in the movement (COFEM 2018; Duriesmith 2017). It is compelling to conduct global and national research to better understand the influence of masculinity and its trajectory into militarised identities and conflict, and what can be done to counter this so as to mobilise everyone for peace instead.

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4 This plays out in the popular concept of having the “man card”, a figurative membership ID or licensure of masculinity, incessantly asserted by demonstrations of control and strength.

5 It ranges from studying state and non-state actors’ recruitment, firearm use, nuclear proliferation, to employing specific research methods like ethnography of violence. Much has been written about men, masculinities, and violence in the last three decades, specifically with a focus on crime and intimate partner relations. Less has been written about the relationship between men, masculinities, and armed conflict, and even less on the broader structural forces that motivate or compel men (and people in general) to participate in armed conflict, or what can be done to support men (and people in general) to work together to oppose militarism and demand peace.
2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This research project aims to assess the role of militarised masculinities in recruitment practices by conducting an instrumental case study whose findings are then applied to and tested with regard to four focus countries chosen by the partner organisation WILPF. Prior to the case studies however, a brief review of the relevant literature has helped with developing a theoretical framework surrounding the topic of militarised masculinities. In light of the scope of this research project, a single instrumental case study has been chosen as a starting point to facilitate WILPF in developing a more global perspective on the research topic. The rationale behind this choice will be explained in greater detail in the following section, but it can be summarised by the influential role of selected instrumental case study plays for a vast number of countries across the globe. Ultimately, the findings on the instrumental case as well as the four supplementary case studies will be used to draft conclusions and practical recommendations for WILPF as the partner to this research project.

2.1.1 Case Studies – The US and WILPF’s Four Focus Countries

The United States has been chosen as an instrumental case due to its historical role and legacy as a former global hegemon, which will be elaborated on in Section 3.2.1. The four focus countries of Afghanistan, Cameroon, Colombia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have been selected by the research partner WILPF. Research on the ground is facilitated by the presence of local WILPF research teams, with whom the student team collaborated to acquire knowledge from the specific contexts and incorporate it in the comparative analysis provided in Section 5.

2.2 Source Material and Usage

This report draws on both primary and secondary sources in an attempt to develop and test a theoretical framework aimed at understanding the role of militarised masculinities in state military recruitment. A review of the available secondary sources in the form of predominantly academic literature lays the foundation for the development of the theoretical framework surrounding the definition of militarised masculinities and related terms. Furthermore, secondary sources also constitute the main source for the analysis section of this report, where the US will be examined as an instrumental case study. Subsequently, in the final section of the report, primary sources in the form of semi-structured interviews with local research teams will be used alongside secondary sources to assess the extent to which findings from the instrumental case study can be extrapolated whilst assessing the four case studies of Afghanistan, Cameroon, Colombia, and the DRC.
2.3 Research Limitations and Potential Gaps

Due to the limited scope of this research project, some concessions were made with regard to the comprehensive nature of this research project. Firstly, choosing just one instrumental case as a base for further extrapolations runs the risk of over- or undervaluing certain characteristics in the global context. This will be mitigated by assessing the findings’ relevance whilst analysing the four focus countries in the case study section. Secondly, other limitations relate to the current global pandemic and political turmoil as this limited the possibilities for field research which led to a greater reliance on desk research and online interviews with a less direct access to primary sources in the researched countries. Potential gaps that would be interesting for further research are concerned with the role of militarised masculinities in the recruitment strategies of non-state armed actors as well as a closer analysis of the interrelation between the military and related industry actors in generating, upholding, and exploiting militarised masculinities.
3. Background and Context

3.1 Case study rationale

The analysis will focus on US military recruitment covering the period from the launching of Operation Enduring Freedom on October 7th 2001 after the attacks of 9/11 (Naval History and Heritage Command 2021) - which spearheaded the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the first All-volunteer-forces sustained conflicts (Brown 2012, 158) - to modern-day practices. The War on Terror has been under academic, journalistic, and activist scrutiny for long: defined by some authors as an “operation of deception” (Butterworth and Moskal 2009, 411), it is now the object of multiple studies mobilising gender, racial, and other analytical lenses.

This international military campaign has been framed through gender and racial narratives, establishing a polarisation between a US-Western “we” (Mann 2006, 151) and a morally incompatible “Other”, defined by various vectors of differentiation (Shepherd 2006, 25; Wegner 2021, 6; Lorber 2002, 379). Indeed, gender and different masculine models have been mobilised to legitimise and normalise violence on non-US soil, while promoting fear and hatred of the enemy (Bellini 2010, 102). A single undisputable narrative (Stahl 2006, 124; Der Derian 2009, xx) was established which portrayed the enemies’ masculinities as deviant (Shepherd 2006, 26) and Global South women and civilians as feminised helpless victims (Shepherd 2006, 25; Wegner 2021, 6). Hence, as Robert Ivie suggested, “just as our enemies are dehumanized by rendering them into devils, our own soldiers are dehumanized by reducing them to depersonalized heroes” (Ivie 2007 in Butterworth and Moskal 2009, 428). Whilst being framed as a moral war – assumption clear by its name Operation Enduring Freedom - the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq initiated a “military contracting gold rush” (Ettinger 2014, 560) fully dependent on private contractors. Hence the narrative of national-patriotic heroes defending freedom is co-opted.

“[J]ust as our enemies are dehumanized by rendering them into devils, our own soldiers are dehumanized by reducing them to depersonalized heroes”

The Global War on Terror has promoted a “hyper-masculinized global environment” (Wegner 2021, 11) in which, especially in the US, war is the means through which “a hypermasculine national style is constituted and reconstituted” (Mann 2006, 159). Studying the US as a locus of militarised masculinities is thus essential due to its historical, cultural, economic, and political influence. In particular, the US military has historically been a leading promoter and upholder of masculine norms in Western culture (Salter 2014, 164). Among other institutional and social reservoirs of militarised masculinities - such as the police, paramilitary civil organisations, private military and security companies (PMSCs), etc. - the military occupies a distinct and noteworthy spot. Indeed, war-making - which we will assume as the traditional and particular modus operandi of the military - “has been the province of men and a source of masculinity” (Brown 2012, 20). The Military and its different branches work as a gendering

In our analysis, we consider the Military institution as a unique entity, despite being aware of the different narratives, strategies, ideals of militarised masculinities that each military branch promotes (Barret 1996, 129): spanning from the more traditional warrior masculinity promoted by the Marine Corps to the more tech-adventure savvy of the Air Force (Brown 2012, 104-131). Albeit the different services are the ones doing the recruitment (Brown 2012, 4), we will focus on the main trends in recruitment and how these relate to the US international geopolitical position and to its internal cultural, and social environment.

3.2 Theoretical Framework of the United States

The social and ideological environment of the country affects its military culture, the modalities of recruitment, and the gender norms it replicates. Ultimately this has a real effect on the definition of masculinity, and, more specifically, of militarised masculinity. We will therefore initially examine the ideology of American exceptionalism and how this promotes and shapes military action and gender norms; later, we will investigate US geopolitical hegemony; and finally, we will conclude this theoretical framework by studying the changing nature of militarised masculinities in contemporary warfare.

3.2.1 Cultural Exceptionalism and Geopolitical Hegemony

Huntington conceptualised the group of values universally accepted by true American people as the “American creed,” suggesting resemblance with a religious system of beliefs (Huntington 1981). These can be traced in the most official historical documents of nationhood, such as the Declaration of Independence, and carry a distinct gendered component. The American creed

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6 For instance, it was just recently, in 2013, that the women’s combat exclusion was officially removed (Mackenzie 2015, 3). Yet, while being de jure allowed to participate in combat, women are still eclipsed from the public imaginary of combat promoted by the Military self-representation (Brown 2012, 177).

7 “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” (Jefferson 1776).

8 Liberty in US culture takes on the Utilitarian conceptualisation of “negative freedom” (Berlin 2012, 52). As such, liberty is still the centre of the political debate, notably when it comes to arms control. According to the II Amendment, American citizens have “the right to keep and bear Arms” (The Bill of Rights: A Transcription 1791) and in some circles a ban on this primary right is considered as a direct violation that the government would exercise on their individual freedom (Schaeffer 2021).

The root of individualism in the US is intertwined with its Utilitarian heritage: the individual is considered in the capitalistic economic order as a free willed, self-aware, utility maximising autonomous actor (Smith 1982). The result is a capitalistic doctrine of laissez-faire: little government intervention in the market, in favour of free competition. This, combined with aspects of Social Darwinism (Smiles 2014), has translated into an extremely high poverty rate and social injustices. In addition, this aspect of the American creed disproportionately affects individuals on the racial, gender, and disability axis.

The principle of “all men are created equal” (Jefferson 1776) is also considered a cornerstone of American values. Nevertheless, historical incongruencies can be found in the application of said principle. Even after the abolition of slavery, social circumstances still define the standing of individuals in society, with movements such as Black Lives Matter that act as a warning bell that perhaps full equality is yet to be achieved in America. Similarly,
significantly impacted cultures, and masculinities, abroad, through the US role as a global hegemon. In the late 20th century, the US established its role as a global hegemon (Reich and Lebow 2014, 2-4). The US has dominated the international sphere across a variety of dimensions including military, economic, and ideological power, enabling it to exert its influence and pursue its national interests beyond its domestic borders. However, recent developments point towards a new shift towards a multipolar world order. Nevertheless, the period of US hegemony has indisputably left a mark which renders it an interesting case of analysis. Militarised masculinities may for instance be nuanced in their case-specific characteristics, but norms and values propagated by the former global hegemon continue to be generated, upheld, and exploited across the globe (Christensen and Rasmussen 2015, 192; Golub 2004, 769-770). The US in its hegemonial role dominated the international sphere in a plethora of different domains, including those of ideology, material power, and culture (Golub 2004, 769-770; Reich and Lebow 2014, 3).

“Militarised masculinities may for instance be nuanced in their case-specific characteristics, but norms and values propagated by the former global hegemon continue to be generated, upheld, and exploited across the globe” depersonalized heroes”

inequalities in the US military, particularly related to ideas of masculinity, are self-evident and will be further explored in Section 3.2.2 and 4.3.

9 Most noticeably China has managed to rival the US with respect to especially material power and political influence (Reich and Lebow 2014, 3-6). Furthermore, Russia’s re-establishment as a geopolitical rival in regional disputes, the projected emergence of new superpowers such as India, and the growing influence of regional alliances such as the EU have cast additional doubt on the prevalence of US geopolitical hegemony (Reich and Lebow 2014, 3-6).

10 In the post-Cold War period, the US had established itself as the global hegemon as the rival communist powers had collapsed, which enabled it to propagate its model of democratic and liberal institutions coupled with economic integration. This normative influence on international governance structures was arguably conducive to the maintenance of US dominance as it facilitated the spread of US ideology and culture and strengthened its position as the economic world leader (Golub 2004, 769-770; Keenan 2008, 18-19).

11 US material power expanded as a consequence which was further supported by the superior military power of the country. The US was able to intervene in conflicts and pursue its national interests in various parts of the world, furthering its influence beyond a mere ideological scope. For instance, the presence of US troops or training missions and funding support in many regional conflicts affected militarisation procedures in the affected regions. It influenced the structuring of foreign militaries through its immediate presence or its political sway as a donor (see Section 5) (Keenan 2008, 18-19).

12 The cultural hegemony of the US articulated itself through the export of the US media and entertainment industry, facilitating the spread of American ideals and normative conceptualisations – be it via social media campaigns, the movie industry, or other media channels (Golub 2004, 769; Kaempf 2019, 15-16). In relation to this research project, especially the role of social media and the entertainment industry are of interest as they frequently enter in lucrative partnerships with the Pentagon (Kaempf 2019, 15-16).
3.2.2 Racialised and Discriminatory Nature of the US military

The concept of masculinity in the US, and even more so its militarised form, is defined principally in opposition to gender, so male vs. non-male, and race, i.e. White vs. non-White. The interplay of gender and race provides the archetypical hierarchical set-up of US society, with the white male at the top. In this hierarchy of race, gender complicates the set-up: due to historical processes, white women are viewed as superior than ethnicised ones\textsuperscript{13} - white women preserve a femininity that must be protected whereas ethnicised and racialised women are viewed as more masculine less fragile.

Analysing the demographics of the US military in comparison to the civilian population will highlight the mechanisms prevalent in the American racialised society\textsuperscript{14} in later chapters. Federal agencies use five racial categories for their census: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander; meanwhile Hispanic is the only ethnic identity used (Iman Ghosh 2020). As shown in Appendix – Figure 2, in 2019, White people make up 60% of the population, Hispanics 18.5%, Black roughly 12%, and Asian 5.6%. However, this make-up is not reflected in the demographics of active-duty men and women in the US military. As of 2018, with the exception of White men who feature at around 70%, Black and Hispanics, both men and women, feature higher than in the civilian labour force, with Black women being significant outliers making up almost 30% of women in the force (see Appendix - Figure 3; Duffin 2020). Notably, this racial/ethnic diversity is less significant at the highest levels of military service, as White representation features disproportionately more often in the highest ranks (CFR.org Editors 2020).

A particularly interesting case for analysis is also the LGBTQ+ individuals’ presence in the US military. Firstly, it must be noted that the US military does not report data on its LGBTQ+ members (CFR.org Editors 2020). The history of this reality is one of hurtful discrimination and marginalisation. Until what is commonly known as the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell (DADT)” act of 1993, gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals were barred from military service. Even after the act was instituted during the Clinton Administration, service was still prohibited to openly gay, lesbians or bisexual individuals (10 U.S.C. §654 1993). The prohibition on explicitly requiring information on sexual orientation made it still possible for those who did not disclose their LGB identity to serve. This act was repealed in 2010 under the Obama administration, allowing even

\textsuperscript{13} Ethnicised: taken from critical race theory and particularly from the work of Heidi Safia Mirza, this term will be used as an umbrella word to indicate people of colour, or non-white people (Mirza 2015). The decision to use this term stems from the problematic nature of centring whiteness, and the necessity to define this “category” in its constructed nature. Ethnicised individuals do not hold specific features until they are ethnicised by the white gaze.

\textsuperscript{14} The first step to understand how this impacts the US military is to investigate the mechanism of racialisation that impacts US society at large. The first approach to understand the racialised nature of the US military is to provide a working definition of the term “racialised”. Racialisation is a concept developed within the framework of Critical Race Theory to formalise the process by which racial meaning is created, attributed, and reproduced (Gonzalez-Sobrino and Goss 2019, 505, Karim and Solomos 2005, 3-4). Characteristic of these mechanisms is the dynamic between a dominant race that creates, reproduces, and exploits these racialised identities by imposing them on minority groups within society. In the case of the United States, this operates and ensures systems of racist oppression against non-white individuals, the effects of which can be seen in the unemployment rate, incarceration rate, poverty rate that disproportionally affect African Americans, Native Americans, Latinx, and other marginalised communities.
openly LGB individuals to serve in the military (10 U.S.C. §654 2010). In 2016, the Obama administration allowed transgender individuals to serve in the military for the first time in US history (U.S. Department of Defense 2016). While this decision was briefly reversed in 2019 during the Trump presidency (Hallie and Kube 2019), on January 25th, 2021, President Biden reinstated this practice by affirming that “all Americans who are qualified to serve in the Armed Forces of the United States should be able to serve,” irrespective of gender or sexual identity (The White House 2021).

3.2.3 The Changing Nature of Militarised Masculinities in the US: Reflections on Technology and Contemporary Warfare

Notions of militarised masculinities are not fixed but change depending on their contextual temporal, geographical, and cultural dimensions. The contemporary era, significantly shaped by the Cold War, technological advancement, persistent economic crises, and the War on Terror, presents equally impacted, new, and particular forms of militarised masculinities within the U.S. Army.

Connell observed the birth of a new soldier who must be on one side, “physically violent”, "dominating and organizationally competent,” and on the other, should simultaneously possess “the professionalized, calculative rationality of the technical specialist” (Connell 1987, 9). These designate the strict interconnectedness between highly sophisticated technology and armed forces, reshaping the idea of warfare and the “military hero” today. BigTech companies are military contractors, AI military robodogs have rifle attachments, and the military recruits on videogame live streaming platforms. In this context, not a lot has been written on how militarised masculinities are transformed by military labour automation, while some scholars explore how having soldiers in the safety of behind-the-screen warfare separated war from its political and cultural contexts.

The separation of warriors from their war, of bodies from the battlefield, has important implications for militarised masculinities (Acheson, 2021). For instance, it has been observed that it fosters emotional distancing, promotes the possession of “situational awareness and strategic thinking skills”, and the representation of “the hard, erect, impenetrable body of the ideal soldier”, which are hegemonic masculinity traits (Clark, 2018: 602; Holmqvist, 2013; Kunashakaran, 2016). The separation of bodies from the battlefield may indeed demythologize the courageous “sacrifice” of soldiers, and thus “feminize” their behind-the-screen role. Still, the US military seeks to uphold the ideal of the militarized man through the promotion of war video games and the conferral of “Distinguished Warfare Medals” to laud robotic pilots for “extraordinary achievements” (de Carvalho, 2018: 46; Manjikian, 2014: 10; Baggiarini, 2015: 39). Therefore, it can be inferred that “techno-modernised” masculinity establishes masculine authenticity in robotic and modern warfare.

The increasing use of autonomous weapons and drones by the US military prompts similarly interesting gender analyses, the most prominent being that the culture of rape and violent masculinities is embedded in such weapons: for example, a nickname given to a drone by its
operator is “SkyRaper”, which institutionalises rape as a weapon of war (Acheson, 2021: 21). Furthermore, it demonstrates an “overt sexualisation” of imperial violence, that penetrates borders without consent and from afar, which encourages targeted countries to uphold the masculine protector role in their communities (Acheson, 2021: 21). At the same time, drone surveillance providing “over watch” allows operators to become heroic protectors and so to reassert traditional attributes of militarised masculinities (Hicks Stiehm, 1982; Clark, 2018: 616).

Whilst reading literature related to the topic of “technomasculinity” and reviewing it through our acquired “internet culture”, the character of the “war fanboy” emerged, which refers to a boy, or man, who collects and curates technological information about wars and fantasises about weapons, often via violent video games.\(^{15}\) They almost seem to use the same “technostrategic” language used by many men in international relations, and are usually associated with scandals like #GamerGate, which proved the explicit gendered and sexist reality of videogame culture, dominated by the so-called “hardcore” “toxic geek masculinity” (Agarwalla 2020; Salter and Blodgett 2017; Hanford, 2018). This emerging masculinity is not only militarised within the videogame, but also actively looked for and exploited by the U.S. Army, which wants to prove the world how “technological power in service of benign might and strength tempered with compassion make the American man and his new form of manhood the putative superior to his rivals” (Brown 2012).

A recent study found that video games generally show male characters engaging in stereotypically masculine activities (i.e., taking risks, engaging in violence, getting angry, etc.) and streamers often have sexist, racist, homophobic, sizeist, ableist, and/or ageist attitudes (Geena Davis Institute, Oak Foundation, and Promundo, 2021). While this study lacks the crucial focus on militarism and on the military in shaping online games, it provides an important perspective on how the most prominent games are war games that reward and normalize white hypermasculine, hyper-muscular, predatory, and aggressive militarised masculinity. It is also pointed out that “the ubiquity of white male violence in video games must be called out in light of mass shootings, white extremist violence and white male police violence against people of color” (Geena Davis Institute, Oak Foundation, and Promundo, 2021). The reach of video games, unprecedented in the current pandemic, can potentially be a space where to promote healthy masculinities and feminist peace instead.\(^{16}\)

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\(^{15}\) This recalls the armament culture and the weapons fetish depicted by Salter (2014) and mentioned in Section 3 of this report, which features within the military and the militarisation of masculinities, becoming “the nexus point for cultural fantasies of righteous male violence and camaraderie”, but in the digital realm.

\(^{16}\) As the military finds video games as a resource to adapt for training, the ICRC has started working with video game developers as well, in order to promote International Humanitarian Law and other rules of engagement, so that video game players face the same dilemmas as real soldiers. While this seems a step towards promoting feminist peace, it only legitimizes and institutionalizes the military-entertainment-industrial complex without being actively anti-war (ICRC 2013).
4. US Recruitment: Generating, Upholding, and Exploiting Militarised Masculinities

Strong of the aforementioned theoretical and contextual framework, the following sections will investigate how the US military recruitment efforts use, exploit, and uphold militarised masculinities. Consequently, we analyse how these are generated particularly through the interactions between the military and the cultural-entertainment industry; and how they are upheld as well as exploited by military recruitment strategies. The analysis draws from the existing literature on the topic, engaging with the main concepts that the authors have mobilised as well as with the latest data available.

4.1 Generating Narratives: Cultural Normalisation and Generation of ‘Ideal Types’ of Masculinity

4.1.1 The Idealisation of the Military and the Military as a Socio-Cultural Entry Point

The US military enjoys widespread domestic popularity with only small periods of wavering public support as in the case of the Vietnam War (Gallup 2021; see Appendix – Figure 4). Whilst a divide in the appreciation of the military along the party lines in the polarised political landscape of the US can be observed, especially 9/11 and the Bush doctrine managed to momentarily unify many Americans behind the military in the face of a perceived external threat (Jervis 2005, 356-358).

The strong normative rhetoric of US foreign policy has led vast parts of the population to believe that US military acts as a “world policeman”17: it polices hostile governments and alleged undemocratic, illegitimate rulers in the self-acclaimed interest of world peace. Wavering ally support and the high resource commitment eventually took its toll on the Bush doctrine’s domestic popularity (Jervis 2005, 356-358).18 Nevertheless, the military and its veterans have remained widely appreciated and highly respected as they are seen by many as heroes who promote and protect Western ideals (Leal 2005, 134-135). This by association also leads to an appreciation of the military culture centred around the ideal of a strong, dominant, and well-disciplined male soldier who protects Western values.19

Whilst the military remains relatively popular across the board, it is crucial to consider what the respective incentives for enlistment are. They can range from patriotic sentiments and the support of US foreign policy, to socio-economic interests related to employment guarantees, access to education, healthcare, and welfare services (see Section 4.3). Nevertheless, the

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17 The US is commonly framed as such in mainstream media outlets and the public discourse (Rachman 2013).
18 However, it is notable that both African American and Hispanic propensity to enlist decreased in response to major wars. Those who enlisted were motivated by perceived less racial discrimination in the army, and better employment perspectives compared to the private sector, rather than the patriotic motive (Armor and Curtis 2010, 240-241).
19 Whilst the US military constitutes the “most trusted government institution in America” (see Appendix – Figure 7; Leal 2005, 134-135), it remains notable that e.g. Hispanics may encourage the youth to enlist to ensure employment whilst simultaneously being sceptical towards military expenditure (Leal 2005, 134-135).
military’s presence in people’s lives has undeniably generated and continues to shape conceptions of especially male ideals as it has historically been popular among (or exclusive to) young men, who commonly enlist during their formative years, thus recreating a nexus between militarisation and manhood.

The military, despite its domestic prestige, is also subject to prevalent criticisms related to the insufficient support for trauma incurred during deployment periods and other problems that relate to the male-dominated militarised culture perpetuated within its ranks (Adams and Montalto 2017, 138-139). For instance, dishonourable discharges have been used to exclude members of the LGB community from veteran services, a legislation that has since been changed (Adams and Montalto 2017, 121). Nevertheless, some of the root causes of these issues related to toxic and militarised masculinities remain commonly unaddressed in the public discourse. Many policies are more performative and circumstantial ad hoc actions geared towards boosting political popularity that are “contingent on how appealing these characteristics are to […] voters” (Porter, McDonald and Treul 2021, 27). An example of this is the higher likelihood of veteran issues to be discussed in electoral campaigns to shine a positive light on the candidate (Porter, McDonald and Treul 2021, 22-25).

Whilst these criticisms are continuously brought forward, the military continues to be considered an established societal entry point for especially historically marginalised communities as it can grant free access to otherwise very expensive college education and healthcare (see Section 4.3), and furthermore gives access to a powerful domestic network of current and former military personnel. The military holds significant political influence and many influential figures consider military service a means of boosting personal prestige (Cox 2014, 14-16). Next to these explicit incentives and the cultural endorsement of the military, cultural industries (such as the entertainment industry) further promote and generate these ideas.

4.1.2 The Role of the Cultural-Entertainment Industry

When studying the archipelago of war’s economy, the multiple actors involved, and the particular interests they defend and advance, it is unavoidable to ask how public consent to militarism is manufactured (Herman and Chomsky 2002, ix). Inspired by Mirrlees’ work, our analysis is attentive to the various strategies and discursive techniques promoting “interactive militainment” (Mirrlees 2018, 175) in the US.

The US cultural-entertainment industry and US Military have a longstanding relationship of mutual benefit (Pumroy 2015, 763), which has underpinned a “controlled militarisation of society” (Robinson 2012, 512). Since Mill’s early conceptualisation of the military-industrial complex and of the “permanent war economy” associated with it (Mills 1958, 33; Robinson 2012, 508), scholars have studied and named such synergies in multiple ways: from “Complex” (Turse 2008 in Pumroy 2015, 764), “military-consumer culture” (Stahl 2006, 123), “military-
The impact of the War on Terror on the media-entertainment industry has been significant. Mainstream media adopted the official militaristic narrative by massively portraying radical Islamic groups “as an embodiment of ‘[t]he dark side’ of ‘cultural notions of manliness’” (Brown 2001 in Shepherd 2006, 26). Moreover, as Stahl points out, “September 11, 2001 and the ensuing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq ushered in a boom in sales of war-themed video games for the commercial market” (Stahl 2006, 118).

21 According to the recent data published by the analytics and research company Newzoo in 2019 the global gaming market was worth USD 152.1 billion (10% more than the previous year). China is the largest market (USD 36.5 billion of revenues in 2019), and the second most profitable market is North America (USD 39.6 billion of revenues in 2019). Europe is the third most profitable region of the world, with estimated gaming revenues of USD 29.9 billion in 2019. Finally, in 2022 the value of the global gaming market is expected to exceed USD 195 billion, which would represent a 27% increase within four years (Rykała 2020, 131).

22 See for instance the mainstream media coverage of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003: “reporters exercised strict self-censorship by not airing or printing images of soldier or civilian casualties […] The Bush administration even engaged in overt censorship when it banned the press from photographing the coffins of returning U.S. soldiers on all military bases on the eve of war” (Stahl 2006, 124).
In the 1990s, Hollywood saw a shift in the way war was represented: the focus was no longer on the political reasons and historical context of combat but on the bond between heroic male soldiers (MacKenzie 2015, 12). This reproduces the idea of combat as an exclusively masculine domain, preserving traditional masculinities and facilitating male bonding. For instance, following the recent US withdrawal from Afghanistan, the American film production and distribution company Universal Pictures23 has acquired George Nolfi’s untitled pitch set during the withdrawal and narrating the story of three former special forces team members involved in the rescue of families and allies (Fleming Jr 2021; Instagram 2021). While these are just speculations, the long-established influence of the US military on war movies allows us to suggest that the dramatic facts occurred in Afghanistan are going to be portrayed from a DoD perspective: praising US soldiers, their male bonding, and their honour.

The interactions between the military and the entertainment sectors are bidirectional: namely, just as military values influence video games, so video games and combat simulations influence soldiers’ perception of violence and their awareness of killing (Barret 1996, 135).24 Moreover, military recruitment and the narratives mobilised for this end, obviously adjust to wider social changes (Brown 2012, 178). In a society where technical expertise and the “mastery over technology” are traditionally conceived as a masculine domain (Wajcman 2009, 144-145), technological innovation has become “central in armed forces’ self-presentations” (Brown 2012, 181-183). In such a militaristic culture, the citizenry is unwarily complicit in reproducing militarised values (Butterworth and Moskal 2009, 414) and promoting an “armament culture” and a “weapons fetish” (Salter 2014, 165).

Given the U.S. Army’s recruitment crisis (see Section 4.2) in recent years, as younger generations seem to be resisting militarism and preferring civilian life, today’s recruitment advertising has been adapted: combat-based risk-taking was shown increasingly less, and new “military heroes” are proposed (Jester, 2019).25

23 The company has already collaborated with the US armed forces in previous films (e.g. in 2012 for the military science fiction action film Battleship) (Keegan 2011).

24 On this point, Andersen (2014) mentions the influence video games have on players’ practices, highlighting how military recruiters benefit from it: “The soldier-gamer seems to be displacing the soldier-hero due in part to games like Black Ops II that carve out a space for a new kind of soldier to enlist […] according to a U.S. military journal, ‘The Army will draw on a generation of mind-nimble (not necessarily literate), finger-quick youth and their years of experience as heroes and killers in violent, virtually real interactive videos’ (Singer 2009, 365). In building a modern fleet, the U.S. military seeks veterans of Halo or Call of Duty rather than aspiring soldiers who immerse themselves in physical training and learning about the strategies of Patton or MacArthur. Consequently, interrogating the ways that games can effectively and physically “train” future soldiers comprises a politically significant realm for future research” (Andersen 2014, 374).

25 For instance, the most recent campaign in the U.S. Army Youtube titled “The Calling”, a video series which seeks to appeal to a growing proportion of youths who do not endorse or align with traditional hegemonic masculinities, showed “tokenised” identities undertaking the military path in the context of inspiring, non-conventional lives. This started arguments in the comment section, which was later closed in one of the videos telling the story of a woman joining the army after growing up with two mothers, as people were making homophobic comments stating that the military is becoming “softer” to cater to young “SJWs” (U.S. Army GoArmy 2020). SJW is a pejorative term originated on alt-right internet which describes young left-wing users who engage in social justice activism. It is worth noting that the military is cognizant of such growing “resistance” and progressiveness of youth. An example of this recognition can be the documents obtained by The Intercept via the Freedom of Information Act revealing that a Pentagon war game, called the 2018 “Joint Land, Air and Sea Strategic Special Program” offered a scenario in which members of Generation Z, that no longer believed in the
4.1.3 Examples of Cultural Resistance to Militarised Masculinities and Military Recruitment

While militarism is deeply integrated in the US (Western) socio-cultural environment and has been exported efficiently around the world (Boyd-Barrett and Mirrlees 2019, 148-149), there are ways in which counter-hegemonic efforts can be effective. For instance, Robinson’s analysis is extremely revealing when he underlines that despite western hegemony in gaming production, this same medium can be used to challenge the Western-led militarisation of society through cyber-activism and “modding” (Robinson 2012, 505-515). This has been done after the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom through the Velvet-Strike mod26 or via indie games such as September 12th and Under Ash (Robinson 2012, 515-517).

Also non-state actors have engaged in gaming counter-hegemonic practices challenging US cultural and military imperialism. Saber and Webber’s analysis of Hezbollah and IS videogame productions and revision of existing US war games shows to what extent mainstreamed representations of the villain as a vague Middle-Eastern Arab is challenged, indeed “these videogame productions create new sites of protest, wherein gamers can identify with a different point of view from that of the American GI” (Saber and Webber 2017, 83-84). Despite producing their own dissenting narratives, these efforts epitomise how “‘resistance’ often reproduces similar hegemonic frames, thus contributing to the maintenance and reproduction of the hegemonic order” (Saber and Webber 2017, 90).

Videogames are not the sole locus of resistance to militarism. Within the US, various grassroots groups engage in antimilitarist actions. For instance, War Resisters’ International’s program Countering Youth Militarisation denounces armed forces’ influence in education and their presence during public events (see Section 4.3). In Sowing Seeds: The Militarisation of Youth and How to Counter (2013), the group promotes non-violent antimilitaristic action such as “causing disruption” at recruitment events in schools, organising parades to oppose the armed forces’ “pink-washing”, etc. (Owen 2013, 128) therefore challenging youth’s early exposure to military narratives and recruitment strategies.

4.2 Upholding: Different Methods and Vectors of Recruitment

A significant body of literature on critical military studies addresses the driving forces and concrete strategies behind recruitment, however the military itself to this day has refused, and is expected continuing to do so, to disclose their own recruitment strategy and targeting rationale, which is a limitation to this research.

American dream, launch a “Zbellion” in the US in the mid-2020s. It is interesting to see the Pentagon’s war gamers choose to focus their attention on a generation that is so often demonstrating peacefully for a better world and refusing to be recruited in its Army (Turse, 2020).

26 It consisted in an adaptation of the war game Counter-strike allowing gamers to upload graffiti and use sprays while playing. By modifying the gaming scenario, protesters challenged the pro-military nature of the videogame. For more information on the authors of the mod and on gamer's reactions (Buckendorff 2004).
The military reinforces and enshrines unequal dichotomies present in everyday life that normalise, legitimise, and valorise hegemonic masculinity which is commonly associated with the access to weapons (Lahav 2020, 6; Myrttinen 2003, 44; Theidon 2009, 34). This section seeks to determine how military recruiters instrumentalise gender norms via the propagation of militarised masculinities for their recruitment strategies, cognizant that the way they use them is by catering to already existing beliefs about masculine superiority and often white supremacy.

Military enlistment is incentivised both by material and idealised motives: on the material side, the military provides a “safety net” that provides structure to younger, poor, ethnicised individuals, on the ideological side, enlistment can be motivated by emotional patriotism, and romanticisation of the “adventurous” life (Park, Shoieb, and Taylor 2017, 571-572). Military recruiters seek to tap into the naivety of youths and romanticise military service with regard to homosocial bonding practices, which uphold patriarchal arrangements based on male dominance (Wadham 2016, 282-283).27

The US has been particularly creative in its recruitment strategies, which first developed from a “militarized concept of national loyalty and identity” as its military occupies “a special place in the public realm, somehow intimately bound to patriotism, to the fate and dignity of the nation” (Enloe 1996, 261). Recruitment is one of the military’s most public faces, it represents the attempt to publicly legitimise militarised masculinities, offering up reasons to serve and potential ideological bases for military culture, and building a positive, provider/protective/strong image of the armed forces for Americans and the international community at large (Brown 2012).

As social expectations around manhood have rapidly evolved so too has the idea of military masculine identity and military hero, especially due to technological progress and the proliferation of the internet. Such definitional shifts, or “gender recalibrations,” continuously called for the modernisation of recruitment and its targets, introducing new qualities such as “technical prowess and manual dexterity” into the idea of hegemonic masculinity (de Carvalho 2018, 48; Bayard de Volo 2016, 12). However, common recruitment focus can still be found in the expressed function of the U.S. Army “to defend the American people from aggressors with a force of qualified, skilled, and dedicated soldiers” that can be linked to gender norms such as the masculine rational, confident, provider, and protector (U.S. Army, n.d.-a, para. 4; Reit 2009).28

While in the past decade the US military concentrated on the necessity of physical fitness and strength in order to survive the painful rigors of deployment, it has also promised maturity, rationality, sense of self, and ensured professional prospects if/when returning to civilian life (Reit 2009).29 Most recruitment advertising highlights the excitement of military action, however this is recognised as not being enough, as it does not instil a sense of discipline and

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27 This will be performed constantly throughout their duty and will stick with them as veterans, when nurturing militarised masculinities might be experienced as necessary (McMullin 2021, 27).

28 In general, the Army’s seven values of “Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage” are the stepping-stone of the generation, exploitation, and upholding of militarised masculinities in the United States throughout modernity (U.S. Army, n.d.-d, para. 1; Reit, 2009).

29 This was a major trend that originated in the 1990s, one that is particularly significant for conceptions of hegemonic masculinity in the 21st century (Brown 2012).
responsibility. For this reason, military recruitment also stresses the benefit of military service in the creation of well-rounded individuals, ready "to compete in the business world" (Brown 2012, 95).

The U.S. Army recruitment website goarmy.com provides an interesting platform for the analysis of such upholding and valorisation of militarised masculinities in America. In particular, its slogans and related images illustrate the aforementioned patriotism, romanticization of the military, strength, and different technical expertise of soldiers. For instance, it stated that being a soldier “can make you stronger” (U.S. Army 2014; Jester 2019), that “There’s strong. Then there’s army strong” and “There is nothing on this green earth that is stronger than the US army” (U.S. Army 2006a; Jester 2019). The most recent campaign asks “What’s your warrior? - Your epic journey starts here” showcasing different skills that the army can have in a gamified video, with pixel lags and superhero-like names like “virus hunter”, “force multiplier”, the “replenisher”, the “thunder maker”, skills that are useful for civilian life as well (U.S. Army 2020; U.S. Army 2021).

A shift towards the increasing use of modern technologies and social media in military advertising (Dertouzos 2009, ix) enables the aforementioned romanticisation of military service due to the various platforms’ unique characteristics and online culture. Platforms such as TikTok or Instagram are increasingly important for recruitment mechanisms as they facilitate the branding of the military as an ‘exciting’ and ‘adventurous’ career path, that upholds hegemonic masculinity by fostering a feeling of homosocial belonging and brotherhood (Makin 2020).

Within this framework, there is emerging literature on the use of video games and video game live streaming platforms/social media chats to recruit youth. Many of these studies analyse war videogames development with the help of the U.S. Army and financed by the U.S. Government, such as America’s Army available for free online (U.S. Army 2021). Similar to popular games like Call of Duty, they showcase the technical aspects of war, including a wide range of equipment such as “machine guns, grenade launchers, and sniper rifles” that “deliver maximum firepower”, which contribute to the upholding and empowering of militarised masculinity (U.S. Army n.d.-a, para. 6; Reit 2009).

This digitalisation allows a demystification of life on the battlefield by suggesting a war aesthetic, which hides the underlying institutional propaganda, rendering players more receptive at a subconscious level (Kohn 2017). Video games emerged in part from military-funded research in the late nineties, and there are ongoing interests and links between military simulation research, military recruitment efforts, and the video game industry (Johnson 2018). As reads a Navy recruiting “Guide for Streamers”, “Gamers utilize skills every day while they compete, sometimes without even realizing it,” “Detail-oriented and working toward long-term goals, problem solvers under time pressures, perseverance in the face of frustration and roadblocks”, which are the same skill sets useful for the military in its nuclear engineering, aviation, special warfare, cryptology, and counterintelligence programs (Gault 2020). In recent

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30 The game is also rated “T” by the Entertainment Software Rating Board, which allows anyone older than 13 to play it. This can expose very young individuals, who are not yet eligible for recruitment (U.S. Army 2021).
years, the U.S. Army created the U.S. Army Esports part of the Marketing and Engagement Brigade to “create awareness about the Army and the opportunities it provides” for the younger generation, namely through its presence on Twitch, social media, and gaming expos (U.S. Army 2021).

This recruitment logic seems to recognize that as video games played a significant part in bolstering interest and career choices in computer science, war games can also aid with the recruitment of new soldiers (Johnson 2018). However, this effort of the U.S. Army to solve the recruitment crisis it faced in recent years by looking to gamers seems to be failing. The presence of the Esports team on Twitch was seen as “predatory recruitment,” since it could potentially reach 13 year-olds, it had fake prize giveaways redirecting to recruitment pages, and even breached the First Amendment by blocking comment sections where users asked about war crimes committed by the US (Gault 2020). Moreover, the games the team plays, especially Call of Duty, may advocate for torture by simulating ticking bomb scenarios, and are regarded by many as imperialist propaganda, showing unmatched American heroism and masculine aggressiveness (Sonju 2021).

It can be inferred that military recruitment strategies instrumentalise the popularity of certain aspects of masculine gender norms among the youth (such as that of the “war fanboy”), which signifies a transition from the presence of values of militarised masculinities in society to the militarisation of society. These recruitment efforts through “militarisation of the youth” are even more effective when coupled with the “poverty draft” (see Section 4.3.1), the promise of recruits’ character development and personal transformation.

4.3 Exploiting: Poverty Draft and Intersectionality

The aforementioned methods and vectors of recruitment are exploited within the framework of US politics, and US life at large, through the targeting of specific under-privileged and marginalised communities. This was institutionalised in a number of ways, and takes place at all levels of the military sector – from recruitment to the highest ranks on the chain of command.

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31 The team members are not recruiters and must serve duty, receive the same pay and benefits as other soldiers of equal rank across the Army. They have competed in violent games such as Call of Duty, Counter-Strike: Global Offensive, Fortnite, League of Legends, Overwatch and Magic the Gathering.

32 The Army strategically promises prospects of leading a wealthy life through masculine notions of the strong “breadwinner” or “provider” in a time of capitalistic greed and constant economic crises. These promises are often advertised at college and university-based officer training programs like the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps, ROTC (see Section 4.3.1; Lazzarino 2016).

33 A characteristic famously used as cruel “conversion therapy” for LGBTQ+ youth in America (Adamson et al. 2020). As explained in Section 4.3.1, homophobia, heteronormativity and the policing of masculinities are prevalent in the military. Women and nonheterosexual men have always discursively “contested their ascribed subordinate status within the military, as military service members position the feminine other as a threat to military effectiveness” (Van Gilder 2019). This is evident when during training instructors would call recruits “ladies” and “girls” if they did not perform well (Wright 2019).
4.3.1 Poverty Draft Recruitment

The term “poverty draft” was coined around the end of military draft and thus the constitution of the “All-volunteer armed forces” in 1973, and it conceptualises the belief that “enlisted ranks of the military were made up of people with limited economic opportunities” (Mariscal 2007, 32-34). The term itself has been strongly refuted in the past within military circles, specifying that recruiters do not target specific groups (Mariscal 2007, 34). Nevertheless, evidence (McGlynn and Monforti 2010; Mariscal 2007; Tracy 2006) suggests that military recruiters have consistently targeted those whose career options are limited due to their socio-economic status and gender (Melin 2016, 5-7, 9). It thus appears self-evident how the interaction between race and class disproportionately affects youth of ethnicised background, particularly Black youth (Mariscal 2007, 34).

“Evidence suggests that military recruiters have consistently targeted those whose career options are limited due to their socio-economic status and gender”

Evidence of these mechanisms can be found in the legislation surrounding military recruitment, specifically in regulating military recruiters’ access to school and college campuses, such as the “No Child Left Behind Act of 2001” (NCLB)\textsuperscript{34} (Pub. L. 107-110 §9528 2001). NCLB effectively gave military recruiters equal access to secondary school students as institutions of higher education, with the idea that schools or individual parents need to file paperwork to actively opt out and withdraw their consent (Pub. L. 107-110 §9528 a.2 2001). With parents often unaware of their rights or procedures for opting out, this leaves young students vulnerable to military recruitment (Furumoto 2005, 203). NCLB legislation also gave military recruiters access to job and career fairs on high school campuses, presenting themselves as a way to have access to a college education, specifically for those high school students that may not have otherwise access to it, or to stable job and socioeconomic conditions. Regardless of military recruiters vehemently denying targeting low-income or ethnicised students, those who face the biggest barriers to quality education or access to well-paying jobs are exactly mostly African Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanics, as well as low-income White students (Furumoto 2005, 205).

4.3.2 Intersectionality

A significant aspect to consider in US military recruitment strategies is the impact of compound systems of oppression. As seen in Section 3.2.2, black women have a higher enlistment rate

\textsuperscript{34} Section 9528 of the “No Child Left Behind Act of 2001” (NCLB) sponsored by the Bush administration, instructed any educational agency that was to receive funding under the Act to provide “on a request made by military recruiters or an institution of higher education, access to secondary school students names, addresses, and telephone listings” (Pub. L. 107-110 §9528 a.1 2001).
than that of men or women of any other racial or ethnic background, making up a significantly higher portion than in the civilian workforce (CFR.org Editors 2020).

A poignant analytic lens to understand this issue is intersectionality, a study to uncover the intersection of social barriers, or compound systems of oppression, that characterise the lived experience of individuals. Intersectionality identifies multiple factors of advantage and disadvantage. Such categories include, but are not limited to: gender, sex, class, sexuality, religion, and disability. As such, intersectionality has become a “constellations of knowledge projects”, each granting a different and complementary lens to understand power relations (Hill Collins and Chepp 2013, 59).

As of 2018, Black women are the most overrepresented group in the US military, and represent almost 30% of all women in it (see Appendix – Figure 3). Since both Black men and women are part of the most underprivileged group in US society, these disproportionate levels of enlistment can be the by-product of a number of factors (including those mentioned in Section 4.3.1). Among these, eligibility is the number one to consider, particularly as it continues to shed light on the racialised nature of US society: despite similarity in socio-economic positioning between Black men and women, Black men experience higher dropout, criminal and incarcerations rates, making them not eligible for military service (Melin 2016, 3). A significant contributor is also the socio-economic factors. Due to patriarchal systems of oppression that are widespread in society, women of all races encounter a gender-wealth gap. Here, factors of race became even more significant as Black women experience far more wealth disadvantage vis-à-vis white individuals (men and women) and Black men, both as single-parent, as well as in a two-income household, and less welfare security (Melin 2016, 3-8).

A note on intersectionality must also be added to discuss the participation and recruitment of trans individuals in the military. Where Black women circumstances render this group the unintended prime victim of military recruiters, trans individuals (and in the past LGBTQ+ in general) have been actively excluded from military service on grounds of “combat effectiveness”, “unit cohesion”, and generally making the argument that the inclusion of non-heteronormative individuals in the military would impact the “bonds of trust among individual service members” (10 U.S.C. §654 1993). It is abundantly clear here that the inclusion of trans individuals as well as openly gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals, was perceived as a threat to the stereotypical gender norms among which US society, and in particular the masculine character of its military forces, relied upon.

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35 “Intersectionality” is an analytical framework, conceptualised and coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 and developed with the aim of including the experiences of Black women in the legal discipline, which drew attention to Black women’s multidimensionality, and thus the interaction of race and gender as a “double” means of oppression for this historically marginalised and overlooked group (Crenshaw 1989; 1991). This project was later brought forward as a means to understand intersecting social systems of power, how they are constructed, transmitted, legitimated and reproduced in a much broader scope (Hill Collins and Chepp 2013, 59).

36 Any criminal record specifically, even if collected as a minor, makes it particularly hard for Black men to have the same access as Black women (and any other racial/ethnic group) to enlist, given also the reported difficulties in obtaining a waiver to join the forces (Melin 2016, 3)

37 Similar arguments were used for the exclusion of cis-gendered women.
These examples highlight ultimately the importance of recognising that, although usually attributed to men, masculinity is not exclusive to men and does not affect only men (hooks 2004, 32). The definition of militarised masculinities firmly positions gender/sex in the site of the binary corporeal form, a fleshy binary which has so convincingly been demonstrated by decades of feminist and critical scholarship as inadequate (Zalewski 2017, 203).

“The definition of militarised masculinities firmly positions gender/sex in the site of the binary corporeal form, a fleshy binary which has so convincingly been demonstrated by decades of feminist and critical scholarship as inadequate.”
5. Comparative Analysis of the Four Focus Countries

5.1 The Role of US Interventionism: A Brief Introduction to the Focus Countries

In this comparative case study section, the different manifestations of militarised masculinities and their role for military recruitment in the four focus countries Afghanistan, Cameroon, Colombia, and the DRC will be discussed and contrasted vis-à-vis the instrumental US case study. This will be used to draw conclusions on the applicability of the previous research findings to a more global context. The US has had soft (cultural) and hard influence in the focus countries: cultural influence on definition of gender roles, militarised culture, and involvement in military training, the deployment of troops on the ground, etc. This lends itself to the identification of global trends, qualified still by case-specific manifestations of militarised masculinities.

5.2 Afghanistan

Four decades of protracted violence in Afghanistan have had a significant impact in the construction and attainment of manhood. Undoubtedly, the role of the US military within the war in Afghanistan is extremely relevant to analyse conflict dynamics, including the realization of Afghan militarised masculinities to this day. The consistent presence of American soldiers in the country and the global narrative of Afghanistan after 9/11 had profoundly shaped the lives of the local population.

Many studies have been conducted on the gendered politics of interventionism and rescue within the context on the Global War on Terror and in particular on US-Afghanistan relations (Stabile and Kumar 2005; Shepherd 2006; Rygiel and Hunt 2008; Mann 2009; Duncanson 2013; Welland 2015; Wegner, 2021, 6). The overarching observation is that the justification of invading Afghanistan was itself gendered in the sense that the intervention was regarded as a heroic mission to save and liberate Afghani women from an oppressive system. This created a paradox: women’s rights claims were underpinned by the American hyper-masculine military presence. In turn, the Taliban enhanced its militarisation to protect Afghan women from foreign forces (Lahav 2020; Tickner 1992, 269).

The image of patriotic soldiers saving Afghan women placed “binary attachments of masculinity and femininity onto the male and female bodies, and permits women’s bodies to

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38 It must be noted that American decision-making has been rather gendered and patriarchal. The Bush Administration understood international relations from the standpoint of its embodied hegemonic masculinity and from the hegemonic country it represented. In his speeches, President Bush made use of gendered ideologies and language to “bolster the case for unilateral intervention in Afghanistan, employing notions of power, rescuer, and warrior” (Bellini, 2010, iv).

39 For the most part, feminists from liberal democracies (such as the Feminist Majority Foundation which, in the 90s, was running a campaign to “Stop Gender Apartheid” in Afghanistan) have been in favor of the intervention, calling it America’s “first feminist war” (Khan 2021; Strainchamps 2021). This introduced the concept of “embedded feminism”, which indicates the co-optation of feminist discourse to legitimize a myopic understanding of gendered vulnerability and the state’s political interests (Nachtigall 2014).
become another battlefield” (Lahav 2020). It also categorized women as victims in need of special protection from a specific protector embodied by the American man. Serving as protector in this sense and earning or demonstrating one’s manhood by doing so are in fact considered as fundamental motives for waging war in general (Brown, 2007, 95). Women and their oppression have long been a civilizational bargaining chip that allowed Western colonial powers to claim cultural superiority over non-western countries and thereby justify imperialism (Ahmed 1992). Moreover, for so long the US has “routinised” violence and a general sense of insecurity, which spurred certain masculine attributes associated with dominance, strength, protection, and patriotism to prevail in Afghan men. Particularly, the majority of men are unquestionably devoted to keep their arms, as guns have become an inalienable part of Afghan security but also culture, and a source of income (Sedra 2002).

While masculinities are always fluid, plural, and constantly reshaped in intersection with other identities, the concept of “thwarted” masculinities tends to continuously emerge when studying the context of Afghanistan. The term is sometimes used to illustrate “the experiences of men who are unable to conform to standards of manhood imposed by their societies, for example because they are unable to find work, get married or support a family” (Wright and Welsh 2014, 10). Men who are not able to rise to the standards of masculinity, which have been raised by the conflict, are expected to be more likely to commit violence, whether domestic or in conflict, as their “failure” is linked to deep shame and dishonour (Barker 2006, 163). This exemplifies the vicious cycle of violence within Afghanistan and the mutual construction of militarised masculinities by all belligerent parties that maintain instability to the detriment of all genders. Although the continuous fighting may have ceased, it is unclear how idealized notions of masculinity will change under the rule of the Taliban. The certainty is that US interventionism has left a deep scar into the fabrics of the country, including its gender norms.

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40 These orientalist tropes shaped today’s reality in the country and can be found in the games analysed throughout the report, which position the enemy as a “rogue state” and legitimize the use of overwhelming force (Robinson, 2016).

41 Bullets are fired in the air by men at celebrations such as weddings or to mark the birth of a child (Sedra 2002). And displays of aggression and intimidation represent a rite of passage for adolescent boys and a symbol of manhood for men (Ahmadi and Stanikzai 2018). Comparatively, this can also hold true for many in the US, where hunting is used as a rite of passage from boyhood into manhood and “gender reveals” after births can be performed with “celebratory rounds from a handgun into the air” (Boine et al. 2020; Colton 2021).

42 Following the withdrawal of US troops and the Taliban’s gain of effective control over most of the country in August 2021, the classification of the armed conflict under International Humanitarian Law is unclear and could be constantly revised. While a “state of war”, as understood in Article 2(1)-(2) GCs I-IV, may seem to be ceased, two types of armed conflicts are technically continuing in Afghanistan: a non-international conflict (NIAC) between the Taliban government against the National Resistance Front, and a NIAC between the Taliban Government and the IS-KP. (Geneva Academy, 2021).
5.3 Cameroon

In the Republic of Cameroon’s context of widespread violence, where heavily militarised security forces struggle to maintain order, civilians are immersed in human rights violations perpetrated by government actors, government-sponsored militias, local villages’ militias, as well as by separatist armed groups. In such a turbulent environment, women and children are the primary victims (Brun 2021) - especially in rural areas where women are generally denied economic stability via access to land and inheritance. However, men are also deeply affected by the ubiquitous violence and precarity in conflict-affected regions. They are often forced to take part in conflict due to the lack of alternative economic opportunities, forced displacements, and social norms which would otherwise stigmatise them as feminised.

Masculinity is mobilised by each actor involved in the violence, for instance, Appendix – Figure 5 and Appendix – Figure 6 show how militarised hyper-masculinities are promoted by the main anglophone separatist group: the Ambazonia Defence Forces. Cameroon’s case study epitomises the relationship linking vulnerability and anonymity to violence: the latter propagates in the shape of militancy, conferring agency and a sense of belonging to those men who exercise it. Furthermore, the military plays a vital role in the political life of the country, indeed since the 1960s military loyalty has allowed the Rassemblement démocratique du Peuple Camerounais (RDPC) party to remain in power unchallenged, thanks to the regular deployment of armed forces against civilian protests (Fokwang 2016, 222).

Albeit militarised masculinities being widely enacted within society, the Bataillon d’Intervention Rapide (BIR) is a noteworthy example of the US role in promoting and upholding militarised masculinities in the country. The BIR is indeed the main beneficiary of US military stimuli. It is the best-equipped and best-paid unit of Cameroon’s armed forces, counting 5000 soldiers (Cantaloube et al. 2019). The Battalion is an “army-within-an-army” that does not report to the Minister of Defense but directly to President Paul Biya (in office since 1982) (Page 2017), and participates in the US regional antiterrorist fight against Boko Haram.

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43 This analysis was aided by the research and guidance provided by Tanushree Kaushal.
44 The Republic of Cameroon currently faces various security challenges: namely, the escalation of violence between the government forces and the anglophone separatist factions - the conflict was declared formal confrontation from 30th November 2017 (Agwanda et al. 2020, 6); Boko-Haram threat in the northern region neighbouring Nigeria; and in the east, the cross-border instabilities from the Central African Republic (Husted and Arieff 2019, 1). These conflicts affect and shape social gender norms.
45 While women and girls are the most exposed to SGBV, “more than nine out of ten people exposed to arbitrary arrests, beating, illegal detention, torture, kidnapping, extra-judicial executions and disappearance are males.” (Brun, 2021). The fear of being abducted by state and non-state actors force men to renounce to their gendered role of family provider. Thus, the adaptation to a hostile reality entails a shift in gender roles: “women can move where men used to go” (Brun 2021).
46 Because of the benefits and incentives men enjoy upon joining the armed forces, recruitment is an attractive choice for many low-income men.
47 Several new armed groups such as the Ambaland Forces, the Vipers, the Tigers, and the Southern Cameroonian Defence Forces have emerged to counter government military forces (Agwanda & Nyadera 2020, 7).
48 The US-Cameroon relationship dates back to the 1960s: the African country acted as a gateway to the Union Douanière et Économique de l’Afrique Centrale (UDEAC), and as an ally to promote free market in the West and Central African region (Amin 2021, 6-7). Already in the 1980s, the two countries had security and military cooperation programs taking place (Amin 2021, 20-21).
The impunity and privileges enjoyed by this elite unit reinstate the material and symbolic dominance of violent masculinities within society.

In 2015, US foreign military aid to Cameroon reached its highest peak. Overall, US aid delivered to Cameroon’s security forces over the last ten years amounts to almost $224 million and comes along with military training (Turse 2021).

Interstate cooperation and military support have implied the involvement of the private sector, especially military firms from the military-industrial complex of the Global North. This perpetuation of an economy of violence via foreign military-economic intervention without civil society’s consent calls to mind an “overt sexualisation” of imperial violence (Acheson 2021, 21; see Section 3.2.3). Besides the economic and military resources Aid countries inject, they also reproduce their highly militarised notions of masculinity and security, mobilising an aura of international legitimacy (Saferworld 2014, 36).

On a separate note, Cameroon’s entertainment industry’s portrayal of BIR praises its efficiency and high-tech equipment. Indeed, despite various allegations of human rights violations (namely SGBV and torture), BIR is depicted by Cameroonian state media (Cameroon Radio Television) as a humanitarian actor (Zra 2019; Funwie 2019) providing both security and humanitarian aid to civilians.

49 There is enough evidence revealing BIR’s further deployment against anglophone separatist groups and civilians. Since 2019, after the public revelation of human rights violations on civilians perpetrated by the Cameroonian Armed Forces, there has been a drawback of US aid. Nonetheless, between 2019 and 2020, the State Department allocated $7.2 million in military assistance for Cameroon (Turse, 2021).

50 A total of $47,230,924 was delivered, of which $13,576,600 came from the US Department of State and $33,654,324 from US Department of Defense (Foreign Assistance 2021). Moreover, during the Obama administration, 300 Green Berets have been sent to Cameroon to assist local militaries in antiterrorist training and missions (Penney 2019).

51 “These figures exclude security aid allocated on a regional or global basis, of which Cameroon has been a significant recipient in recent years. Cameroon participates in the State Department-led Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP) and the military has received other U.S. training and equipment in support of peacekeeping deployments to CAR. Internal security forces also have received sizable assistance via the State Department’s Counter-Terrorism Partnerships Fund. The Department of Defense (DOD) has provided further counterterrorism aid under its global train-and-equip authority (currently, 10 U.S.C. 333). Cameroon also benefited from a 2014 Boko Haram-focused Global Security Contingency Fund program administered by the State Department and DOD” (Husted and Arieff 2019, 3).

52 Namely, the US Company Insitu, a subsidiary of Boeing, has been awarded $9,396,512 for aircraft systems of ScanEagle surveillance drones delivered to Cameroon and Kenya in 2016 (Stevenson 2015). The US is not the sole country supplying equipment to Cameroon while providing a market to its national military corporations. For instance, the French military vehicles manufacturer Arquus has provided BIR with 23 armored vehicles (Cantaloube et al. 2019).

53 While Cameroon civilians are well aware of the deceitful nature of this forged narrative, it reminds those mobilised by international hegemonic discourses promoting militarised securitisation.
5.4 Colombia

The Colombian case echoes the prevalent link between violence and masculinity ingrained in US culture. This is due to a number of stress factors, which due to the scope of this project cannot be all given appropriate space. As such, there are three main dimensions of the US-Colombia comparison that will be brought to the fore: the culture of violence and the state’s commitment to militarisation, as well as practices of resistance in both cases.

Violence, *machismo*, systems of oppression in accordance to race, gender, sexual orientation, and class are considered the lived experience in Colombia (Muñoz-Onofre 2011, 99). The hegemonic model of masculinity (*masculinidades bélicas*) is intrinsically linked in this case with the history of violence and conflictuality in the country (Richani 1997, 38; Legrand 1989, 5), and as such stands in a co-constructive relation between ideas of national identity and the militarisation of masculinity (Muñoz-Onofre 2011, 97). This can be seen firstly in the cult of the national hero: the idea we explored in the US (see *Section 4.1.2*) of the hero-martyr military man who sacrifices himself to protect the homeland is extremely prominent in Colombia. Of interest here is how this idea operates in the history and societal structure of the country: due to the historic violence that permeates the birth of the Colombian nation – be it the struggle against the colonial power to the fight against armed groups/narcotraficantes (Parra Macías, Recalde 2021) – the figure of the soldier becomes foundational to society, to the mere existence of the Colombian nation (Parra Macías, Recalde 2021). Around this mythical figure relies the construction of the ‘cult of violence’ as a national practice: the military is celebrated as a symbol of the nation, through several cultural projects (Parra Macías, Recalde 2021; Waldmann 2007, 63; Sweig 2002, 122). Similarly to the US, the linkage between the entertainment industry and the celebration of the military is prevalent in Colombia too. Here, the cult of the military is also expanded through public cultural projects, school curricula, etc. (Parra Macías, Recalde 2021).

A process of socialization of violence thus takes place from a young age, in a co-constructive relationship with forms of othering that then create the lived experience of Colombians (Berrío Meneses 2018, 408-409). This othering is exercised as follows: when the institution of the military man, strong, violent, firm, represents the ideal good, the identity to aspire to, then all other identities become inferior, marginalized, and – at times – persecuted (Parra Macías, Recalde 2021; Muñoz-Onofre 2011). According to this process not only women are recognized as inferior, but any man who cannot live up to the standard of *macho* finds himself “othered”. This includes the practice of measuring masculinity in terms of the potential for violence: during military training, for instance, the practice of insulting recruits is colored by sexist and highly gendered remarks (González Quintero, Forero Ángel, and Ramírez González 2019, 1491-1492). To a much more extreme case, this mechanism also defines the lived experience of the LGBTQ+ community: non-cis, non-hetero males, are subject to high levels of marginalization, often persecution, in wider society and even more so in the military.

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54 This comparison was aided by a semi-structured interview conducted with Verónica Recalde, researcher at Limpal Colombia (WILPF Colombia) and Alejandro Parra Macías (ACOOC - Colombian Collective Action of Conscientious Objectors), and the research and guidance provided by Mia Schöb (see *Appendix – Interview Notes 1*).
5.5 Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)\textsuperscript{55}

The US has had historically strong ties with the DRC in terms of military cooperation as it is not only the DRC’s largest bilateral donor, but also the single largest financial contributor to the UN Organization Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) (U.S. Department of State 2020). US-DRC security cooperation dates back to 1974 (United States Africa Command 2021), thus preceding the Second Congo War.\textsuperscript{56} Whilst US-DRC bilateral relations momentarily weakened after the Cold War (Lindsay 2012), multilateral military cooperation has continuously constituted a key avenue of joint efforts to bring stability to the region (U.S. Department of State 2020). Following the recent 2018 elections in the DRC, US-DRC military cooperation has once again intensified.\textsuperscript{57}

The DRC features one of the highest frequencies of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV), and specifically rape, carried out by both state and non-state armed actors (Meger 2010, 119). Attempts to explain this phenomenon point at the cultural context of the DRC: the conceptualisations of masculinity and femininity render a violation of women as the “social fabric of the community” an effective tool for “feminizing” and controlling the entire target population (Banwell 2014, 51-52; Meger 2010, 132-133; Meger 2012, 55, Slegh 2021). Economically motivated armed groups involved in the exploitation of natural resources as some of the most common perpetrators of SGBV work in tandem with global industry actors as they are largely funded by external sources, pointing at a complicit globalised military-industrial complex (Banwell 2014, 50, 55-56). They rarely have aspirations to govern local civilians, rendering instrumentalised SGBV a less controversial means for control (Banwell 2014, 50, 55-56; Meger 2010, 132-133; Meger 2012, 55; Schneider, Banholzer, and Albarracin 2015, 1358-1359). Furthermore, SGBV “enhances a perpetrator’s sense of masculinity by “feminizing” the victim and gaining power over them” (Meger 2012, 72). This is especially relevant as masculinity is commonly associated with “success” and the ability to provide for the family – an ideal that is near impossible to achieve in a war-struck environment. (Banwell 2014; Meger 2010; Meger 2012). By consequence, men who feel emasculated due to their failure to meet this ideal may be inclined to join the military and resort to acts of SGBV in an attempt to achieve a “certain temporal realization of the soldiers’ masculinity” (Bazaz and Stern 2009, 515). In addition, soldier accounts of motives for SGBV have pointed at the role of traditional gender

\textsuperscript{55} This comparison was aided by a semi-structured interview conducted with Henny Slegh, Senior Fellow at Promundo in the Great Lakes region in Africa and researcher for WILPF DRC (see Appendix - Interview Notes 2).\textsuperscript{56} The Second Congo War (1998-2003), involving nine African countries and resulting in over 3 million casualties in the DRC, left a legacy of ongoing regional violence (U.S. Department of State 2020).\textsuperscript{57} The 2019 announcement of the Privileged Partnership for Peace and Prosperity (PP4PP) entails the promotion of Security Sector Reform (SSR) with emphasis on the professionalisation of the armed forces, the military justice system, respect for human rights, and Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) prevention among other core themes (U.S. Department of State 2020). Furthermore, the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding in 2020 covers approximately $5 million in Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) and International Military Education and Training funds (U.S. Department of State 2021). In August 2021, DRC President Tshisekedi additionally authorised US special forces to help the DRC military combat the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), an armed group with links to the Islamic State (U.S. Embassy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo 2021).\textsuperscript{58} In the DRC context, men are commonly held to the idealised standard describing their role via the use of four Ps: they are meant to be Protectors, Providers (for their families), Procreators, and Privileged (by virtue of being a man, they inherently deserve to be met with respect) (Slegh 2021).
dynamics whereby a man supposedly has the “right” to satisfy his “needs,” facilitating the normalisation of SGBV (Baaz and Stern 2009, 514-515).59

In terms of military recruitment, the prospect of reaffirming one’s masculinity through the exercise of state-legitimised power is appealing to those who feel emasculated due to their perceived inability to meet the gendered ideals set out for men (Slegh 2021). When compared to the US military recruitment incentives, this adds another dimension to the socio-economic recruitment incentives relevant to both cases. By joining the military, recruits can change their position in the power dynamic from a potential victim to a potential perpetrator who can temporarily reassert his masculinity through SGBV. A particularly relevant avenue of military recruitment entails the deliberate (re-)integration of former rebels into the military,60 including from groups who forcibly recruit child soldiers and normalise SGBV - factors which positively affect the propensity to commit acts of SGBV (Chaudhry, Karim, and Scroggs 2021, 917-918, 921; Hermenau et al. 2013, 6-9; Slegh 2021).61 This consequently raises questions concerning how the US as a major donor and provider of military training addresses these issues. Whilst the US has shown commitment to enshrining SGBV prevention into its military training abroad, partially US-funded and trained perpetrators of such violence have historically faced little consequences in the DRC (Banwell 2014, 52-53, Slegh 2021).62

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59 The FARDC soldiers made a distinction between “lust rapes” and “evil rapes” (Baaz and Stern 2009, 514-515). Whilst it is argued that all types are forbidden, it is assumed that some motives are more “morally defendable” (motivated by male sexuality and libido) whilst only rape that is weaponised (motivated by anger, rage, and the desire to instil fear and exercise control) is considered inexcusable (Baaz and Stern 2009, 497).

60 This can be considered a means of strengthening the numbers of the military with the added advantage of recruiting already experienced fighters with intel on the opposing conflict parties. As an alternative means of strengthening the military, President Kabila also made use of forced (child) conscription in the past (Chaudhry, Karim, and Scroggs 2021, 917-918). This was abolished after Kabila’s 2002 ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and accompanied by conditional financial aid of $240 million from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for meeting the human rights guarantees (Chaudhry, Karim, and Scroggs 2021, 917-918). After learning that rebel groups had restarted forced recruitment in breach of the negotiated peace agreement, Kabila reintroduced forced recruitment in 2004 (Chaudhry, Karim, and Scroggs 2021, 921).

61 Many of these recruits were previously involved in SGBV carried out by the armed group and/or incurred trauma due to forced (child) recruitment and their exposure to a war-struck environment which significantly affects the propensity to become a perpetrator (Hecker et al. 2012; Slegh 2021).

62 Military officers of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) alongside members of the MONUSCO peacekeeping force, who both receive funding and military training support from the US, have been accused of acts of SGBV with impunity (Kovatch 2016, 174; Schneider, Banholzer, and Albarracin 2015, 1358-1359; Slegh 2021).
6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the RT would like to offer final reflections and recommendations, based on our analysis of the instrumental case study, and on the trends identified in the comparative analyses. At this stage, it is worth noting that this project does not wish to provide a comprehensive set of recommendations to tackle militarised masculinities, nor does it have the ambition to prove an exhaustive, unproblematic understanding of systems of oppression. We will provide a reflection on both challenges and limitations alongside our recommendations, to encourage a critical stance. While the main audience of this report is WILPF, we wrote our recommendations with all actors dedicated to world peace in mind. Moreover, given the trends detected in our research, the RT’s recommendations wish to put forward a holistic 3+1 point plan to co-construct a society towards the achievement of feminist global peace.

6.1 Recommendations: The Road Ahead towards Feminist Peace

The constant performance and upholding of hegemonic masculinity within the military – and generally in society – manifest the fragility of gender norms. As a matter of fact, if masculinity “in the raw” was enough, there would be little need for sweat, humiliation, and punishment for desertion (Enloe 1993: 55). Our findings point towards the need of redefining masculinity beyond the boundaries of the patriarchy and understanding that no man successfully measures up to it “without engaging in an ongoing practice of self-betrayal” (hooks, 2005). This is an important act of resistance to militarism that, as the RT’s research has shown, “needs a gender ideology as much as it needs soldiers and weapons” (Burke 1998). In this sense, policy must address the use of masculinity as a weapon of war and the exploitation of it for the pursuit of national interests. The framework of the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda can be a good starting point to address this at an international policy level. However, as the RT has demonstrated that the patriarchy is omnipresent and militarised masculinities do not manifest in a vacuum, the RT believes these solutions cannot be addressed to specific actors, genders, or decision-makers only. Here are presented an all-encompassing set of recommendations to inspire anyone to engage in feminist peace – be it NGOs, academia, international organisations, communities, individuals or others. We wish to inspire a joint action, which is the sole and meaningful way to achieve this ambitious goal.

Moreover, the significance of having an intersectional approach cannot be stressed enough. Intersectionality theory allows to identify and dismantle what WILPF recognizes as “The Giant Quadruplet” of Militarism, Capitalism, Racism, and [Hetero]patriarchy (WILPF, 2016). Thus, engaging men and boys in achieving feminist peace also means being aware of the “multiple axes of oppression that shape masculinities in any given context”, for the benefit of everyone (Duriesmith, 2017). Therefore, the RT’s recommendations for the road ahead focus on a comprehensive approach that problematise security, mobilises social movements, and promotes abolition.
**Human security:**
- Understand that the root causes of violence are poverty, climate change, gender inequality, lack of education and healthcare, and so invest in meaningfully tackling them;
- Educate the public that a militarised notion of security only benefits political and economic elites;
- Call for new international legislation to regulate new technologies of warfare.

**Social movements:**
- Build strong alliances between feminists and decolonial social movements that critique imperialism, masculine, and nationalistic rhetoric of security i.e. of control and protection;
- Reaffirm previous commitments to ending SGBV and centering decision-making around survivors’ voices;
- Support men’s resistance to militarism, both from the digital space and from movements against mandatory conscription.

**Abolition:**
- Recognise military recruitment and urban policing as key domains of capitalist militarised accumulation sites;\(^6^3\)
- Align with antiracist, disability, and queer organizing for prison abolition by recognizing that many institutions are central to “martial politics” (Howell 2018, 131);\(^6^4\)
- Create more spaces of localised redress and activism that can learn from post-conflict projects of transformative justice.\(^6^5\)

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\(^6^3\) As shown across different sections of this report, we cannot understand militarisation and militarised masculinities without contextualising them within our capitalist societies. It is therefore important to note that systems of mass surveillance and warfare, especially in segregated neighbourhoods and borders, seek to “contain the real and the potential rebellion of the global working class and surplus humanity”, within which masculinities are deeply influenced (Robinson, 2018). This is increasingly a means of capital accumulation, revealing the presence of a “military–industrial–security complex” (Robinson, 2018). Within this framework, the concepts of surplus populations and the extraction of surplus value emerge. The military, similarly to the prison-industrial complex, extracts groups of people who are rendered unproductive, impoverished, and left unemployed or underemployed – and often racialised – because of the structure of capitalist systems of production (see Section 4.3; Gilmore 2007; Rajaram 2017; Cowen and Siciliano 2011).

\(^6^4\) Because they are war-like and “of war”, as shown by Howell in Forget “militarization”: race, disability and the “martial politics” of the police and of the university (2018).

\(^6^5\) As stated by Cullors (2019), “abolition means transformative justice”, as in we cannot advocate for abolition without promoting transformative solutions to the challenges it comes with. Transformative justice is commonly understood as a way to engage in harm reduction by addressing the root causes of it. It seeks real justice through alternatives to today’s criminal justice system or to any other system that engages in a carceral and capitalistic/extractive means. Often employed during transitional justice processes, it stresses on the “localised” ownership of these alternatives, as they are community and trust-building efforts that only the local population can do amongst each other.
Lastly, we reiterate the importance of critiquing all forms of hegemonic gender norms. In this context, it is crucial to understand that the construct of the gender binary is a violent and “immaterial invention that in its toxic virality has infected our social and cultural narratives,” that directly choose for us and our bodies, rather than allowing us to define ourselves freely (Russell 2020, 6). We must dismantle gender as a project of disarmament, we collectively need to end our relationship with the social practice of the body as we know it (Russell 2020, 10). Thus, no clear recommendations can be advanced here, but the RT highlights that solutions can be found specifically in those queer spaces that abolish gender norms and further queer futurity. Prioritising the inclusion of “marginalised genders” in all decision-making is therefore crucial in imagining and achieving feminist peace.

### 6.2 Challenges for Feminist Peace

The achievement of a feminist peace represents a challenge in several ways:

i) The intricate constellation of actors and nefast alliances promoting militarised masculinities, securitisation, and war, is complex to seize and dismantle. It intermingles various systems of oppression (capitalist extractivism, systemic racism, etc.) transforming the attainment of a lasting global peace into a discouraging and apparently disproportionate task. Therefore positive alliances need to be built.  

ii) As Maria Butler recently mentioned, “patriarchy has no border.” It is resilient and ever-changing. Thereby, our activism must be aware that it might at times participate in reproducing a patriarchal structure or/and other systems of domination.

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“Patriarchy has no border”

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iii) The pursuit of a lasting peace must be done at all levels: locally-conducted peace work needs to be appreciated as much as actions carried out at the global level by international organisations. This is oftentimes not the case: we see indeed those international norms and expertise (generally produced in the Global North) tend to monopolise fundings and energies, imposing the course to follow.

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66 As Lola Olufemi argues “Feminism is a political project about what could be. It’s always looking forward, invested in futures we can’t quite grasp yet. It’s a way of wishing, hoping, aiming at everything that has been deemed impossible. It’s a task that has to be approached seriously—we must think about the limits of this world and the possibilities contained in the ones we could craft together” (Olufemi in Acheson 2020, 123).

67 Maria Butler is the Global Programmes Director of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), the quote was stated during the event “Gender and Peacebuilding” organised on November 18th, 2021 by the RT in collaboration with: TEDx, the Peace Building Initiative, and the Gender, Peace & Security Coalition of the IHEID.
iv) Finally, we should define what kind of peace we are collectively pursuing: is it one where order is provided through securitisation, surveillance, militarised accumulation, and the monopoly of violence and resources by few? Or is it one where human beings of all gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and religion live in dignity and safety?
7. Bibliography


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8. Appendices

**Appendix – Figure 1**

![Patriarchal society diagram](image1)


**Appendix – Figure 2**

![Visualizing America's Population By Race](image2)

Source: Visual Capitalist 2020, *Visualizing the U.S. Population by Race*. 
Appendix – Figure 3


Appendix – Figure 4

Appendix - Figure 5

Source: Ambazonia Government 2021, Department of Homeland Security Website.

Appendix – Figure 6

Appendix – Figure 7

Source: Gallup 2021, *Confidence in the US military, Yearly Percentages*.

Appendix - Interview Notes 1

**MILITARISED MASCULINITIES IN COLOMBIA**

Disclaimer: This interview was not recorded, and thus a specific transcript was not provided. Nevertheless, the notes hereby reported are a truthful recount of what the interviewees discussed, reported to the best of the interviewer's ability.

Interviewer: Gaya Raddadi
Interviewees: Verónica Recalde (coordinator of Militarised Masculinities project for LIMPAL); Alejandro Parra Macías (works at ACOOC)
Date: November 30, 2021. Location: Zoom

**Militarised Masculinities and Military Recruitment in the Colombian Context**

1. In the local/regional context of Colombia, where can militarised masculinities be observed and what are the core characteristics/manifestations?

   - In the main institutions: the army, the police, the Defence Ministry, private security companies, armed groups (gangs that operate in the narco-business).
   - Even football supporters organise in a militarised way: patterns of organisation.
   - Police violence is a wide-spread phenomenon – “war on the streets”.

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- Guerrillas and spontaneous groups of protestors also show militarised patterns: the men who fight the police, & women go into medical support or communication. Even popular expression of resistance are militarised masculinities.

Core characteristics
- Construction of militarised masculinities is primarily a colonial inheritance.
- The nation building process is defined by military victory and military itself, very important institution in how we perceive our social organisation.
- Militarised masculinities are hegemonic: most prominent type of masculinity in general terms.
- Reflection of institutional and cultural practices of how militarised masculinities come to be: how men who exercise this masc. resort to violence to resolve the issue and so does the state – from small/ personal scale to the broad/ institutional.
- Same patriarchal hierarchies: men at the top of ladder, make the decisions: head of state, head of families. Personal level reflects state level.
- Practices defined by how patriarchal system works: subordination of other bodies from the male archetype (archetype of militarised masculinities) women need to obey, like the subordinate need to obey military superior.
- Military men as heroes, how men should be, who they should aspired to be, how they communicate. The soldier that protects us.

2. How does the militarised component shape masculinity in wider society? What impact does this have on other identities in society (women, LGBTQ individuals, etc.)?
   - Focus: impact on women.
   - Had interview with Trans individual.
   - First: violence when a common enemy has to be defeated, the same mentality is used on others. Everything is subordinated to the archetype. Violence based on gender, on identity.
   - Huge impact is normalisation of violence. Huge problem of violence, people kidnapped, people recruited by force, hegemonic masc. make link between “you’re a man so at some point you will make something violence” and must be tolerated.
   - Are women considered as need to be protected? The narrative is that men must protect their sisters, mothers, girlfriends, etc. always protect someone who is female. That protection means that they expect something in exchange: need to obey, be faithful, etc. Consequence of not abiding is violence. Huge problem with femicide: a man who knows the victim, consequence is always violence.

3. Do militarised masculinities get instrumentalized by the Army to facilitate military recruitment?
Not only to facilitate the recruitment process, this process is found in different ways: the impunity in the interactions between soldier and superior, but also outside of the military.

- In terms of recruitment: glorification of the soldier like a hero – war publicity. Like in the US NCLB (No Child Left Behind) etc. perspective to infuse masculinity in the narrative of the hero. This narrative is very effective to the recruitment process. “I want to be recognised as a hero for my community”.

- This hero narrative is also very bonded within the Colombian identity: independence, republican country, and the fight of the soldier that brought to us the independence against the Spanish conquerors. Inaccurate/ incomplete: for independence in Colombia, there was also a key role being played by the Indigenous and Afro-Colombian community with acts of disobedience and organising. The army appropriated all narratives of independence: the day of independence, July 20th, the army parades, the people go with children dressed as police/soldiers. This is a ritual, almost a century old. The parade exists since 1921.

4. In the US context, we observed the presence of a military-entertainment-industrial complex which entails the cross-cooperation of various public and private actors in the propagation and exploitation of militarised masculinities? How does this translate into the Colombian context? Do US/international actors also play an important role in Colombia? Can a similar phenomenon also be observed at the local/regional level?

- Focus: militarised masculinities are constructed in different stages of life, different but cumulative. In childhood there are different ways in which violence is normalised: children play with toy-guns, games are based on competition and exclusion of others – not random, but it comes from strong efforts to ingrain these dynamics.

- Tv commercials, movies, about how military are the hero and protecting your family.

- In schools, there is a sense of nationalism: every Monday children have to pay tribute to the flag, very nationalistic. Normalise the idea of “I want to serve my country”.

- Civic military campaigns in the schools: develop practices, even when they are violent – even when prohibited by International Human Rights. All the teachers cause a huge commotion, as children need to behave well since the soldiers are heroes who the kids need to respect. During these days: the military asks what do your parents do, where do you live, what happens close to you?? – dangerous in a country during conflict.

- Impact on the child is also that a gun is an instrument of power, not just a weapon. “I feel more like a man with this gun in my hand.” A lot of children ask for a gun as presents because their friends also have one.

5. In the US context, we also looked at recruitment through an intersectional lens and found that oftentimes, marginalised groups’ military enlistment is incentivised via
prospects of access to otherwise inaccessible employment, education, healthcare, and other welfare services rather than (or alongside) patriotic sentiments. Can similar patterns be observed in Colombia? How do ethnic identity and other identity markers play into intersectionality and military recruitment in Colombia?

- Practice of people who are well-off and can afford it, can pay way out of military service that is supposed to be for everyone. It is mandatory for people who can’t afford to get out of it mandatory for people who don’t have any other choice. Mandatory only for people of specific groups
- [https://view.genial.ly/619ed5fa357f920d7a2bf798](https://view.genial.ly/619ed5fa357f920d7a2bf798) Arbitrary detention
- Note: stay tuned as they are about to translate a report on arbitrary detention to the UN – forbidden by law since 2014. It is a heavy violation of the rights of the young people in Colombia.

6. How does perception change between different groups of society?
- Explore two things in relation: 1. Colombia has one of the highest rates of evasion to mandatory military service. By the official data of the Colombian army, they say they have almost 1.2 million young people that evade recruitment. For this reason, they created the category of “remiso” for those who have not completed their military service. This is not a crime, but an infraction, for which a fee must be paid to be resolved. When you have more than a million evaders, this is only demonstrative. This shows that mandatory military service is not really popular, only for poor people, it is an institution that kills etc. 2. At the same time, there is the propaganda that paints the army as heroes, more desired by women. When these two factors are considered, we see that the perception of young people changes all the time. There are people who refuse to go, the conscientious objectors. A lot of people in Colombia don’t know about that right, for this reason they just evade. However, still a lot of people (in school) say they want to go to learn how to drive a tank, use huge weapon like in the movies and video games. Two realities.

7. What recommendations would you suggest for addressing issues related to the instrumentalization of militarised masculinities by the army (and other actors) to facilitate feminist peace in the Colombian context? How could these recommendations be adapted to a global scale?
- [https://datasketch.github.io/violencias-invisibles/](https://datasketch.github.io/violencias-invisibles/)
- As a collective action of conscientious objectors they made a specific research between 2017 and 2020 called “violencias invisibles”. The researched focus on the gender violence inside the army and families of the soldiers reference in 2009 police of Baltimore, where 40% members of police recognised that they make violence at home just because of the stress of the work.
  a. They found that there was a need incorporate in the process of selection and training a perspective of gender equality and a study of masculinity (since the language used is always very violent and misogynistic). Note on
language: The study of soldiers between 2015 and 2020 their superior was giving the training on how to use a weapon and the analogy he chose was: “just like you need to know how to put your fingers inside your girlfriend, so you need to know in your weapon. You know that when you don’t have your fingers inside your girlfriend, she will go find someone else to have sex with – similarly, when you leave your weapon unattended in the field it will be taken”. This type of language is used every day in the army, and when some of these soldiers are barely 18, some of them never had sex/ or long-term girlfriend, they leave army with this kind of language and behaviour normalised. Dangerous for women.

b. Army knows they have problem in gender violence, they try to evade so to not confront this issue. Recommendation: have to confront the problem, have to create a way to actually hold these people accountable. Reproduction of violence – the facility of “family problems” does not exist. Huge rates of impunity, need to have a process of justice. They are trying to create a wall between victims and justice.

c. Civil society processes to bring companionship to the victims of army and police violence, as they are now alone. For that reason, they don’t denounce it. It is very difficult to denounce acts perpetrated by them. Don’t want to be re-victimised civil society, and feminist organisation have to create some kind of bond relation with police/ military to give them a point of reference on how to act in these cases.
Appendix - Interview Notes 2

MILITARISED MASculinities IN THE DRC

Disclaimer: this interview was not recorded, and thus a specific transcript was not provided. Nevertheless, the notes hereby reported are a truthful recount of what the interviewees discussed, reported to the best of the interviewer’s ability.

Interviewer: Conrad Otto Lude
Interviewees: Henny Slegh (Senior Fellow at Promundo in the Great Lakes region in Africa and researcher for WILPF DRC)
Date: November 29, 2021. Location: Google Meet

Militarised Masculinities and Military Recruitment in the DRC Context

1. How would you conceptualise the term “militarised masculinities”?
   - The notion describes social expectations tied to what it means to be masculine/a man.
   - Militarised masculinities describe negatively connotated norms and values (aggression and violent behaviour) that are commonly associated with both idealised masculinity and the military.
     - It goes beyond a uniformed appearance and refers to specific behaviours and values cultivated in militarised settings.

2. In the local/regional context of the DRC, where can militarised masculinities be observed and what are the core characteristics/manifestations? What role do militarised masculinities play in society in the DRC?
   - In the DRC, (militarised) masculinity is associated with four Ps: protector, provider, procreator, and privilege/privileged person
     - Thus, men face high expectations, but can also demand respect simply by virtue of being men
   - Women are commonly seen as “property” of men and thereby indirectly a part of them, which renders an attack on women an attack on related men/men in a relationship with them by association
     - SGBV as “rape by association” - this renders “revenge rape” a phenomenon that occurs in the chaos of war, it does not necessarily have to be intentionally weaponised, but it is widely considered a means to feminise and emasculate the target (both through rape by association as well as in the case of rape of men)
     - Men are often unhappy/unwilling to let go of sexually abused partners, but social stigma demands it

3. In the context of the DRC, what role does the state military play in generating, upholding and exploiting militarised masculinities?
   - Tapping into cultural norms, men and boys are framed to be tough
One of the main incentives for joining the military is to do it for respect. Lack of good governance and rule of law in military cultivates and facilitates the spread of militarised masculinity. DDR (Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration) programmes phases 1-3 considered a total failure. Former participants totally untrained, leading to tensions.

4. Do militarised masculinities get instrumentalised by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) to facilitate military recruitment?

- No explicit recruitment for these purposes/in line with militarised masculinities
  - But: societal expectations and respect rank highly among listed incentives to join the military
  - Craving violence as uncommon, people want/dream of peace

The Instrumental Case of the United States of America and its Influence on the DRC

5. We chose the US as our instrumental case study due to its historical legacy as a global hegemon in a (formerly) unipolar world order. As such, the US was able to exert its influence beyond its own borders across the ideological, cultural, economic, and military dimension. As the largest bilateral donor as well as a military partner who deploys troops on the ground and provides military training, how important do you consider the role of the US in shaping the forms of militarised masculinities prevalent in the DRC and the FARDC in particular?

- US training and funding influence on military often very normative: the term “gender” gets spoilt by donors without understanding the case-specific context as conceptualisations of terminology vary
- Despite SGBV prevention training, all actors (including UN peacekeepers and FARDC) are implicated in SGBV
  - UN discourse on SGBV prevention more about saving face - actively and effectively addressing the issue becomes a taboo
  - Close to MONUSCO camps, over 50% of girls aged 14-18 had sexual relations with peacekeepers (partially motivated by the access to privileges this granted)

6. In the US context, we observed the presence of a military-entertainment-industrial complex which entails the cross-cooperation of various public and private actors in the propagation and exploitation of militarised masculinities? How does this translate into the DRC context? Do US/international actors also play an important role in the DRC? Can a similar phenomenon also be observed at the local/regional level?

- The DRC and its extractive industries in particular receive significant amounts of foreign funds which are used to finance both state and non-state armed actors who commonly seize control over natural resource extraction sites.
7. Specifically looking at military recruitment strategies, we observed that in the US context, the military seemed well-versed in adapting to societal change by e.g. launching social media recruitment campaigns and advertising on videogame streaming sites to capture the attention of the young target audience? Can similar types of adaptation also be found with regard to the FARDC?

- Military service commonly normalised as “just another job”
- Child recruitment common: boys get recruited just because they are male
  - They are promised to become powerful men (respect and employment/socio-economic motivation)
- Armed groups framed as community/safe haven for those in need of a group (lost family in conflict, internally displaced people, refugees, etc.) as it is unsafe to be alone
  - Tapping into a sense of belonging
- State military framed as more prestigious than regular armed groups (power and access granted by weapon possession is supplemented by uniform, official state legitimacy, and associated privileges)
- Military positions itself more positively than armed groups
  - Militar offers prestige, respect, employment (whilst salaries to bank accounts often go unpaid, bonuses are an important cash revenue source for especially higher ranking officers), etc.
  - Rebel groups commonly also feature emotional motivations related to anger and revenge
- Due to recent criticism, the military has started to position and frame itself more similarly to the police which has a better image (emphasis on protector role and service to the Congolese people)

8. In the US context, we also looked at recruitment through an intersectional lens and found that often times, marginalised groups’ military enlistment is incentivised via prospects of access to otherwise inaccessible employment, education, healthcare, and other welfare services rather than (or alongside) patriotic sentiments. Can similar patterns be observed in the DRC? How do ethnic identity and other identity markers play into intersectionality and military recruitment in the DRC?

- In the DRC, recruitment is mostly circumstantial: those with little to no alternative prospects will join military as any job is better than none
  - Added dimension of common forced recruitment (including at a young age)
- The access to a weapon removes socio-economic barriers - if you have a gun, you can take from those who don’t
- Military service historically strictly male-dominated - Hypermasculinity of the military
  - The idea of female fighters is culturally inconceivable
  - Female recruits more commonly will want to join the boys, but then will commonly be rather used for sexual services etc. and not a fighter function
9. What recommendations would you suggest for addressing issues related to the instrumentalisation of militarised masculinities by the FARDC (and other actors) to facilitate feminist peace in the DRC context? How could these recommendations be adapted to a global scale?

- It is important to focus on mental and psycho-social health
  - Traumata need to be addressed as drivers of hypermasculinity: looking into the psychodynamics of socialisation
    - Acknowledge that the main driver of violence is the perceived disempowerment rather than the aspired aspect of empowerment
  - Mental health as a priority for addressing the root causes of violence