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ARTICLE

Military Intimacies: Peruvian Veterans and Narratives about Sex and Violence

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Abstract

This article explores how sex and violence were part of the everyday making of the soldier in the Peruvian armed forces during the internal armed conflict between 1980 and 2000. In-depth interviews with Peruvian veterans indicate the importance of sex and violence in soldiers' experience of becoming a combatant. The article analyzes the ambiguity in soldiers' narratives about sex and violence, coercion, and consent, and how they are implicated in both receiving and enacting sexualized violence. In particular, authors discuss veterans' accounts of collective experiences of sexualized hazing, abuse of women and girls, porn and prostitution, and references to gang rape. Soldiers, while in the army, experience intimacy through performative practices of sex and violence—which profoundly affect their interactions with one another—and the violence they perpetrate against enemy populations. These military intimacies, encouraged through institutional as well as cultural practices, help explain the prevalence of widespread sexual violence during the conflict.

Keywords: gender; sexual violence; military; Peru

Resumen

Este artículo explora cómo el sexo y la violencia formaron parte de la cotidianidad de los soldados en las fuerzas armadas peruanas durante el Conflicto Armado Interno entre 1980 y 2000. Entrevistas en profundidad con veteranos indican la importancia del sexo y la violencia en la experiencia de los soldados del proceso de conversión en combatientes. El artículo analiza la ambigüedad en las narrativas de los soldados sobre el sexo y la violencia, la coerción y el consentimiento, y cómo están implicados tanto en ser objeto de, como en ejecutar, la violencia sexualizada. En particular, el artículo analiza los relatos de veteranos sobre experiencias colectivas de rituales de iniciación sexualizados, abuso de mujeres y niñas, pornografía y prostitución, y referencias a violaciones en grupo. Los soldados, mientras están en el ejército, experimentan intimidad a través de prácticas performativas de sexo y violencia que afectan profundamente su interacción entre ellos y la violencia que perpetran contra las poblaciones enemigas. Estas intimidades militares, alentadas a través de prácticas institucionales y culturales, ayudan a explicar la prevalencia de la violencia sexual generalizada durante el conflicto.

Palabras claves: género; violencia sexual; militarismo; Perú

This article explores how sex and violence were part of the everyday making of the soldier in the Peruvian armed forces during the internal armed conflict between 1980 and 2000. We are interested in how the entwinement of sex and violence shape the experience of soldiering and how this is facilitated by military cultures, and vice versa—how soldiers' experience of sex and violence contributes to military culture and, hence, the sexual violence that becomes possible and imaginable. We argue that soldiers experience intimacy through performative practices of sex and violence while in the army, where intimacy is understood as the sharing of very personal and even secretive emotional and physical experiences that are often part of the liminal space between the public and private (Berlant 1998). These military intimacies, encouraged through institutional as well as cultural practices, draw on existing imaginaries of race, gender, class, and sexuality. Examining in-depth interviews with Peruvian veterans, we argue that these military intimacies help explain the prevalence of widespread sexual violence during the conflict.

Scholars have questioned the singular idea of "rape as a weapon of war," a strategy or tool of warfare, as the reality is often far more complex and variable (Buss 2009; Kirby 2013; Baaz and Stern 2013). Research shows how rape in war reflects peacetime gender-based violence (Boesten 2014, 2017; Meger 2016), is used as a tool for combatant cohesion (Cohen 2016, 2017) or internal military hierarchy (Boesten 2014; Theidon 2015), as opportunity and entertainment (Enloe 2000), and how it is often a tolerated practice rather than a strategy (Wood 2018). What these authors propose is that seeing conflict-related rape through the prism of a war strategy limits our understanding of the experiences of victims and perpetrators and overlooks the motivating dynamics that lead to widespread rape in war. In this article, we are particularly interested in the complex dynamics in which sexual violence became a widespread practice among soldiers—how did ordinary young men become perpetrators of sexual atrocity?

The Peruvian soldiers whose interviews we discuss make a distinction similar to the soldiers interviewed by Baaz and Stern (2009) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where ex-combatants spoke of "evil rapes" (triggered by and part of the violence of war) and "lust rapes," motivated by what is perceived as legitimate sexual desire. In the Peruvian case, the violent sex the interviewees feel comfortable enough to talk about—abuse of local women and girls—involve encounters that are recalled using metaphors of intimacy (*cariño*, or affection; courtship; marriage; falling in love) or transaction, not violence (Denegri 2016). Our interviewees do so in the understanding that these were not crimes but legitimate forms of sexual release, as in the cases where transactions took place. Such narratives build on existing gender regimes in which men are believed to have sexual needs that must be satisfied.

Our interviewees also speak of the abuse perpetrated against their own bodies by peers and superiors as part of hazing practices, which we can understand as processes of building social cohesion and discipline (Cohen 2016), as well as the reproduction and affirmation of racialized hierarchy between men (Theidon 2013). Violence and sex are often indistinguishable in the narratives about such abuse. Pain and pleasure seem to become confused, entwined, and strongly embedded in the expectations fomented by the prevalent military culture. As such, drawing on Henry's (2019) critique of military masculinity, military culture and existing gender norms intertwine to create the violent sexualized practices and discourses of the Peruvian soldier. Racism is an aggravating factor that allows for a further escalation of sexualized violence among soldiers and against civilians and captives (Theidon 2016, following Nelson 1999), as we further explore here.

Sexual abuse in hazing and training practices is not often explicitly mentioned or analyzed in studies on military cultures in the Americas. However, Vela Castañeda (2009, 246–247) mentions the prevalence of sexual abuse against recruits in the training of Guatemalan death squads, alongside other forms of abuse that would harden young men into becoming worthy soldiers. Such sexualized violence within armed groups suggests

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that a neat binary distinction between the masculine and the feminine, the heteronormative and homosocial, is largely absent in favor of a much more confused and ambiguous set of moral codes, as Belkin (2012) observes in his research on the US military. Importantly, the tensions in these gendered military norms seem to desensitize toward pain and desire and to replace those with the need to conform to the group's demands for internal cohesion. The threat of violence from within the military group may be overcome only by compliance with those same codes of violence and abuse. Sexual violence in all its forms is then an exercise in establishing military intimacy and in creating disciplined, loyal, and battle-ready combatants.

According to the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC, 2001–2003), sexual violence against local and imprisoned populations was systematic on the part of the military, so clearly a strategy of war. But many of the testimonies to the TRC also speak of the ambiguities of interpretation of sexual violence: women and girls were "courted" by soldiers stationed in their community; forced to attend parties with alcohol, drugs, and pornography; raped under threat of violence, in prison, or in exchange of foodstuff. TRC interviewers did not always agree with the assessment of interviewees that what had happened to them was indeed violence, even if the mandate and framework held by the TRC asked them to do so (Boesten 2014). This suggests a societal ambiguity about the nature of coercion and consent, sex, and violence. There is no clear understanding of what sexual violence is, as the default interpretation is not based on victims' experience of such violence, but on broader notions of male needs, seen as uncontrollable and legitimate. Therefore, while deadly gang rape of prisoners is considered rape even by the soldiers themselves, the abuse of women and girls in the community or even in the military base under the threat of violence is not.

We argue that the ambiguity around coercion and consent and sex and violence in the experiences soldiers narrate is fed by social contexts and processes such as institutionalized peer pressure, experiences of (sexual) violence both as victim and as perpetrator, and existing cultural messages about gender and race, sex, and violence. At the heart of the "aggressive sexuality" (Lorde [1984] 2019, 113) espoused by the interviewed Peruvian veterans lies a culturally and institutionally encouraged belief in a biologically determined gender binary in which men's sexuality is uncontrollable and must be satiated (Fuller 2003), as well as a related conviction that men are entitled to sex with women (see Srinivasan 2021). The military as institution, and war as context, facilitate and encourage the intimate link between and ambiguity of sex and violence.

The article proceeds by briefly explaining the context in and methodology with which the research was carried out, followed by a discussion of the circumstances in which young Peruvian men say they became abusive soldiers and how soldiers learned to understand their own sexual agency within that context. We explore the blurred boundaries between understandings of coercion and consent in everyday understandings of desire and male dominance through an examination of soldiers' abuse of local women and girls, followed by a discussion of soldiers' experiences with institutionally facilitated prostitution. Last, we explore how such intimacy shared among soldiers and perceived as largely legitimate might link to extremely cruel and violent rape and torture of prisoners and perceived enemies. In the conclusion we highlight our main findings.

Ex-soldiers' narratives in Peru: A note on context and methodology

Peru experienced what is generally referred to as an internal armed conflict, instigated by Shining Path in 1980 and ending in 2000. The Truth and Reconciliation Committee estimates that almost seventy thousand people, largely indigenous people, died or disappeared in this period. The counterinsurgency forces are deemed responsible for 30 percent

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of total deaths and disappeared and for most cases of sexual violence against the local population (TRC 2003). The violence started in the department of Ayacucho (Peru is divided into departments, provinces, and districts) in the south-central Andes. Because of the association between Shining Path with Ayacucho's youth, the army initially did not recruit soldiers from this region—rather, it recruited coastal criollo (of European descent) or mestizo (mixed-race) soldiers and sent them to the Andes—facilitating the ease with which soldiers deemed the Andean population Other and the enemy. From 1989 onward, the army started to recruit local young men into its ranks. Although Peru had conscription, its administrative system to formally recruit young men was weak. The military resorted to the forced recruitment of boys and men between fifteen and twenty years old who were picked up from the streets, or *levados*, sent to the barracks, briefly trained, and sent to military bases around the country. *La leva* was widely used as a system of military recruitment in twentieth-century Peru (Toche 2008); the violence with which it recruited during the conflict, in practice kidnapping often underage boys into the barracks and holding them until they complied, was not.

The TRC provides an archive of seventeen thousand witness testimonies that includes a significant number of accounts of different forms of sexual violence, abuse, and rape that researchers have used to identify patterns (Henriquez 2006; Leiby 2009; Boesten 2010, 2014). Although the TRC identified 538 cases of penetrative rape, testimonies of ex-soldiers, victim-survivors, and family members show that many more cases and many distinct forms of sexual violence occurred. Repertoires of sexual violence include the opportunistic abuse and forced prostitution of women and girls in the communities where soldiers were stationed, the use of women as loot and reward for combatants, and gang rape and sexual torture of prisoners and women tortured and killed (Boesten 2014). A post-TRC victim registration system and reparation program were set up to redress the long-term effects of sexual violence on the affected population (Duggan, Paz y Paz, and Guillerot 2008; Henríquez and Figari Layús 2018). In addition, there are several ongoing legal cases against identified military perpetrators. One trial, started in 2016 and still inconclusive in 2023, involves nine women and thirteen accused (Boesten 2021). Other cases of gross violations of human rights such as forced disappearance and homicide include sexual crimes (Burt 2018, 96).

Contrary to existing research based on TRC testimonies or post-TRC victim-survivor testimonies, in this research project we are interested in the perspectives of soldiers who perpetrated sexual violence. Although the TRC archives do include some veterans' references to sexual violence, these are few and always in the third person (Theidon 2013; Boesten 2014). This project is a result of a collaboration between a feminist researcher based at a European university with more than twenty years of experience researching and writing on gender relations in Peru and an anthropologist who lives and works in Ayacucho, the birthplace of Shining Path. Before becoming an anthropologist, Gavilán spent a life that resembles many of the stories of our interviewees. He is a former Shining Path child soldier who was captured by the army when he was twelve years old. He then spent nine years in the army during the most difficult times in the Peruvian conflict. After this period of active military service, Gavilán spent time in the Catholic Church as a Franciscan monk, after which he studied at the university in Ayacucho and in Mexico. Gavilán has written two highly acclaimed memoirs that inform the questions and answers in this research (Gavilán 2012, 2019).

The collaboration allows for the coproduction of knowledge as we complement each other in terms of methodology, positionality, and theoretical and conceptual analysis. Boesten's (2010, 2012, 2014) track record in studying gender relations and the politics of violence in Peru allows for a feminist perspective on normative understandings of gender in everyday life, in the context of the conflict, and within Peru's institutions. In contrast, Gavilán, as a military veteran with public exposure through his widely read

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memoirs, has acquired a wide network of Peruvian ex-soldiers. Gavilán's own experience resonates with the interviewees and allows for a unique position as interviewer. He has a personal knowledge of the circumstances told to us that fosters empathy. His postservice trajectory and academic training ensure a high level of reflection on the experiences, contexts, and explanations that our interviewees describe. We do want to emphasize that this work does not aim to justify sexual violence or judge individual soldiers' experiences. This is a difficult balance to maintain considering some of the content of ex-soldiers' stories and their underlying assumptions. However, our aim is to further our understanding of the relation between sex and violence among recruits and how this shapes and is shaped by military culture in a conflict setting in order to feed into debates around sexual violence in conflict, as well as along the continuum of violence—understood as the analysis of patterns within and links between different forms and contexts of sexual violence and violence against women. With Baaz and Stern (2009), Theidon (2016), and Aijazi and Baines (2017), we believe that it is imperative to listen to the stories of perpetrators of sexual violence if we want to understand what dynamics and contexts facilitate the widespread abuse of women and girls in war and post-conflict.

This article is based on twenty life-story interviews held in three different cities in Peru. Participants were sought through a snowball method and approached by Gavilán for an interview for a research project about their personal experiences while in active service. The academic credentials of the project were essential for the participants to avoid association with judicial investigations or with the army's secret service. Participants were informed about anonymity and about potential implications. None of the interviewees is cited with a real name or military pseudonym—all pseudonyms were made up by the authors during this research. Interviews were held in quiet corners of squares, houses, and cafés—wherever a meeting could take place and the interviewees felt comfortable. We asked soldiers when and how they were recruited, to circle back to their preservice home life, and back again to their experience with recruitment and training. They were asked about life in the barracks, about military confrontations, and about what they did when they had a day off. They were also asked about when, why, and how they left the military and what they did after. We probed interviewees about their domestic lives post-service. Interviews were semistructured, with much space to follow the flow of the conversation. The narratives reflect personal and contextual interpretations of life in the military, shaped by the relational aspect of the interview situation and the expectations embedded therein. We are not looking for an objective truth in the words of our interviewees, but to the subject positions that soldiers present to us through the interview (Baaz and Stern 2009; Baaz, Gray, and Stern 2018). Interviewees respond to questions with an idea of what we want or should hear. The presence of Gavilán and his ability to create an atmosphere of military camaraderie based on a shared past allowed soldiers to respond in a confidential manner, sharing stories about sex and violence that may otherwise not have emerged.

We did the first three recorded interviews with ex-soldiers together—two were done by research assistants from the San Cristóbal University in Huamanga, Ayacucho, one by Boesten alone, and fourteen by Gavilán alone. Interviews were voice recorded with explicit permission, transcribed, and anonymized. All interviews were held in Spanish, although many are sprinkled with Quechua, Gavilán's first language. Soldiers' interviews are complemented by forty written essays by members of a veterans' association in Ayacucho who participated in a competition on *narrativas de leva y perrada*—narratives of recruitment and hazing. This "concurso" was organized by us as researchers and the leadership of the association. All participants were informed of our objectives and how contents might be used. In addition to soldiers' narratives, we rely on prior research in the archives of the TRC carried out by Boesten, and the written memoires and shared experiences of Gavilán.

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The dual experience of receiving and enacting violence and abuse is central to the discussed narratives. To respect the narratives that interviewees shared with us, as well as to further our understanding of the experience of violence and sex, some of these experiences are described here as told to us. This leads to uncomfortable reading; while perhaps there is no language to express the experience of pain (Scarry 1985), there is a language for the experience of violence. That said, there are also many silences; in particular, there is a clear barrier in the narratives between what they perceive as "benign" forms of abuse and forms of sexual violence that the veterans themselves perceive as torture or torturous. This difference in what can be said and what cannot is essential in understanding how and what soldiers considered acceptable behavior—and is embedded in sociocultural understandings of gender and sexuality—and which violence is shrouded in impossibility, even if we know it happened and our interviewees have at least witnessed it, if not participated. We fill these gaps in veteran's accounts with the knowledge established by the TRC and through the unique coproduction of knowledge that is the basis of this article.

Young and abused and/or abusive soldiers

Our aim in this research was to break through the official military narratives of heroism as well as the narrative of the human rights community focusing on atrocity (Drinot 2009; Milton 2018). By focusing on the common soldier's story, we seek the nuance between these two opposites. Most of our interviewees (seventeen) served at the bottom of the military hierarchy: they were *tropas* (troops), rank-and-file soldiers, those who executed orders. We also include interviews with three higher-ranking personnel, retired officials who started as recruits but had risen through the ranks. The majority of our interviewees (sixteen, or 80 percent) say they were forcibly recruited. While Peru had obligatory military service during the war years, a significant segment of society—white and middle class—was never expected to serve. They were either not called, or if called, parents easily bought them out. Those who did enlist would receive military training and go straight into higher ranks (Toche 2008). Hence, to populate the military bases with troops, many young men from poor backgrounds were kidnapped from the streets and taken to bases. They were often sixteen- or seventeen-year-old teenagers. Some remained *incomunicados* with their families for months; some left the army as soon as they could; many others stayed, as it seemed the only option for them to survive in a society hostile to their indigeneity and poverty. The line between forced and voluntary recruitment is not always clear, as some who say they volunteered clearly did so in a context that provided extremely limited options—young men living in the Andes were either recruited or killed by Shining Path or the military. Some recruits were battle orphans captured and imprisoned or saved and incorporated by the army when they were very young; they were protected, educated, and raised in the army and participated from a very young age, as did Gavilán (2012; Milton 2018).[1]

All our interviewees are members of veteran associations and networks; that is, they are organized. Despite the abuse they themselves received and the accompanying victim narrative they collectively espouse, they are proud to be soldiers. Often, the army gave them access to some education, respect, and "discipline," an oft-repeated virtue among these men.

[1] There are stories about boys as young as seven. The realities of what is called the *leva* (forced recruitment) in Peru, are emerging only now that veterans start speaking out. This was not included in the TRC procedures and testimonies. Currently there are no studies of Peruvian military as institution post-1980, apart from Toche (2008), Milton's (2018) work on military memory work, and the institutionally produced report *En honor de la verdad* (2012), written as a response to and justification of military action as documented by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

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New recruits were called *perros*, dogs, until they completed their training, when they became soldiers and then experienced soldiers, or *cabos.* The first three months of training were called *la perrada*—recruits were treated as dogs, a process ending with the ritual fighting and slaughtering of dogs. This training period was extremely violent and abusive, but most interviewees claim they got used to it. Some say they even appreciated it, as it made them strong and hardened, although others admit having rebelled and even deserted because of the abuse. As one of our first interviewees recalled, "There was no training, all was beating, the only thing we learned was beating"—referring to both being beaten and beating others (Lion, July 2019). Disciplining these recruits in violent hazing practices included a range of racialized and sexualized verbal abuse, imposing ideas about what it took to be a soldier that largely dismissed them as soldiers from the start: some say that they were called *terrucos*, terrorists, as they were from the Quechua-speaking highlands. Interviewees who served in the late 1980s and early 1990s recall a clear hierarchy between coastal soldiers and soldiers of Andean descent, a distinction that diminished with the increase of Andean commanders during pacification in the mid-1990s, according to our informants. Nevertheless, race and class continued to be clear markers of hierarchy and frames of abuse among those serving in the military.

Drawing on Nelson's (1999) work in Guatemala, Theidon emphasizes how violent training makes violent soldiers. Race and class are instrumental in this breaking-down-building-up, as internalized racism is mobilized against the recruits to teach them they should be something else than what they are: less Indian, more mestizo, more masculine (Theidon 2016, 202). González-Cueva (2000, 100) also concludes that the abuse recruits received from military leaders confirmed and reinforced an internalized racism: "Soldiers who are abused because of their race or class and who are taught to associate masculinity and violence, Indianness and brutality, poverty and victimization, learn how to abuse others on the same grounds. They will learn to exert sexist violence over women, racist violence against indigenous groups, and class violence against the poor." Sexual violence, alongside racism, was a marked tool in the breaking down of new recruits and creating military relations of power (Theidon 2016).

The prevalence of sexual violence against recruits during the training period is partly implicit—few veterans want to speak about this openly, and certainly not in the first person. Nevertheless, interviewees clearly stated that abusive commanders could do whatever they wanted, including raping their own soldiers. Sexual innuendo, a constant banter of who was *maricón* (faggot) or *cabrito* (another offensive label for "gay"), served to remind soldiers of the need to perform heteronormativity in an all-male environment. This started with how one spoke—as a woman or as a man, and a man's voice is "loud and strong" (Tiger January, 2020). Tiger remembers that some more senior soldiers made fun of junior soldiers by forcing them to dress up as women and dance before them. They would be touched "as women," and pictures were then taken and shared among the soldiers. Such intent to feminize recruits through shared sexual humiliation was part of the repertoire of discipline and punishment that shaped the building of military intimacy in a homophobic culture.

Peruvian society is hostile to LGBTQ people (Alcalde 2019), and there are multiple accounts of politicized violence particularly against gay and trans people during the conflict (TRC 2003; Infante 2013). However, the military is largely a male-only space, and violence and sex seemed to have had an often contradictory as well as central place among soldiers. Homosexuality was never far away and was tolerated when mitigated by otherwise macho behavior. But much male-on-male sex was of an abusive nature:

> Tiger: Yes, that *técnico* (lieutenant) was also a faggot . . . . I entered the room and saw him, and I thought, well he must be cleaning or so, as the *perro* [soldier] was doing sort of a plank, but standing up, and he moved.

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Interviewer: Was he very macho as well, or was it clear, did it [gay behavior] show on him?
Tiger: No, no, he behaved normal . . . he was really aggressive, had big arms, he was a disaster, he beat me up, but I never did it to him, and he never asked me . . . . He was a husband, how do you say? He was the wife of the soldiers.
Interviewer: So he forced the soldiers?
Tiger: Yes, perhaps, as they were soldiers, well, when one is a *perro*, you'd know, he'd molest you.

In addition to macho behavior, seniority may have protected the practice of homosexuality, as Spider remembers a captain who was gay and who had his *gil*—slang for lover:

Spider: Yes, he was like his bodyguard.
Interviewer: And how did you all see him?
Spider: Just like anyone, normal. I mean, when you are in the barracks what can you do?
Interviewer : They didn't make fun of the captain?
Spider: No! How are you going to make fun of someone if he has his husband . . . . No . . . perhaps on the streets if you are like that they make fun of you but here . . . you are not going to make fun of your superior.

According to Tiger, in 1999, the army carried out an anonymous survey among recruits in which they were asked to snitch on their colleagues "who was bad and who wasn't bad, who was a terrorist, who wasn't," as well as who "molested," that is, who was gay, as Tiger explains. All those reported on, including the *técnico*, were dismissed after the survey. Tiger himself was convicted of raping one of his own recruits with objects. Tiger explained that he feels he was wrongfully convicted, as he claimed the recruit had hurt himself after willfully inserting objects in his anus after watching porn with other soldiers. Nevertheless, according to Tiger, the recruit claimed he had been raped; he had to be operated in hospital and was supported by medics, human rights organizations, and the priest. Tiger lost the case and spent ten years in prison. His account of these events is confused and fragmented, and it is difficult to reconstruct the events. What is clear is the ambiguity in which the events, and Tiger's own understanding of them, are mired: it is not clear if the events concerned sex or violence, what the source of arousal was, and whether this was sex and/or violence gone wrong between two men or not. The ambiguity and subtlety of what is sex or violence, what gendered behavior is acceptable, and the boundaries between permissible sex and permissible violence clearly emerge from the soldiers' narratives.

According to our interviewees, who speak of hazing practices in explicitly abusive terms, portraying themselves often as victims, the violence meted out on incoming recruits was a little worse with every new batch, each group outdoing the last one in cruelty. Several interviewees admit that they replicated the violence they themselves experienced with additional cruelty. So violence was not only copied behavior by those who learned it from their superiors; its severity was also accelerated through its practice. Tiger's account fits this idea of how violence becomes "sticky" (Ahmed 2014) or reverberates in cycles of atrocity and retribution (Girard 1977 as cited in Littlewood, 1997). Repertoires of violence are reproduced and exacerbated: Tiger first tells us about witnessing sexual violence against his peers and, via a series of other stories about violence and harm between soldiers, implicates himself in a story of doing harm for which he was convicted. But the story he tells is almost "normal"; these were unfortunate events

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with unfortunate outcomes, but nothing out of the ordinary. Rather, it was a result of the stories that came before. As such, the abuse that the soldiers recount is normalized through repetition; they repeat what they learn and witness in the barracks.

Aaron Belkin (2012, 92), reflecting on hazing practices in the US military, explains that the violent humiliation experienced in hazing practices can be turned into the ability to endure pain—that is, it becomes a signifier of strength rather than weakness. Undergoing such violence can then become desirable as it shows strength and produces status. Belkin argues that penetration can be viewed as masculine endurance rather than feminine weakness. In the construct of Peruvian peacetime masculinity across social groups, in which male strength is as much associated with sexual virility as with physical dominance (Fuller 2003), the sexualized nature of violence and humiliation perpetrated by fellow soldiers on incoming soldiers can aim to purge the homoerotic and affirm heteronormativity in the all-male environment. Either way, the association between sex and violence in military training perpetuates hierarchies of dominance and subordination as sexual and physical. And as the military psychiatrist Theodore Nadelson asserts, sex and violence meet where they both produce dominance. The pursuit of dominance can be intoxicating and even addictive, particularly as soldiers' main reason for existence is to dominate the enemy, and because only through domination will they be able to survive (Nadelson 2005, 130). In the barracks, soldiers are trained to be dominant to protect themselves from escalating violence and sexual abuse: it is better to be abusive than to be on the receiving end of that abuse; hence, being abusive becomes desirable. Chloe Skinner's interviews with former members of the Israeli Defense Force similarly show an explicit link between sexual desire and violent domination over others—over the women and the "lesser" men in the force, practices that reverberate in sexualized violence against Palestinians (Skinner, forthcoming). Following this line of thought, sexual desire is directly associated with violence and domination and strongly related to the context in which wartime violence is both received—as recruits, by their superiors—and enacted upon others.

Sexual desire, girlfriends, and "fixes"

A recurrent theme in our interviews is the natural and to-be-expected sexual desire of these young recruits, a mantra repeated to emphasize the inevitability of sexual violence, an excuse offered before a question about actual behavior was asked. "We were so young, just in that period [of heightened sexual desire]." Two interviewees, Jaguar and Fox, told us independently of each other how they and their friends were forcibly recruited by the army while they were hanging about squares and school gates to catch a glimpse of girls. Their youthful and explorative sexual desire is upfront in the conversation, which made it somewhat easier to ask them questions about sexual experiences in those years. Skinner (forthcoming) found a similar coming-of-age discourse regarding sex among Israeli veterans, a cultural understanding in which sexuality is directly linked to obligatory military service because of the age at which youth enter the force. Age and sexual desire become the legitimation of soldiers' behavior and contribute to the cultural understanding that rape in war is inevitable.

Our interviewees do not admit to committing rape and speak about this only in the third person. But these men tell many stories of sexual encounters that resemble the stories women have told in their TRC testimonies, which the women framed as violence, assault, or abuse (Boesten 2014). Hence, what many women and girls experienced as rape, men recount as sex. These became the stories of how soldiers legitimately (according to army standards, not according to international human rights law) satisfied their desire while in the army. Leopard remembers a girl they smuggled into the military base to have sex with. They promised her that she could charge all soldiers individually, thereby

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making lots of money. Jackal recalls the house where he and his friends went every day to get their "fix" ("ponerse al día"), paying an older woman with bags of sugar and rice while her husband hid in the corner. Wolf recalls two young sisters who lived alone, where he and his fellow soldiers would go to. He does not speak of violence or payment or courtship: "The two sisters lived there on their own. They were young women, really, older than we were. I was young compared to them. That's where we would get our fix." All of this is told with laughter and complicity about their then-youthful sexual desire. The fact that these soldiers came to women's houses in groups and in full military gear did not leave the women much choice but to submit to the soldiers' demands of sex (Theidon 2004). For the soldiers, this seems irrelevant: as young, virile men, they felt—and were encouraged by their superiors—to seek sexual release in the community. These are the stories they are relatively comfortable discussing with a fellow veteran. They clearly do not perceive these instances as criminal nor as shameful as they fit the cultural understanding of male sexual entitlement.

Several of our interviewees spoke about the girlfriends they had along the way. Some had stories of love affairs. Others told of their "womanizing" when they had a Sunday off. Several interviewees were aware of children who were the product of such wartime sexual relationships. For example, a relatively well-organized veteran association in one Andean town campaigns, among other things, for recognition from the community and the state, as veterans feel let down and undervalued. Many of the veterans are locals who were forcibly recruited in the early 1990s to serve in their own region. They want recognition from the state for having been forcibly recruited, as well as for having suffered abuse, hunger, and extreme poverty in the military. At the same time, they are very proud of their service and their valor in defeating Shining Path. All these somewhat-contradictory sentiments came together in a military march the association organized in late November 2019. Before the march, we spoke with the organizers about their plans, which included inviting (via social media) all recruits who served in the town to come and stay for several days and celebrate their legacy. One of the hopes the organizers had for this day was that "when we march through town in November, the women will come and look for their lovers in the crowd, and the children will ask who their fathers are" (Lion, August 2019). While the men's desire to know their children may be genuine, if complex (on Uganda, see Madhani and Baines 2020), the idea that women will come look for their wartime "lovers" is an example of the gross misinterpretation of the nature of the sex these men had. The children of war left behind by soldiers are the product of rape and sexual abuse in a highly coercive and violent context, complicating the lives of these children "hidden in plain sight" and the mothers who had to raise them (Theidon 2015).

Several of our interviewees lament the "children left fatherless" during the military campaigns; none lament the violated women, or indeed lost "lovers" (e.g., Shark, Nov. 2019). Among veterans, there is no clear understanding of a distinction between coercion and consent. In testimonies given to the TRC between 2001 and 2003, women recount how they were raped aged fifteen or sixteen, often in their homes after having been picked by a soldier—this is reminiscent of Wolf's story about two sisters they abused regularly, or the girl smuggled into the base as recounted by Leopard. But some of these testimonies also include mothers and fathers who reported the rape of their children to military superiors: not to ask for criminal justice but for recognition of children born of rape, or financial and moral responsibility for their daughters via a promise to marry. This was inscribed in law as a legitimate route to redemption until 1997 (Boesten 2014), indicating an ambiguity around coercion and consent in the legal system as well as in social-cultural norms. This ambiguity has not been resolved through the postconflict transitional justice process; ambiguity around coercion and consent continues to haunt the ongoing criminal trial against thirteen ex-soldiers accused of raping nine women, started in 2016 and known as "Manta y Vilca" after the communities where the women lived and the military base

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was stationed. The judges in the trial allowed questions about women's dress, their sexual history, and even about the children they had after the events the soldiers stood trial for, all to undermine the women's testimony and prove consent (Boesten 2021). It is precisely this widely displayed ambiguity about the nature of the sexual violence perpetrated by the military against the civilian population that allows ex-soldiers to imagine that victim-survivors of rape might be looking for "their lovers" and children born of rape "look for their fathers."

Military prostitution and pornography

While the military hierarchy did not often punish soldiers for their "errors" if community members came to complain about pregnant daughters, officers did believe that their recruits' sexual desires could become a problem. The fear of homosexuality and bestiality, as well as rape, was a motivator for the military to facilitate the release of male desire via prostitution. The expansive US military facilitated brothels near bases globally with the same logic of an entitled and uncontrollable male sexual desire (Enloe 2000). In addition, the sexual exploitation of poor women and children in the vicinity of military operations, including UN peace operations, provides a persistent window into the ambiguity between what is euphemistically called "sexual exploitation and abuse" on the one hand and voluntary prostitution out of sheer poverty and misery on the other (Higate 2007a, 2007b). Military prostitution is often justified by military officials as a necessary service for men who are far away from wives and girlfriends. Wood (2009) calls this the "substitution theory," whereby the military hierarchy actively pursues the availability of sex workers for troops as an acceptable substitution for wives and girlfriends and as a prevention strategy for potentially deviant sex (homosexuality and bestiality) and the rape of local women and girls. The Peruvian military was not much different.

In our interviews, questions about sex were introduced by asking about *Charlies*. Charlies were sex workers contracted by the army to service the troops, health checked, and flown in by helicopter (depending on the remoteness of the military base in question). Charlies were thirty or forty years old, "old and ugly" as several of the interviewees told us. But they were available, even if expensive for badly paid soldiers. Women would not be paid directly, as base captains would keep a tally, and fees were taken off soldiers' monthly salaries. The base captains would insist on the use of the service and would start showing pornography several days before Charlies would arrive so that the soldiers would be ready. If a soldier refused, he would be called names to question his heterosexuality—*maricón* (faggot), *madre* (homosexual, or mother), *cabrito* (homosexual, or goat)—and sometimes even beaten. According to most of our interviewees, all soldiers were obliged by their superiors to use the services of the Charlies:

> Yes, we made the new recruits do it. We told them "you now have to go," we wanted them all to take a turn, but not all of them did, some didn't want to, others didn't want to pay, and still others ... so we said, "hey, *perro*, you don't want to?" "No, my sergeant," so there were others who would say "let us go first then," we would make the recruits pay anyhow, even if they didn't go. (Tiger, January 2020)

> If you didn't want to enter, well, the more senior soldiers would tell you *maricón* or something like that ... "are you one of them, a Charlie," they'd say. You'd have to enter, if you wanted to or not ... and when you were there, paf! paf! You take it, it wasn't pleasurable, you're not going to kiss or so, nothing like that, just ... (Eagle, January 2020)

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Our interviewees insisted that the sex workers earned a lot of money as they serviced hundreds of men in a couple of days and were paid well (although we do not know how much of the payment ended up with the women, as captains paid them, not individual soldiers). The insistence on good pay helps legitimize the behavior of the soldiers and affirms, to the soldiers, the voluntary and acceptable nature of the service provided.

The way In which soldiers used the service merits attention: penetrative sex would happen in one and the same space, and soldiers would wait their turn watching each other. This benefited the Charlies: "If they would watch each other, then when it's their turn, they'd be done in a couple of minutes" (Leopard, December 2019). Watching each other might be just as arousing as watching porn, and the soldiers themselves were aware of that: "It was just like ... you know, like *Pantaleón,* where you'd want to go for a fix [*desfogar*], because if you don't you will be really hard, which is worse among men, in the barracks it is only men, and then the heat hits you" (Tiger, January 2020).

As Tiger recognizes, this system of army-contracted sex workers is reminiscent of Mario Vargas Llosa's account in the 1973 novel *Pantaleón,* or *Captain Pantoja and the Special Service*. Captain Pantoja, the commissioned officer who organizes the contracting of sex workers to service soldiers stationed in the Peruvian Amazon, also suggests that porn makes the men come quicker, saving time and making the service more efficient (137). Vargas Llosa, in *Pantaleón*, explicitly mentions fear of rape, homosexuality, and bestiality as an argument for institutional facilitation (22). As discussed, several of our interviewees speak of the ambiguous attitudes toward homosexuality and heteronormativity, and bestiality is mentioned several times (Spider, January 2020; Gavilán 2012). Tiger refers to the "heat among men," suggesting that, were it not for the prostitutes, they would turn to each other for sex.

It is difficult to study the system of military prostitution established in Peru, and we do not know when it started or ended and how women were contracted. However, Drinot's (2020) history of prostitution in Peru shows that, already in the early twentieth century, there were medical and political debates about soldiers' use of sex workers and the need for regulation of prostitution for medical and social reasons, including the fear for homosexuality among soldiers. In the Peruvian male imaginary, military prostitution will always be associated with the happy hookers of *Pantaleón* who make much money.

Pornography was then seen as a stimulant for natural desire and sexual release, and alongside prostitution, as a vehicle to channel this desire in acceptable practices. The institutional facilitation of pornography and sex workers for soldiers emphasized and further legitimized the idea that men have a natural propensity for sexual release through heterosexual penetration, and that the satisfaction of that desire is in great part what makes a good soldier. As our informants said, watching each other was also arousing. Peer pressure to perform is highly intimate and homoerotic, set off and mitigated only through violence. If soldiers did not comply with the need to perform sexually and show heteronormative manhood, they would get a beating—or they were threatened with feminization through rape themselves. Hence, soldiers' own sexual desire is enforced with and through violence and abuse.

While the soldiers, and the military hierarchy, frame the sexual servicing of men through managed prostitution as benign and preventative of unacceptable sexual practices such as rape, bestiality, and homosexuality, the staging of this sexual release through pornography, force, and collective and performative penetration provides the emotional introduction to the much more violent practice of gang rape and the sexual torture of prisoners.

"They were going to die anyway"

If men were ordered to have sex with prostitutes, were they perhaps also ordered to rape? *They were.* According to several of our interviewees, captured enemy women (suspected

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Shining Path members) were always raped. As the TRC testimonies discussed by Boesten (2014) show, the captain would have privileged access to captives, and if the person in question was considered pretty or otherwise desirable (by being white or well educated, for example), she would be kept alive for a couple of weeks to serve the desires of the captain and sometimes also the troops. Imprisoned women would also serve the base cooking and laundering (Gavilán 2012). Before killing them, all soldiers would rape imprisoned women. They did so in the same way they had sex with Charlies: one after the other, watching each other, as a performative act. According to our interviewees, some men did this with gusto; others had to be ordered to rape. This was presented to soldiers as opportunity: "as they were going to die anyway" (Leopard, January 2019). As such, soldiers were encouraged—or forced—to mirror their heterosexual masculinity performed with sex workers in the intimacy of the collective, in these acts of gang rape, as if this were their entitlement as soldiers.

None of our interviewees suggests he was an active participant in these very violent scenes. Just as ex-soldiers do in TRC testimonies, such violence is discussed in the third person. The silence around these clearly violent rapes makes it difficult to explore ex-soldiers' emotional and sexual understandings of such experiences and their memories thereof. However, this form of gang rape was a performative act like that of the sexual encounters with Charlies: these were peer performances meant to evidence a masculinity associated with virility and violence, as has been observed in other contexts as well (Cohen 2016, 38). This suggests a level of intimacy between soldiers that was physical and sexual, as much as emotional and affective. Roland Littlewood, a scholar of anthropology and psychiatry, observes that in psychoanalysis, gang rape is seen as "primarily a sexual relationship between the men themselves" rather than with the object of desire. "Serial rape involves each successive male penetrating and ejaculating where another male has just done the same, a pattern of inter-male intimacy generally unusual outside war situations" (Littlewood 1997, 13). This male intimacy is first established in the sexual practices with sex workers through the performative staging of arousal and then repeated in the serial rape of captives and women and girls in the community.

Several of our interviewees recall instances in which they witnessed the raping of captured women and say that those who raped did so without scruples, without compassion for the pleading of their victims. The violent rape of enemies was, this suggests, part of a military culture in which physical domination and strength were highly sexualized, and even eroticized: the capture and/or killing of enemies meant victory, at least in that moment, over that enemy and over one's own death. Fear overcome, raping captives could be the sexual confirmation of power over others, the release of the physical tension associated with fear, fighting, and killing (Nadelson 2005, 132). Littlewood (1997, 13) observes that "both violence and sexuality are contingent and incremental, possibly in reaction to each other or related through psychophysiological mechanisms of arousal." Aggression and sexual desire merge, and pain and pleasure meet, ensuring that survival and domination are two sides of the same coin.

The military hierarchy clearly fostered these feelings and behaviors, as none of this was "accidental" or "collateral"—these were not "errors"—as the official accounts of the military hierarchy claimed in response to accusations of systematic sexual abuse. Rather, the military hierarchy facilitated access to pornography and prostitutes, as well as access to prisoners, and they were not opposed to soldiers going out to abuse women and girls outside of the military base on the weekends. These acts were calculated, not a lack of control. For example, when Charlies complained that they were abused and unpaid by soldiers who had been drinking, military leaders could punish the troops. An interviewed major (2019), Falcón, refers to soldiers who got local women and girls pregnant as "errors." He said he resolved complaints about such behavior by offering marriage between the soldier and the raped girl. In places and bases where there was no access to Charlies,

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prisoners, or civilian women and girls, soldiers were urged to do sports, as Hawk tells us. And soldiers who refused to have sex with Charlies or prisoners were punished as well. Hence, the military hierarchy had knowledge of and control over the sexual behavior of their men, encouraged the belief that "real soldiers" have innate sexual needs, and facilitated the satisfaction of that need through sports, sex workers, and access to civilian and imprisoned girls and women. The calculated effect was that rape served to keep soldiers in line, reinforced race and class hierarchies, created intimate bonds among troops that would ensure complete loyalty to each other and the army as institution, and ultimately terrorized the population and showed dominance over communities and their territory.

Conclusion

As feminists have insisted for a long time, rape is about power and dominance, not sex (Brownmiller 1975; Segato 2003). However, arousal must play a role somewhere, and understanding men's learned understandings and practices of sex—and the relation between sex and dominance—are useful in understanding rape (Baaz and Stern 2018). The interviewed men clearly indicate the importance of sex and violence in their experience of becoming a combatant. They recount experiences they perceived as legitimate sexual release through the abuse of women and girls in the community, experiences that victim-survivors reported as rape. This suggests a vastly disparate understanding of what sex is and what violence is between the objects of abuse (women and girls) and the soldiers seeking sexual release. This is supported by the widely espoused belief, strengthened by persistent cultural norms, legal frameworks, and institutional practices, that men need and deserve sex and women are legitimate targets. This is where the "practice" of rape (Wood 2018) is part of a continuum of gendered violence (Boesten 2014; Meger 2016): patriarchal cultural and even legal frameworks have long tolerated and even encouraged male behavior that is harmful to women and girls.

But the interviews also show how much of the veterans' sexual experiences were specific to the military context. The military fomented and reinforced ideas about male sexual entitlement through pornography and prostitution; the collective experience created an intimacy between soldiers that was laden with sexuality and violence. Recruits' low status in Peruvian society, as men of largely indigenous descent, fed into soldiers' insecurity in a highly racially hierarchized masculine environment. Heteronormative performance was further emphasized through homophobic banter and humiliation as well as homosexual violence and desire: the ambiguity of the heteronormative message becomes fuel for the strong connection between sex and violence in the experience of military service. The practice of performative rape among soldiers exacerbated this link between violence and sex and between domination and submission as elements of arousal. Hence, the dual experience of receiving and enacting violence and abuse is central to the experience of sexual violence in the military. Unattainable masculinity framed in sex, violence, and racism may lead to the desire to sexually dominate the bodies of others, to make them compliant and suffering—just as soldiers' own bodies are compliant and suffering.

Veterans' stories suggest that the military hierarchy exercised firm control over the sexuality of their troops and the systematic nature of sexual violence against civilian and enemy populations. None of our interviewees talked about the sexual torture and domestic slavery of prisoners in the first person; they all know that this is beyond the "legitimate" or acceptable sphere of male desire.[2] Likewise, none of our interviewees spoke

[2] See also Theidon (2016) for a discussion of ex-combatants' tendency to speak in the third person about rape, and the underlying effects of shame and guilt.

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in the first person of male sexual violence, either as perpetrator or victim. These experiences are shrouded in a combination of shame, fear of legal or peer retribution, and the understanding that communicating such experiences is bad for future intimate relationships. The intimacy of these experiences—the very personal, emotional, and physical experiences shared among men—creates its own aura of secrecy. Nevertheless, the narratives above paint the route toward the extremely cruel and violent rapes of (suspected) enemies: apart from heteronormative sexual expectations and the rape among peers, soldiers practiced performative gang sex with prostitutes, and they themselves were forced or bullied if they did not comply to make use of military-supplied sexual services. They told us how violence itself became acceptable, normal, and even desirable. Sex and violence, pain and pleasure became intimately entwined in everyday life in a combat zone. Understanding the intimate interplay of sex and violence in the military, then, is a relevant factor in understanding how young men can become soldiers capable of atrocity.

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