

The hypermilitarization of politics in Brazil

MARCELO BORDIN¹

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to discuss the process of hyper militarisation of political security in Brazil. The initial hypothesis of this article is that the participation of the Brazilian military in politics has been constant and has had no major historical interruptions, providing a context for the historical militarisation of politics. From the 2013 demonstrations against public spending at the World Cup and the Olympics, the country saw a radical change in politics and polarization, culminating in the impeachment of President Dilma Roussef and the election of Jair Bolsonaro as president, in 2018. During this period, several military personnel from the armed forces and state military police were placed at the head of the public security secretariats. Throughout this wave, several state and federal deputies and senators from the police and armed forces were also elected and started to form the "bullet stand" across the country, always with a conservative discourse advocating violent practices against criminals and minority groups. This expansion of the participation of the military in politics and in the different spheres of public administration is what I call hyper militarisation, a socio-historical continuum proposed by Marcel Mauss, complementing Emile Durkheim's definition of the social fact. This process can also be defined as a hyper militarisation of daily life and life on the whole.

Keywords: hyper militarisation, political polarisation, 2018 elections, public security institutions

INTRODUCTION

Historically, Brazil has always been a militarised nation. The proclamation of the Republic was a military coup against the Emperor Dom Pedro II², who had many soldiers in the court safeguarding him. The Brazil's History has been written with the intense political participation of the military. Out of 38 Presidents of the Republic, 16 were military men from the Armed Forces, especially from the Brazilian Army. Even though it is less than half of the total, it already shows a high degree of militarisation of the federal executive power³, given the notion that the country is "peaceful" because it has not took part in many wars⁴.

Of course, the simple fact that the military run for elections and get elected does not make politics militarized. Actually that happens in several countries, but the fact that they

¹ Geographer, Political Scientist, Master in Geography and PhD in Sociology. Professor at Centro Universitário Curitiba (UNICURITIBA) and researcher at the Centro de Estudos em Segurança Pública e Direitos Humanos (UFPR) e do Grupo e Estudos em Segurança, Violência e Justiça (UFABC).

² Bethel, 2002, p.32.

³ The current President, Jair Messias Bolsonaro, is a retired Officer of the Brazilian Army, elected in 2018, taking office on January 1, 2019.

⁴ For an idea of the amount of internal war conflicts that have occurred in Brazil, see Donato, 1987 and Bordin & Moraes, 2015.

use the term "military", or the military degrees and degrees in their electoral nicknames for the elections, reveals the opposite.

With the political polarization after the great popular demonstrations of 2013, which had the objective of contesting the great private events (Soccer World Cup and the Olympic Games), the number of candidates from the armed forces, military police and other security forces, has increased dramatically, resulting in the election of a high number of "military men" to positions in the Brazilian federal Congress. and also of several candidates for governors and vice-governors also being elected with this "military" proposal in their political careers⁵. This electoral moment resulted in the election of a number of military men never seen before in the history of the Brazilian republic⁶.

AFTER THE 2016 COUP: MILITARISATION OF POLITIC

Based on the idea of a militarized state, with a strong participation of the military in many fields of civil life, this work aims to show that Brazil is in a process of solidifying military values across the country. It is clear that this insertion of military values is not seen only in Brazil. Several countries are going through this process, however, in Brazil this insertion of military men in the many instances of civil administration, whether municipal, state or federal, is accentuated, defining it by hypermilitarisation. Along this work, we will build some characteristics to define the hypermilitarisation process. This process can be seen with the increase in the number of military men in the civilian government of Bolsonaro government, which already exceeds the number of military ministers in Venezuela⁷.

With the impeachment of President Dilma Roussef, through a parliamentary coup, the process of hypermilitarization has been consolidated, especially in the field of public security policies, with the highlight of the installation of federal intervention in the city of Rio de Janeiro. The replacement for Dilma as President, Michel Temer started a budgetary restriction process in several areas, especially in education and health, in addition to restricting possible salary increases for the various categories of civil and military servants.

⁵ Cunha, 2020, p. 50.

⁶ Jorge de Souza, 2021, p. 127.

⁷ Available in <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-51646346>

In the United States, for example, a process of militarisation of the police can be observed, with the use military equipment, tactics and techniques in their work on the streets and many groups of special operations (for example, SWAT-type groups), in actions of repression of the most range of crimes⁸, in particular after President Nixon's declaration in 1971 that the USA would be in a "war on drugs". In Europe⁹, the military of the armed forces also participate in patrolling the streets to prevent terrorist attacks, however, these military personnel do not get involved in domestic politics cases and when they speak out in public, they are either punished or have to apologize publicly¹⁰. In Brazil, the military police (uniformed state police) have a historical link with the armed forces, especially with the Army, having the same hierarchy. This link was solidified after the 1964 military coup and the promulgation of the 1967 Federal Constitution, which created the "Inspetoria Geral das Polícias Militares" (IGPM). A department of the armed forces that oversees all the activities of the military (state) police, from purchases of weapons and ballistic vests to training and police operations.

After 2013, political polarization brought to light a feature that demonstrates the militarization process of Brazilian society, a large number of groups have emerged, called "conservatives", "radical right wing" or even those who miss the military dictatorship, demonstrations asking for military intervention and showing intense support for the current president Jair Bolsonaro. Walking alongside with this conservative Brazilian (and also international) wave, the figure of the "military party" emerges, which hasn't become an official political party yet¹¹.

This "military party" is the result of the intense military participation in politics, which never quit civilian government has emerged with with great power in Bolsonaro government, taking many places in civil administration, including public universities. This process of militarization of education is also not new, since it was first observed in 1998, in Goiás, in schools managed by the State, when it started slowly but has moved fast from 2007 on ¹². This hypermilitarisation of education comes along with a larger project, which

⁸ For the case of militarization of the Police in the USA, see Balko, 2013.

⁹ Available in <https://www.dw.com/pt-br/fran%C3%A7a-quer-punir-militares-que-defenderam-interven%C3%A7%C3%A3o-no-pa%C3%ADs/a-57364298>

¹⁰ Available in <https://g1.globo.com/jornal-nacional/noticia/2020/06/05/trump-irrita-comandantes-militares-com-ameaca-de-usar-forcas-armadas-contra-protestos.ghtml>

¹¹ Jorge de Souza, *idem*.

¹² Alves e Ferreira, 2020.

directs life, towards war, even though it is not the conception of war by the cultural industry.

The process of education hierarchy began in the 1990s with the importation of programs to reduce violence and drug abuse among students, with the D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) which was put into practice in the military police of the States, under the name of PROERD (Programa Educacional de Resistência às Drogas). After the installation of this program, numerous police institutions, with the endorsement of the State Secretariats of Education, started the creation of "school patrols", and in some cases "school patrol battalions", which in many cases were used to solve cases of students' indisciplines and that did not effectively reduce crime statistics at schools. The highlight of this process was the federal policy initiated in 2019 to militarize countless schools in the country. This process was also followed by some states in the country, such as the State of Paraná¹³. The militarization of education will have an impact, for example, in the reduction of youth and adult education programs and evening courses, attended by people who need to work during the day.

In addition to the process of militarization of education in state public schools, other sectors were taken over by the military, created by the Bolsonaro administration. According to the dossier by the National Union of Teachers of Higher Education Institutions (ANDES), *"In Brazil, there are 6,157 active or reserve soldiers occupying civilian positions in the Bolsonaro government, which represents an increase of 108% in relation to 2016, year in which President Dilma Rousseff was illegitimately removed."*¹⁴ (author translation). Also according to the ANDES report, insertion in the civilian administration is not an exclusive feature of the Brazilian armed forces, with several states and military police being also part of the federal administration¹⁵. Researcher Jacqueline Muniz says that the number of military personnel in the federal government, in civilian positions, would be close to 12 thousand members¹⁶.

AFTER THE POLICY, THE HYPERERMILITISATION OF PUBLIC POLICIES

¹³ Available in
<https://www.plural.jor.br/noticias/vizinhanca/governo-quer-militarizar-215-escolas-no-pr-veja-lista/>

¹⁴ Zibechi, 2021.

¹⁵ ANDES, 2021.

¹⁶ Muniz, 2021.

This consolidation of hypermilitarisation is the progress of the total social fact¹⁷, being capillarized by the whole society, with no exceptions. As far as public security is concerned, this capillarisation has made its way in an ostensive and subjective way, through symbols and actions. The symbol that appears to be most evident in this process is the rifle, which always has been conceived as a way of power, either whether to force the state order or for the order of criminal groups. We can also use the idea of "social accumulation of violence"¹⁸ and make a parallel with hypermilitarization, which stems from the process of "accumulation of militarization". This mutation of the hypermilitarization process can be understood from the political moment experienced in Brazil and in the world, from a shift towards the ideals of the extreme right, with historical aspects that many believed were buried. But they were dug up.

On the national scene, the setbacks related to gun control legislation have only brought to light the population's willingness to arm themselves to face hypothetical enemies, legitimated by an endless religious quest, based on mean and cruel values towards those who do not follow the "normal order" of things, based on a patriarchal, sexist and also misogynistic heritage.

The hypermilitarisation of life is expressed in all fields of social development, of personal and public relations, in the small nuances that the "militarised" world presents us with: militarized education, which today presents itself as an alternative way to keep young people under control more and more intensively, to the perverse control of the poor areas of the big cities in ways of police/military occupation, whether by the creation of territorial control units of these areas, or by the increasingly insertion of the Brazilian armed forces in the public security routine. The penetration that military values have in society is unimaginable. This penetration of military values can be measured through public policies of the current federal government, in which the defense budget is much more valued than investments in areas such as public health, education and research¹⁹.

And the evident lack of respect for education becomes a reality with the possibility of closing the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro for lack of public funds to pay its basic bills such as water, electricity and maintenance. To the detriment of the other essential areas of the government, for which there will not be salary increases, the federal military

¹⁷ Mauss, 2003, p. 309.

¹⁸ Misse, 1999.

¹⁹ Available in <https://veja.abril.com.br/economia/a-opcao-equivocada-do-governo-de-privilegiar-a-defesa-em-vez-da-educacao/>

were the only ones contemplated. However, the support of the low-ranking categories (soldiers, sergeants and non-commissioned officers), the Armed Forces and even the State Military Police, to President Bolsonaro was a "shot in the foot" (the expression "shot in the foot" is popular Brazilian slang for an action that initially could be positive but has a negative result.), as the social security reform increased the contribution of this professional category, even of retirees, **by** decreasing their salaries, which rose manifestations of these categories of employees of the state and federal governments.

It cannot be left out in this article, Brazil's participation in the Peace Force in Haiti (MINUSTAH) because this moment of Brazilian foreign policy was one of the important factors in the consolidation of the process of hypermilitarization of public security in Brazil. Even though this "peacekeeping force" was operating in another country, there is no difference in levels of poverty and social inequality between Brazil and Haiti, allowing for a level of information exchange between the military ²⁰ men who worked in the Caribbean country with the state police, especially that of Rio de Janeiro, which was used in the city's slums, almost always located on hills. The public security policy in the State of Rio de Janeiro, especially in the slums, from the 1980s on, was to occupy militarily hills and poor areas that can be hiding places for drug dealers, that is, there have not been significant changes in public security policies in Rio de Janeiro.

These occupations result in the cyclical escalation of violence, keeping everyone under the routine of fear of daily confrontations and subject to numerous abuses by police or drug dealers. State Police in Rio de Janeiro uses the same model used by northern troops during the Vietnam War, search and destroy actions. An example of this exchange of experiences is the fact that 60% of the military personnel who occupied the "Alemão complex" in 2010 were MINUSTAH veterans²¹. This militarization of politics will also influence the creation of special operations units, similar to BOPE, in the Civil Police of Rio de Janeiro, called C.O.R.E. (Coordenadoria de Recursos Especiais) which even has its entry training ~~in this unit~~ very similar to that of the Military State Police unit, and which has become famous for being portrayed in the Brazilian film "Elite Squad" and its sequel)

TO CONCLUDE: ON THE WAY TO THE HYPERMILITARIZATION OF LIFE?

²⁰ Souza Neto, 2012, p.256.

²¹ *Idem.*

In this sense, a peaceful point among researchers is that most police institutions in Brazil are historically military, except for certain periods, where "civil guards", "city guards" or "pedestrian troops" acted in urban policing, the big question that remains is the "legacy" of the dictatorship installed since 1964, which would have turned the role of the Military Police into ostentatious policing. In fact, the Military Police patrolled (and maintained public order) before 1964 in various regions of the country, with some cities under the responsibility of the civil guard. The state military also worked in the field, but kept most of their troops in quarters.

Numerous municipal guards are trained by retired military police officers and because of the lack of structure for the training of municipal guards; many courses are conducted at military police academies. With every known crisis in public security, the media, in general, have (has) raised the need for the intervention of the armed forces in different parts of the country, whether in Military Police strikes across the country or in the occupation of some communities, in the broken geography of the city of Rio de Janeiro controlled by groups of drug dealers with large numbers of guns, also in the frontier areas. The creation of this media expectation and the demand of the society for more security (or the appeal for a feeling of more security), the armed forces have often taken part in actions of a police (and civil) nature, through rules that ensure the possibility of intervention for the "guarantee of law and order".

In this sense, it seems that, increasingly, the militarization of public safety shall not only be maintained but, likely to be intensified despite of the speeches about "human rights", "community police" or even recommended constitutional changes in several "Constitutional Amendment Proposals" of demilitarization, in addition to what we have called the act of taking control of the armed forces, and which seems to be irreversible with the creation of the National Security Force. This concession of police power to the Armed Forces in the border regions and the actions for retrieving territories under control of groups of criminals in the city of Rio de Janeiro have been increasingly common, with armored transport of troops of the Navy and their personnel in the control of those areas clearly demonstrating the option for the ultimate militarization of public safety, where the State showing complete lack of capacity of leading an efficient and effective public policy, by constantly using the federal military.

The current situation in Brazil is a delicate one, because even with a Federal Constitution providing numerous legal guarantees for citizens, the authorities do not act to

ensure that they are respected, resulting in cases, which are common, of police lethality, and especially in poorer areas of large cities and against minority groups. This situation is aggravated by the election of a president who creates his political support with the military through the distribution of countless ministries and other positions in the government. This situation also affects States in general with the participation of military police and members of the armed forces in civil administration positions, passing those values on to the whole society and hypermilitarizing life and bringing us back to the models of fascist countries, which caused such harm for humanity in the first half of the 20th century.

Bibliography

ALVES, Miriam Fábila & FERREIRA, Neusa Souza Rêgo. **O processo de militarização em uma escola pública em Goiás**. Revista Educação e Sociedade, volume 41, Campinas, 2020. Available in <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/es.0224778>.

ANDES. **Dossiê: A militarização do governo Bolsonaro e intervenção nas instituições federais de ensino**. Brasília, 2021. Available in <https://www.andes.org.br/diretorios/files/renata/abril2021/DossieMilitarizacao.pdf>

BALKO, Radley. **Rise of the warrior cop: the militarization of America's police force**. New York: PublicAffairs; Perseus Books Groups, 2013.

BETHEL, Leslie. Política no Brasil: de eleições sem democracia a democracia sem cidadania *in* BETHEL, Leslie. **Brasil: fardo do passado, promessa do futuro**. Tradução de Maria Beatriz de Medina, Editora Civilização Brasileira, Rio de Janeiro, 2002.

BORDIN, Marcelo & MORAES, Pedro Rodolfo Bodê de. Hipermilitarização da segurança pública no Brasil: discussões iniciais *in* **Anais do 6º Seminário Nacional de Sociologia e Política- eleições contemporâneas: o Brasil na perspectiva das Ciências Sociais**. Curitiba, 2015 - available in http://e-democracia.com.br/sociologia/anais_2015/pdf/AMHH.pdf

CUNHA, paulo Ribeiro da. **Militares e militância: uma relação dialeticamente conflituosa**. Editora da Unesp, São Paulo, 2020.

DONATO, Hernâni. **Dicionário das batalhas brasileiras: dos conflitos com indígenas às guerrilhas políticas e urbanas e rurais**. IBRASA, São Paulo, 1987.

JORGE DE SOUZA, Marcelo Pimentel. "A palavra convence e o exemplo arrasta" *in* **Os militares e a crise brasileira**. MARTINS FILHO, João Roberto (org.). Alameda, São Paulo, 2021.

MAUSS, Marcel. **Sociologia e antropologia**. São Paulo: Cosac & Naify, 2003.

MISSE, Michel. **Malandros, marginais e vagabundos e a acumulação social da violência no Rio**. 1999. Tese (Doutorado em Sociologia) - Instituto Universitário de Pesquisas do Rio de Janeiro (IUPERJ), 1999.

MUNIZ, Jaqueline. **PMS, milícias e governo Bolsonaro: uma relação de apoio, favores, vantagens, privilégios e carteiradas. Entrevista especial com Jacqueline Muniz.** Available in <http://www.ihu.unisinos.br/159-noticias/entrevistas/609020-pms-milicias-e-governo-bolsonaro-uma-relacao-de-apoio-favores-vantagens-privilegios-e-carteiradas-entrevista-especial-com-jacqueline-muniz>

SOUZA NETO, Danilo Marcondes de. O Brasil, o Haiti e a Minustah *in* **KENKEL**, Kie Michael & **MORAES**, Rodrigo Fracalossi de. **O Brasil e as operações de paz em um mundo globalizado: entre a tradição e a inovação**. IPEA, Brasília, 2012. Available in https://www.ipea.gov.br/portal/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=16688

ZIBECHI, Raúl. **A militarização do Estado**. 2021. Available in <http://www.ihu.unisinos.br/78-noticias/608239-a-militarizacao-do-estado-artigo-de-raul-zibechi>

Other references or websites

DW. França quer punir militares que defenderam intervenção no país. Available in <https://www.dw.com/pt-br/fran%C3%A7a-quer-punir-militares-que-defenderam-interven%C3%A7%C3%A3o-no-pa%C3%ADs/a-57364298>

JORNAL NACIONAL. “Trump irrita comandantes militares com ameaça de usar Forças Armadas contra protestos”. Available in <https://g1.globo.com/jornal-nacional/noticia/2020/06/05/trump-irrita-comandantes-militares-com-ameaca-de-usar-forcas-armadas-contra-protestos.ghtml>

PLURAL. Governo quer militarizar 215 escolas no PR. Available in <https://www.plural.jor.br/noticias/vizinhanca/governo-quer-militarizar-215-escolas-no-pr-veja-a-lista/>

VEJA. A opção equivocada do governo de privilegiar a Defesa em vez da Educação. Available in: <https://veja.abril.com.br/economia/a-opcao-equivocada-do-governo-de-privilegiar-a-defesa-em-vez-da-educacao/>