

**WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE ARMED FORCES AND CIVILIAN
POSITIONS: A Gender Perspective**

SHORT BIO:

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INTRODUCTION:

The present study intends to analyse the participation of women in active and/or reserve military service in the current Brazilian governmental administration, and compare it with the perceptions of high school students regarding the incorporation of women into military jobs and civilian positions in the federal public administration. The paper is conducted through bibliographical research - via books, academic publications and journals, newspapers and magazine articles and official data published on the Internet - and it takes a qualitative approach. As for the field work part of the research, questionnaires were conducted with high school students from different ages, as speech allowed the author to confront theory and decision-making with empirical reality. Through the participants' answers it is possible to infer their historical and cultural understandings of what it is to be a woman in the armed forces. The explicitly patriarchal stance of the Bolsonaro government has taken pride in having set up a "militarised government". The military service has its androcentric genesis built on patriarchal foundations, which, in the current political conjuncture, is reaffirmed. It is noted that a culture that does not consider women to have the capacity and availability for certain positions and that also believes that they do not have the necessary physical requirements to have good results in Army careers still prevails. Despite the

conquests achieved so far, it is necessary to re-signify the historical patriarchal bias of military professionalisation, denaturalise and modify certain practices and apply gender equity policies within military institutions and the governmental base.

Keywords: gender perspective; women in armed forces; civil positions; gender equity policies

QUESTION:

This article aims to explore the following question:

Why does the Bolsonaro administration exclude women from political participation; and how do high school students rate the high participation of military men in upper levels of the government?

METHOD:

This paperwork uses qualitative research to understand the behavior and speech of the Brazilian president and his ministers (members who assist the President of the Republic in the exercise of Executive Power) through observing different newspaper articles. Data was also collected, being done through a questionnaire with a mix of close-ended and open-ended questions, sent over the internet for the high school students. The data from the questionnaire was used to gain insight into the participants' thoughts and understand why they think a certain way about female participation in the armed forces; the presence of military men and the absence of women in parliamentary positions. It allows us to identify the participant's perceptions and the commonalities or differences among them. The study did not address quantitative aspects.

Qualitative research involves analysis, observation and interpretation. Shank (2002, p.5) claims that qualitative research is "a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning". Systematic because it is "planned, ordered and public", and empirical because this type of inquiry is used to understand how people experience the world, trying to understand how others make sense of their experience. Gil (2008, p.121) defines 'questionnaires' as a "technique consisting of a set of questions that are submitted to persons for the purpose of

obtaining information about knowledge, beliefs, feelings, values, interests, expectations, aspirations, fears, present or past behavior etc”.

As a theoretical contribution, we analyze Pierre Bourdieu’s ideas about masculine domination, which is determined by society as an example of symbolic violence. Covering the discussions, we explore Heleieth Iara Bongiovani Saffioti’s concepts of gender and patriarchy. Then, we explore an interview with Bolsonaro supporters conducted by Esther Solano. Finally, Schwether and Pagliari’s ideas from the article “*He new military trends: an opportunity for women?*” are included.

It is relevant to mention that the Covid Pandemic has limited the conduction of this study. At first, the conduction process was thought to be through face-to-face interviews with the high students followed by classroom debates, which would enable the interviewer to observe and to interpret voice tones, take doubts, re-ask the questions and listen to implicit collocations, for example.

HYPOTHESES

In 2019, in a report conducted by the UN and the Interparliamentary Union, “*The Map of women in politics*”, Brazil was, among the 118 countries surveyed and occupied the 149th position, putting it as one of the worst countries when it comes to female participation in the government. Jair Bolsonaro, supported by the majority of the members from the evangelical church - a group which advocates for subjects regarding gender ideology not to be brought to the congress -, considered by non-supporters as conservative, racist, misogynist, homophobic, prejudiced and anti-democratic, the the former-captain of the army and current Brazilian president, made the following statement regarding the low presence of women in civilian positions in his government during a ceremony alluding to the International Women's Day, in 2019: “We have 22 ministries: 20 men and two women. Just a small detail: each of these women who are here equals 10 men. The claw of these two transmits energy to the others.”

In August 2020, a public civil action was filed by the Federal Public Ministry against the Bolsonaro government for its disrespectful posture and, also that of its minister, in relation to women. Among the misogynistic statements made by the current president, one is that: “I have five children. There were four men, the fifth time I was weak and a girl came”.

The president, a rich white man, in addition to boasting about his status as a "Macho"¹, considers that having male children guarantees his masculinity and that having a female daughter is a weakness.

The president externalizes these thoughts through his discourse, not through dialogue, and through the practice of structural male domination, contributing to sustain gender differences. It is no coincidence that Minister Damara Alves, a female pastor inserted in a patriarchal context, was chosen for the Ministry of women, family and human rights. Thus, the way we are socialized means that the division of sexes is natural and therefore legitimized. It is an invisible, structuring power that underlies reality through symbolic ways and behaves as an instrument of domination (paradox of doxic). It is thought that "conditions of existence of the most intolerable can permanently be seen as acceptable or even as natural" (BOURDIEU, 2012, p. 07).

SCHWETHER and PAGLIARI, quoting RESENDE, claim that the division of tasks and social positions in the division of labor by gender occurs through the interaction between genders. And so people are hired for productive activities with high added value. These tasks are manifested and play a role in the public sphere given the social order. In relation to women, this happens in the private sphere. For this reason, they are responsible for activities related to domestic work and the activity of taking care of society.

Regarding the participation of women in the Armed Forces, they state:

In the military institution, women are excluded, whether conscious or unconscious, from networks of influence. These discriminatory policies, permeated by institutional sexism, are responsible for limiting career plans, or even causing them to give up their positions, by indirectly consenting to this culture. For a woman to be respected in the military, she must demonstrate a lot of competence, otherwise, the idea that they are protected or given privileges is the one that prevails. (SCHWETHER and PAGLIARI, 2017, p 55)

SCHWETHER and PAGLIARI (2017), based on Careers (2010), explain that, in the reproduction of stereotypes, the gentrified organization is structured based on the categories of female and male, of the division between the functions related to men and to women. In addition, it comes from discourses of masculine or feminine superiority. Therefore, the military organization is most conducive to the male gender because it is organized based on power and the sexual division of labor directed to men. Certain categories of this institution,

¹ Brazilian Portuguese slang word for "alpha male" which is constantly used in Bolsonaro's vocabulary.

which guarantee a greater possibility of ascending office and social prestige, are reserved for men due to a culture that reproduces traditional and masculine views. Until the 1980s, women were excluded from certain professional and central positions, mainly in the field of combat, and they could exercise secondary, administrative or assistance functions (SCHWETHER; PAGLIARI, 2017).

The incorporation of gender equality in the composition of the Armed Forces in the midst of military structures is a recent move that has occurred since the post-Cold War period, with the new changes in the world order from the 1990s that brought new poles of power. The Armed Forces, previously seen as a threat, come to be understood as an instrument capable of maintaining the security of the State in the face of external threats by the International System. Then, it starts to be demanded from the military institutional structure of the States to fit in this new context. Since then, the participation of women as the subject of State strength starts to rise amid the greatest powers of the current International System (SCHWETHER; PAGLIARI, 2017).

Within the military, through the use of secondary arguments, the logic of inferiority still prevails, trying to prove that female participation in the military is inadequate. Some of the arguments frequently used are related to women's alleged lower capacity for strength, the diminished physical structure, the heightened sensitivity, the need to have closer ties with the children of women in relation to men (Matos; et al, 2016, p. 2). In other words, the controversies that try to arrest women in the private sphere appeal to Bourdieu's so-called social reproductive function and physical characteristics.

When comparing Brazil's military structure with that of other countries (which can be considered a great security country in the current circumstances), it is important to note that the composition of women in Brazil's military organizations is lagging. The Army, an institution that represents the State, is hierarchical, vertical, with little democratic bias, representing the model of masculinity legitimized by tradition and power. The presence of women in the Brazilian Armed Forces is a recent move: only since 1980, women became part of this picture, but in administrative positions first. Slowly, this scenario has changed. Today, 5% of the Navy, 2% of the Army and 8% of the Air Force is composed of women. The absence of women in ministerial positions brings an underlying fact: the minimal participation of women in Armed Forces careers. Saffioti (2004, p. 117) states that "the

marginalization of women from certain jobs and centers of power has created a deep gap between their experiences and those of men".

It is common for the president to refer to the Army as "My army" in speeches, propagating an authoritarian and conservative (and threatening) culture through often crude language and a manly posture, naturalizing the relationship between masculinity and militarism and, consequently, expressing the search for domination sustained by social gender organization. For Bourdieu, if on the one hand masculinity brings privileges, it also "imposes on every man the duty to affirm, in any and all circumstances, his virility" (BOURDIEU, 2002, p. 67).

Bolsonaro's speeches are often seen as normal by his supporters.

A very important issue to take into account is that the hate speech of this new right, which terrifies us, is often denied by its followers. For example, Bolsonaro's controversial phrases are part of his crude, crude way of speaking, but without ill will. The censoring attitudes of the MBL (Movimento Brasil Livre) are necessary to protect the family, children, values, morals (SOLANO, 2018, p. 20)

When supporters of the representative of the Brazilian nation justify or relativize the sexist and homophobic speeches, the sexism dictated by the patriarchy corroborates to subjugate minorities. For Bourdieu:

Symbolic violence is instituted through the adhesion that the dominated cannot fail to grant to the dominant (and, therefore, to domination) when he does not have it, to think it and to think, or better, to think his relationship with him, more than knowledge instruments that both have in common and that, being nothing more than the incorporated form of the domination relationship, make this relationship be seen as natural (Bourdieu, 2002, p.47)

Solano (2018) identified in his interviews the aversion that Bolsonaro's voters had to feminism. According to Saffioti (2013, p.179), "the image of the feminist is then created as a monster that aims to destroy the family and reduce men to slavery, in a complete subversion of divine laws".

In this sense, upon taking office, Minister Damara Alves has affirmed that the State is secular, but that she is "terribly Christian" and that the current government would end the "ideological indoctrination" of children and adolescents: "girls will be princesses and boys will be princes". She has also said that the Bolsonaro government's public policies would be built "on the basis of the family".

In 2021, it is estimated that 6,000 to 8,000 military personnel will occupy positions within the government, but it is visible, on TV or internet images, that women are not participating in this government.

Social representations have a historical and collective origin. Thus, prejudices, stereotypes, misogyny, homophobia, for example, are learned at school, in the family, in church, through interaction and through language and are unconsciously incorporated. The emergence of Bolsonaro on the Brazilian political scene gave voice to the yearnings of part of the Brazilian people - security, order, discipline - and to conservative groups, longing for the patriarchal family, being a group that has identified itself with the presidential candidate.

Bolsonaro's speeches, attitudes, decision-making (*habitus*) work as structures that seek to structure Brazilian society according to the patriarchy ideals. Thus, the president was supported by his voters. According to Bourdieu, “*habitus* is this generating and unifying principle that translates the intrinsic and relational characteristics of a position in a univocal lifestyle, that is, in a univocal set of choices, of goods, of practices.” (BOURDIEU, 1996, p.21)

When questioning high school students about the role of military service in Brazil, students associated it to order, security and protection. Only one student considered that the violent actions of the Brazilian military police do not correspond to their functions. Another student has also claimed to be against the existence of the Army.

When asked if there are any areas of the Armed Forces that are more suitable for women, most of the students pointed that they think women would do well in any area. The justification that came up the most was “because they are capable to act in any area”. Some students specifically chose the Navy and the Air Force because they understand that those are areas that require more intelligence and concentration. One can notice the explicit presence of socially constructed stereotypes rooted in the collective imagination when justifying why women are discarded from the army; one of the answer pointed that: “I think this function is more for men”; The implicit presence of those stereotypes can also be seen when stating, as according to some questionnaire answers that pointed that women should be able to participate in the Army: “as long as they women are well trained”, or “[have the] ability to work as men”; also, when saying that “It is a highly dangerous job, but if the woman tries hard, she can do it”. These responses carry the symbolic vision of what it means to be a man

and what it means to be a woman and to contribute to the reproduction of the social order.

However, the approach to gender equity in the Brazilian Armed Forces was the issue on which the greatest arguments were conducted. The students did not consider the three forces separately, which might have caused stereotypes to hardly appear. They spoke about equal opportunities, guaranteeing rights, the need for inclusion, participation and the need for representation “getting out of the tradition imposed by society”, as stated in an answer. Saffioti (2013) clarifies that "if all members of society had the same opportunities, started from the same conditions in the process of fighting for life, the laws should be the same for everyone". A little more than half of the students were against civilian positions being filled by military men and a significant portion did not know how to answer.

Thus, we start with the hypothesis that through the construction of the Armed Forces to be patriarchal - that is, mostly male within the Armed Forces positions or in the composition of the Ministries of the current government, as presented throughout the text - Jair Bolsonaro contributes to the permanence of such stigmas and structures. It can also be understood that the current Bolsonaro administration has been making it difficult for women to enter parliamentary and military positions because it deals with the subject in an archaic and sexist way. However, being from a different generation, the students start to demand and have a greater need for equity, regardless of the position to be studied within the army.

CONCLUSION

Much is said about the possibility of a military coup being conducted by the Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro due to the high presence of countless soldiers in his mandate administration, his “affection” for the military regime and his eternal threats of a coup, alluding to 1964. Without considering the aftereffects of his words and actions, the behavior, speech, decrees and choices of the president bring serious losses to the recent achievements in favor of a democratic society, for example, in relation to education, health, science, and the rights of minorities. We are experiencing a setback. The president and his ministers (members who assist the President of the Republic in the exercise of Executive Power) have constantly violated respect for human rights.

The high participation of military men and the low participation of women in his government is visible. Military culture was historically constructed based on socially

accepted concepts that use gender roles in society as an ideological basis. Thus, those most commonly observed in contemporary Western societies, the male figure is associated with strength, robustness and the duty to protect and, on the other hand, the female figure is associated with fragility and the need to receive protection (SCHWETHER; PAGLIARI, 2017). For the authors, the exclusion of women in the military institution and discriminatory policies in that institution is due to the presence of institutional sexism which limits career plans, and often causes women to give up their positions because they consent to this culture. If you do not demonstrate competence within the institution, the idea of privileges within the corporation prevails.

For Schwether and Pagliari (2017), it is necessary to deconstruct this stereotyped image of women (peaceful, vulnerable, mother and protector), as it perpetuates the image that they are displaced from military service. Unfortunately, Brazil continues to perpetuate this image due to the representativeness of Jair Bolsonaro. As Resende (2017) explains, not only in Brazil, it is observed that male domination is supported by a social construction that supports the subordination of women to men in the various social spheres (political, social and economic). That is called symbolic domination. Consequently, the driving force of this dynamic of domination favors masculinity and allows the creation of the sexual division of labor.

According to data from the *Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics* (IBGE) on gender statistics in 2019, more than 54.5% of the Brazilian workforce is made up of women. This percentage has been increasing in the last 5 years. Compared to men, they have devoted almost twice as much time to caring for people or doing household chores. Although they have a wide advantage over higher school access, this does not diminish inequalities. They received approximately 77.7% or $\frac{3}{4}$'s of men's income and continue to face barriers in certain areas of knowledge.

If, on the one hand, women have higher access to education, on the other they have less insertion in public life and in civic, economic and political fields or in assuming leadership positions in both the public and private sectors. The Brazilian sociologist Heleieth Iara Bongiovani Saffioti asked women: “*How is it what is it like to be a woman today?*” and “(...) only 8% mentioned the conquest of political rights” (SAFFIOTI, 2004, p. 43).

IBGE's survey shows us that there is still a long way to go. Jair Bolsonaro's patriarchal mentality management, the presence of military personnel in government positions

and the exclusion of women not only reinforce the place of women and men from the perspective of male domination, but also maintain divisions and amplify conflicts. There is no dialogue. Thus, the president reproduces the authoritarian and conservative culture and intensifies male domination and exploitation.

In the students' responses, traces of the social representations attributed to men and women can be perceived. Despite the majority of the students being in favor of a greater participation of women in the Armed Forces and in government positions, when questioned about the presence of male soldiers as ministers and the almost absence of women in the current administration, almost thirty percent did not know how to answer. In the open questions, it was noteworthy that there were few answers with arguments in which the students were committed to their chosen point of view (yes or no) in face of the problem raised. Students demonstrated a critical and sagacious awareness of injustices.

Precisely because they are critical of authoritarianism, these people are always open to dialogue and, therefore, to changes. They are always young, regardless of their age, if the premise is adopted that the young person and everyone is willing to accept and / or bring about social changes. (SAFFIOTI, 1987, p. 99)

Such aspects lead us to another Brazilian social problem (which is not the subject of this work): the low quality of Brazilian education. As Saffioti states:

In Brazil, as in all societies governed by patriarchy-racism-capitalism, schools generally teach what the ruling classes determine, either directly or through the state. Evidently, the contents taught and authoritarian teaching methods aim at preserving the command positions occupied by the white, adult and wealthy patriarch. (SAFFIOTI, 1987, p.103)

Despite the increase in the level of schooling for women, they continue to earn less than men and enter into “more suitable” careers for women. Some students were unable to take a position on the militarization of the government. Why didn't they ever think about this topic? Why don't they know what it means? The struggle for a country in which women and men have the same opportunities in the issues analyzed here and in so many others is still long and even more tortuous with the election of Jair Bolsonaro.

IMPORTANCE OF THE PAPERWORK FOR THE CONFERENCE

Female participation in the armed forces was just recently made possible in Brazil, starting in the 1980s, still representing an incipient, with a slow and gradual change.

Currently, according to 2017 data from the Ministry of Defense, only 8% of the country's total military is made up of women. From the moment we understand how androcentrism and sexual division of labor affect militarism specifically in Brazil, we realized that while there is a continuous effort to achieve gender equality both in civil means and for the military, a historical barrier must be overcome. Such a barrier arises from the genesis of our society and is extremely difficult to be overcome, as it demands the deconstruction of ingrained precepts of the population.

It is possible to affirm that among the contemporary challenges for greater gender equality in all Brazilian spheres, and, specifically in the Armed Forces, the difficulty of breaking with social representations built with regard to femininity and masculinity stands out, and that, consequently, it influences the occupations and functions that men and women perform in society and, above all, in military organizations.

Under the motto of "Brazil above everything, God above all", and from the perspective of hierarchy, order, and discipline, Bolsonaro acts in favor of the privatization of public spheres, theocratic values and the militarization of the country. The president neither addresses nor governs for those who disagree with his ideas. Inserting women in civil positions or accepting military women is also accepting the rights they have won, reconciling the rules of militarism with the rules of women's rights. However, for the current Brazilian president this would be a disservice to businessmen, with the respect for plurality and diversity being constantly attacked by him and his ministers.

The fight for gender equality is an old one. Bolsonaro's election brought up the codes of patriarchy, gender stereotypes that act against inclusive and participatory participation, limit mobility, weaken this social struggle and prevent its progress. As pointed by Bourdieu, "the representations that social agents have of the divisions of reality ... contribute to the reality of divisions" (1996 p. 114).

In this sense, more research papers must be conducted in order to better measure the impact of a greater female insertion in the Brazilian Armed Forces. In addition, in view of the arguments brought by the present paper, it is possible to verify that the eradication of gender disparity with regard to Brazilian military organizations represents an important aspect for the improvement and better development of the country's military capacity, as it problematizes masculinity within military institutions, given that it is crucial to analyze the power relations within and between the institution and society.

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