



# The populist-militarist relationship and its impacts on democratic education

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**ABSTRACT.** This article discusses the populist-militarist relationship that structured the Bolsonaro administration and its implications for education, particularly for the teaching of Social Sciences and Humanities, given its role in strengthening a democratic project and, therefore, opposing such forms of government. To this end, we take as a case study the National Program of Civic-Military Schools (PECIM), which envisages the creation of a hybrid organizational format in which the administrative and educational management of schools will be carried out by military personnel. To address the guiding question of this research, which asks: What does the representation of social actors involved in PECIM reveal about the ideological content legitimized by Bolsonarism and its practical effects? Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), developed by Theo Van Leeuwen (2008), is used as a methodological framework. According to him, understanding the processes of discursive legitimation can be achieved through the way social actors are textually represented. The texts investigated come from official government agencies, individuals directly linked to PECIM, and interviews with informants. This study contributes to two major areas of research, considering current debates. The first concerns the investigation of militaristic ideological content disseminated by populist governments. The second presents the practical implications of this in the educational field. The results of this research highlight forms of discursive and representational construction that weaken critical thinking and position education as an object of common sense, depriving it of its status as a scientific endeavor produced from different fields of knowledge.

**Keywords:** populisms; education; critical thinking.

## A relação populista-militarista e seus impactos para uma educação democrática

**RESUMO.** Esse artigo discute a relação populista-militarista que estruturou o Governo Bolsonaro e os reflexos disso para a educação, em especial, para o ensino das Ciências Sociais e Humanas dado seu papel no fortalecimento de um projeto democrático e, portanto, oposto a formas de governo desse tipo. Para tanto, toma-se como caso de estudo o Programa Nacional das Escolas Cívico-Militares (Pecim) o qual prevê a criação de um formato organizacional híbrido, no qual a gestão administrativa e educacional de escolas passa a ser feitas por militares. Para dar conta de responder à questão norteadora dessa pesquisa que indaga sobre o que a representação de atores sociais envolvidos no Pecim revela sobre conteúdos ideológicos legitimados pelo Bolsonarismo e os efeitos práticos disso? Utiliza-se como referencial metodológico a Análise Crítica do Discurso (ACD) desenvolvida por Theo Van Leeuwen (2008) para quem a compreensão sobre os processos de legitimação discursiva pode ser alcançada a partir da forma como os atores sociais são representados textualmente. Sendo que os textos investigados são provenientes de órgãos oficiais do governo, de pessoas diretamente relacionadas ao Pecim e, também, de entrevistas com informantes. Esse estudo traz contribuições em duas grandes frentes considerando os debates atuais. A primeira diz respeito a investigação sobre os conteúdos ideológicos de viés militarista disseminados por governos populistas. A segunda é apresentar sobre as implicações práticas disso no campo educacional. Os resultados dessa pesquisa evidenciam sobre formas de construção discursiva e representacional que enfraquecem o pensamento crítico e que colocam a educação como objeto de senso comum retirando-lhe o status de fazer científico produzido a partir de diferentes áreas do conhecimento.

**Palavras-chave:** populismos; educação; pensamento crítico.

## La relación populista-militarista y sus impactos para una educación democrática

**RESUMEN.** Este artículo discute la relación populista-militarista que estructuró el Gobierno de Bolsonaro y las consecuencias de ésta para la educación y, en particular, para la enseñanza de las Ciencias Sociales y

Humanas, dado su papel en el fortalecimiento de un proyecto democrático y, por tanto, contrapuesta a formas de gobierno de ese tipo. Como caso de estudio, se analiza el Programa Nacional de Escuelas Cívico-Militares (Pecim), que prevé la creación de un formato organizacional híbrido, las Escuelas Cívico-Militares (ECIM). En ellos, la gestión administrativa y el control de los estudiantes ahora lo llevan a cabo los militares. Para responder a la pregunta rectora de esta investigación, que indaga sobre qué nos revela la representación de los actores sociales en el contexto del Pecim sobre los contenidos ideológicos que el bolsonarismo busca legitimar socialmente y cuáles son los efectos de ello en el campo de la educación? Se utiliza como referencia metodológica el Análisis Crítico del Discurso (ACD) desarrollado por Theo Van Leeuwen (2008), para quien la comprensión de los procesos de legitimación discursiva puede lograrse a partir de la forma en que los actores sociales son representados en los textos. Ya que los textos investigados provienen de organismos oficiales del gobierno, de personas directamente relacionadas con Pecim y también de entrevistas a informantes. Este estudio trae contribuciones en dos grandes frentes considerando los debates actuales. El primero se refiere a la investigación de los contenidos ideológicos de un sesgo militarista difundido por gobiernos populistas. El segundo es presentar las implicaciones prácticas de esto en el campo educativo. Los resultados de esta investigación muestran formas de construcción discursiva y representacional que debilitan el pensamiento crítico y que sitúan a la educación como objeto de sentido común, despojándola del estatus de trabajo científico producido desde diferentes áreas del saber.

**Palabras clave:** populismos; educación; pensamiento crítico.

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## Introduction

During the impeachment vote against then-President Dilma Rousseff in 2016, then-Congressman Jair Bolsonaro caused considerable controversy on social media and in the press. On that occasion, he paid tribute to Colonel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, the first military officer recognized by the Brazilian justice system as a torturer, whom Bolsonaro referred to on more than one occasion as a 'national hero' (Mazui, 2019). This episode exemplifies the militaristic political appeal that would become the foundation of Bolsonarism. This movement, which can be defined as radical right-wing populism (Mudde, 2019), rose to power in Brazil between 2019 and 2022, following Jair Messias Bolsonaro's victory in the 2018 presidential elections.

Radical right-wing populisms, such as Bolsonarism, attack liberal democracy by opposing the rights of minorities (in power and capacity for social representation) and the independent institutions that seek to guarantee these same rights (Mudde, 2019). The antidemocratic and reactionary bias of these movements (Lynch & Cassimiro, 2022) can pose a series of challenges to the field of education, especially the teaching of the Social Sciences and Humanities. This is because these areas of knowledge usually play a significant role in strengthening a democratic project—that is, one based on the promotion of a just, inclusive, and participatory society concerned with protecting the rights and dignity of all people.

Taking these aspects into consideration, this article explores the National Program of Civic-Military Schools (PECIM). According to the then-Ministry of Education of the Bolsonaro administration, it is "[...] a public policy [...]" for Brazilian education that aims to revive "[...] once-forgotten values, such as discipline and respect" (Escola Cívico-Militar, 2021). Created in the first year of this administration, this program promotes a hybrid organizational format, the so-called Civic-Military Schools (ECIM), which are a hybrid of a military school and a civilian public school. In the ECIM, administrative and educational management is now carried out by military personnel (Manual das Escolas Cívico-Militar, 2020). Broadly speaking, PECIM made school militarization a national public policy and constituted a clear example of an anti-democratic project aimed at education.

In this sense, we argue that understanding the role of the Social Sciences and Humanities in strengthening a democratic project for society involves uncovering the ideological content that such governments seek to socially legitimize, which can be identified through their public policies (Naguib, 2020).

To analyze and discuss these aspects, this study uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a method, based on the approach developed by Theo Van Leeuwen (2007, 2008). For this author, understanding what is socially legitimized and its practical effects can be achieved by analyzing how social actors are represented in texts. Thus, this discussion begins with the following guiding question: what does the representation of social actors involved in the PECIM program reveal about the ideological content legitimized by Bolsonarism?

This article seeks to contribute to current discussions on two fronts. The first, despite the recent wave of populism, concerns the fact that emerging literature has not devoted due attention to analyzing the populist-

military relationship (Hunter & Veja, 2022). Particularly regarding the intersections of this relationship in the field of education, and even though current studies recognize that militarization refers to a type of political approach with social effects (Alves & Toschi, 2019; Tiellet, 2019), there are still gaps to be discussed regarding the ideological content disseminated, especially when schools become a battlefield around a particular model of society. The second is based on the observation that very little is known about the practical implications of having populists in power for the functioning of Public Administration (Bellodi et al., 2021; Peci, 2021) and even less with regard to education, one of its most important areas considering its impact on the formation of citizens and the development of the country as a whole.

To develop this discussion, this material includes, in addition to this introduction, a first section that addresses the ideological coupling between Bolsonarism and a militaristic ideology. The second section discusses the militarization of Public Administration, including the field of Education, as a reflection of this connection. This theme is further explored in the following section, through the National Program in Civic-Military Schools (PECIM), an emblematic case of militarization in education. The fourth section addresses the procedures, methods of analysis, and the research corpus. The fifth and sixth sections present the research findings regarding the representation of military personnel and teachers within the PECIM context. The penultimate section discusses in depth the practical implications of the representation modes of these two groups in the context of civic-military schools (ECIM). The final considerations integrate these elements and present them, considering the challenges posed not only to education in general, but also to the teaching of Social Sciences and Humanities in Brazil.

## **Ideological couplings and their reflections: Bolsonarism-militarism**

Populist movements, whether left-wing or right-wing, function as ideologies. They offer a framework, a kind of 'mental map,' through which people analyze and understand the reality around them (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017).

However, populism is a particular ideology: a 'narrow-centered' ideology. This means that, on its own, it is incapable of offering comprehensive responses to the complex demands of modern societies. For this reason, populisms need to be linked to other, more robust ideologies (such as communism, socialism, conservatism, nationalism, fascism, neoliberalism, etc.). These broader ideologies provide the structure and 'thicker' substance that gives strength and shape to the mosaic of populist demands (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Mudde, 2019).

Bolsonaro populism has made this type of coupling evident. He did so by embracing neoliberalism, represented by Bolsonaro's chosen Minister of Economy, Paulo Guedes, who added to his agenda explicit support for privatization, public spending cuts, and the shrinking of the state bureaucracy. He also embraced religious neoconservatism, manifested in Bolsonaro's outreach to religious leaders, especially evangelicals who advocate anti-progressive perspectives (Segatto et al., 2022). This neoconservatism was also embodied in his embrace of militarism (Lacerda, 2019; Andrade, 2021).

Regarding the latter, it is important to consider that the controversies surrounding the concept of a militaristic ideology (or simply militarism) (Boer, 1980) are not recent. Ruy Barbosa's speech during the 1909/1910 election campaign demonstrates that this is a secular discussion and demonstrates that militarism is a distortion of military values, or as the politician puts it: "[...] military institutions legally organize the Force. Militarism disorganizes it. Militarism is to the army what fanaticism is to religion [...]" (Barbosa, 1910, p. 43). Thus, if fanaticism is an obsessive religious zeal that can lead to extremes of intolerance, militarism would follow the same path, producing sectarianism, an exaggerated attachment to a point of view, and forms of intolerance.

As Castro (1990) explains, the 'military spirit' is based on a set of values enshrined and sustained by the idea of moral integrity. To which we add, militarism would be a type of distorted exacerbation of this idea. This type of distortion can be characterized by what Silva (2014) wrote in his reflection on the lexical elements of the term. As he argues, the term militarism is the result of an association of the suffix -ism with the word military, which confers the idea of an organic connection between the military and a doctrine. In this doctrine (or ideology), military culture remains supported by values typical of the military ethos, such as hierarchy and discipline, but these values are transformed into blind obedience, submission, warmongering, domination, and the use of force.

Militarist ideology, in the Brazilian context, is based on the idea that corruption prevails outside the military, and that what is done by the military is more efficient (Silva, 2014). This aspect is transformed,

through a more radicalized Brazilian right, into statements that project the military as "[...] one of the few social actors that still have the legitimacy to bring back forgotten traditional values" (Solano, 2018, p. 24). These values, from a reactionary and antidemocratic perspective, signify the "[...] claim to a mythical past [...]" of happy, upstanding, and heterosexual families, when women and racial minorities knew their place, when neighborhoods were orderly, safe, and homogeneous, when drugs were a Black problem, and when Christianity and whiteness constituted the manifest identity, power, and pride of the Western nation (Brown, 2019, p. 13).

Broadly speaking, militarism is anchored in a warlike and fighting ideal (Boer, 1980). Based on the principle of coercion as a method of social organization, its purpose is combat, war, and victory and, consequently, the annihilation of a specific enemy (Adelman, 2003; Johnson, 2019).

Seen from this perspective, this ideology serves as a resource that enhances the fundamental populist antagonism – us versus them – which divides society between a ‘corrupt elite’ versus a ‘pure people’ (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Mudde, 2019). However, in movements of this type, the definition of who constitutes the (pure) people and the (corrupt) elite varies according to each context.

Generally speaking, the ‘people,’ in populist ideology, is neither real nor fully inclusive, but rather a mythical and constructed subset that represents the population (Mudde et al., 2021). In Bolsonarism, much of the ideal of the people was based on the idea of the ‘good citizen,’ which is constructed based on the dichotomy of ‘good citizen’ versus ‘criminal,’ or ‘good citizen’ versus ‘vagabond’. This, in turn, produces a sense of separation and restricts citizenship to only certain types of subjects considered, vaguely, as ‘good’ (Costa, 2021). As Costa (2021) explains, the figure of the ‘good citizen’ is the expression of a deep and historical anti-pluralist and, therefore, anti-democratic sentiment existing in various sectors of Brazilian society. It is from this perspective that statements such as ‘human rights for right humans’ and ‘a good criminal is a dead criminal’ are produced. This expression was repeatedly used by Bolsonaro to refer to those he defended (‘the people’), as were generals who supported him before and after his election. Among them were Augusto Heleno, head of the Institutional Security Office of the Presidency of the Republic, and Eduardo Villas Bôas, commander of the Army during the Bolsonaro administration.

The ‘elite’ is also a rather malleable concept, yet its definition is related to a certain capacity for power and influence (Mudde, 2019). This means, for example, that teachers, journalists, intellectuals, and digital influencers can be considered members of the elite due to their capacity to influence/power a captive audience. The ‘corrupt’ aspect, within current radical-right populist discourses, generally refers to progressive positions or even the political left itself, accused of corrupting the nation with its “[...] postmodernist [...]” ideas and “[...] cultural Marxism” (Mudde, 2019, p. 36). Thus, for these movements, corruption need not be solely linked to the theft of foreign currency and financial resources; it can be related to the idea of corruption of people's minds, especially women (as, for example, in their fight for feminist ideals) and young people (Mudde, 2019), which makes schools an important arena of dispute.

It was from this dichotomy—corrupt elite versus pure people—that Bolsonaro and his supporters skillfully integrated anti-PT (anti-Workers' Party) and anti-leftism into anti-communist rhetoric. However, this rhetoric not only included the PT's political leadership, but also spread throughout the public administration and public servants considered part of a corrupt elite (Peci, 2021).

This is a type of strategy already identified in the literature in radicalized populist governments, leading to attacks on state bureaucracy such as the hiring of loyalists at the expense of expertise (Peters & Pierre, 2019; Peci, 2021), the discretionary redistribution of institutional priorities and public resources (Bauer & Becker, 2020; Dussauge-Laguna, 2021), and the embrace of conspiracy theories as a way of delegitimizing public servants in general (Moynihan & Roberts, 2021; Bergmann, 2018).

Even so, and going beyond rhetoric very similar to Trump's, who argued that the ‘corrupt elite’ included members of the federal government itself, with the only exceptions being the military (Moynihan & Roberts, 2021), Bolsonaro has transformed this into a pattern of governance, demonstrating the strength of a militaristic ideology within the constitutive framework of Bolsonarism. And in this regard, as Mathias (2004) has already written, one of the most visible forms of manifestation of militarism is the militarization of Public Administration, that is, the occupation of public positions by military personnel.

## Militarization of Public Administration

Although the militarization of public administration is not a phenomenon restricted to the Bolsonaro administration (Fuccille, 2021), it became more evident than before through the significant occupation of

civil service positions by military personnel during this administration. This occurred through the appointment of the latter to key positions within the state bureaucracy, as well as to civilian public positions in general (Schmidt, 2022).

This populist-military relationship proved to be an alliance that benefited both sides. Bolsonaro partnered with the military to gain political capital, given that the Armed Forces, in particular, enjoyed widespread public approval in Brazil (Bächtold, 2019). He had a strong affinity with the military subculture, being a former army captain himself. He also found a way to govern within this segment, given his difficulties in interacting with political parties (Hunter & Vega, 2022).

In turn, the military, by organically linking themselves to their government, secured positions that, in many cases, gave them significant political voice on a wide range of issues, including some outside their professional competence. One of the most emblematic examples of this was the appointment of Eduardo Pazuello, an active-duty general with no healthcare expertise, as Minister of Health during one of the most severe moments of the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil. Also during the Bolsonaro administration, we saw a steady increase in defense investments despite the economic recession that forced cuts in other areas, including healthcare and education. Nevertheless, military personnel were the only public servants to see their salaries increase in the first years of the administration. Broadly speaking, this group was elevated to a higher caste of public servants who, in addition to being well paid, had relevant status and power of influence/decision over other segments of the Public Administration (Hunter & Vega, 2022).

Particularly with regard to education, militarization expanded through Bolsonaro's numerous education ministers.

During the administration of Abraham Weintraub (April 2019 to June 2020), an economist with no extensive experience in education, several military personnel were appointed to strategic positions within the Ministry of Education (MEC). Among them, Colonel Carlos Alberto Decotelli, who took over as Executive Secretary of the MEC; Colonel Ricardo Wagner Roquetti, appointed Chief of Staff of the MEC; Captain Wagner Vilas Boas Garcia, who became a special advisor to that ministry; and Lieutenant Colonel Alexandre Gomes da Silva, who was appointed Program Director of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES).

Also during the administration of Milton Ribeiro (July 2020 to March 2022), a Presbyterian pastor who was dismissed after allegations of a corruption scheme involving the misappropriation of public funds from that ministry, military appointments continued. Among them was Colonel Mauro Luiz Rabelo, appointed to manage the National Fund for the Development of Education (FNDE) and responsible for managing the ministry's financial resources.

Even so, one of the most emblematic cases of militarization in/of education was Pecim, the National Program of Civic-Military Schools (Almeida Santos et al., 2019).

### **Pecim: material interests as a driving force for ideology**

Launched in 2019, the National Program of Civic-Military Schools (PECIM) aimed to establish more than 200 civic-military schools (ECIM) throughout Brazil by 2023. Promoted as a public policy aimed at educating low-income youth aged 11 to 17 (Escola Cívico-Militar, 2021), PECIM proposed a new approach to school management. Public schools that joined PECIM now have military personnel (from the Armed Forces, Police, and Fire Department) present. These professionals worked in administrative management and in the educational development of students, focusing on developing discipline, hierarchy, and nationalist ideals (Manual das Escolas Cívico-Militares, 2020). However, the program faced significant criticism from various sectors of Brazilian society, particularly from organizations linked to education and human rights. The main objections included the potential violation of human rights, the lack of transparency, the lack of scientific evidence of the effectiveness of the civic-military model in improving teaching and learning, the direction of public resources for military purposes and the devaluation of education professionals (Almeida Santos et al., 2019).

Data obtained by the press regarding the resources allocated to PECIM revealed that the amounts allocated to this Program were gradually increased. From 2020 to 2021, the increase was approximately 328%, and from 2021 to 2022, the projected increase reached 139% (Fiquem Sabendo, 2021). However, more than half of the financial resources were transferred to the Ministry of Defense to pay retired members of the Armed Forces and not, effectively, to schools as investments such as the purchase of school supplies and infrastructure improvements (Menezes & Sócrates, 2020). When analyzing the data obtained in January 2021 by the Fiquem

Sabendo agency, specialized in the Access to Information Law (LAI), it was possible to identify that the 96 Army soldiers (not considering other Forces such as the Navy and Air Force) hired by the Program received a total of R\$2,155,551.23 in 2020 (Fiquem Sabendo, 2021).

A more detailed examination of this material also revealed that many forms submitted by military personnel to participate in PECIM were merely signed. And, when completed, inconsistencies in the information became apparent. Illustrating this statement: for one lieutenant, his Real Estate Transactions Technician and Mechanical Drawing courses each scored 10 points in the category called 'Higher Education Training Courses in the areas of teaching and education'; for a Third Sergeant, his 120-hour course preparing for the reserve ('Reserve and Retirement Course') scored 5 points in the item related to 'professional military courses in the areas of administration/personnel management/psychology/social assistance'; for another Third Sergeant, his information on 'higher education' listed an (unfinished) Psychology course begun in the second semester of 1989 and completed six months later, which also scored 10 points on his application form (Fiquem Sabendo, 2021). Despite this, the scoring criterion is important in the placement of military personnel within the ECIM, as the highest-ranking students receive priority in choosing their desired locations.

Armed Forces personnel or auxiliaries can work in these schools as monitors, in which case they engage directly with students, as Educational Management Officers coordinating the monitors, or as School Management Officers acting as "[...] advisor to the Principal on matters related to educational, didactic, and pedagogical matters" (Manual das Escolas Cívico-Militares, 2020). PECIM does not require any qualifications in the field of education for the selection of military personnel to work in these schools, blatantly violating the Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education (LDB) (Lei nº 9.394, 1996).

Retired Armed Forces personnel are the program's target audience (Portaria nº 1.071, 2020). While these schools that became militarized (Ecim) opened up significant space for ways of relocating this group, even because the expected number of military personnel per school is significant (Portaria nº 2.015, 2019).

These types of relocation, in turn, are well-paid, as the amounts paid to these military personnel are not insignificant, corresponding to a 30% bonus on their inactive salary, plus vacation pay, food allowance, and Christmas bonus. Ranks such as colonel received around R\$7,000 per month in additional pay ('bonus') alone in the first years of PECIM. Since the 30% bonus is applied to the gross income they already receive monthly, in the case of a colonel, for example, this would exceed R\$20,000 (Fiquem Sabendo, 2021).

This information highlights the material, economic, and class interests of the military establishment, particularly those of the military. It also suggests the creation of an unusual 'market' in the field of education for a workforce that, even though displaced from its original training and professional experience, receives financial returns in the form of extra compensation that surpass those of professionals in this field. In this sense, it is essential to consider that the minimum wage for Brazilian teachers of R\$2,886.24—the lowest among 40 countries (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2021)—is, in many cases, lower than the bonuses (additional amounts) military personnel receive for entering such educational environments.

Finally, it is worth highlighting that although Pecim's central objective is "[...] to improve Basic Education in Brazil" (Manual das Escolas Cívico-Militares, 2020, p. 2), its numerical impact does not match this statement. This is particularly true because 216 Ecims were planned (from 2019 to 2023) within an existing universe of approximately 178,000 school units in the Brazilian public system (Cristaldo, 2022), which means this amount represents approximately 0.1% of the total number of public schools in the country. Thus, the impact of Pecim is symbolic, and its promotion throughout the country, as a public policy for education, reveals a process of discursive construction about how populist governments can legitimize forms of behavior, practices, and modes of social relations - a topic that will be illustrated and discussed below..

## Methodological Approach, Analysis Mode and Data Set

In Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), we view discourses as concrete, materialized manifestations that, in Foucault's words (2012, p. 64), "[...] systematically form the objects they speak of." This means that we can collect discourses through various texts, whether written, oral, visual (images, videos), or other communicative materials (Leeuwen, 2008).

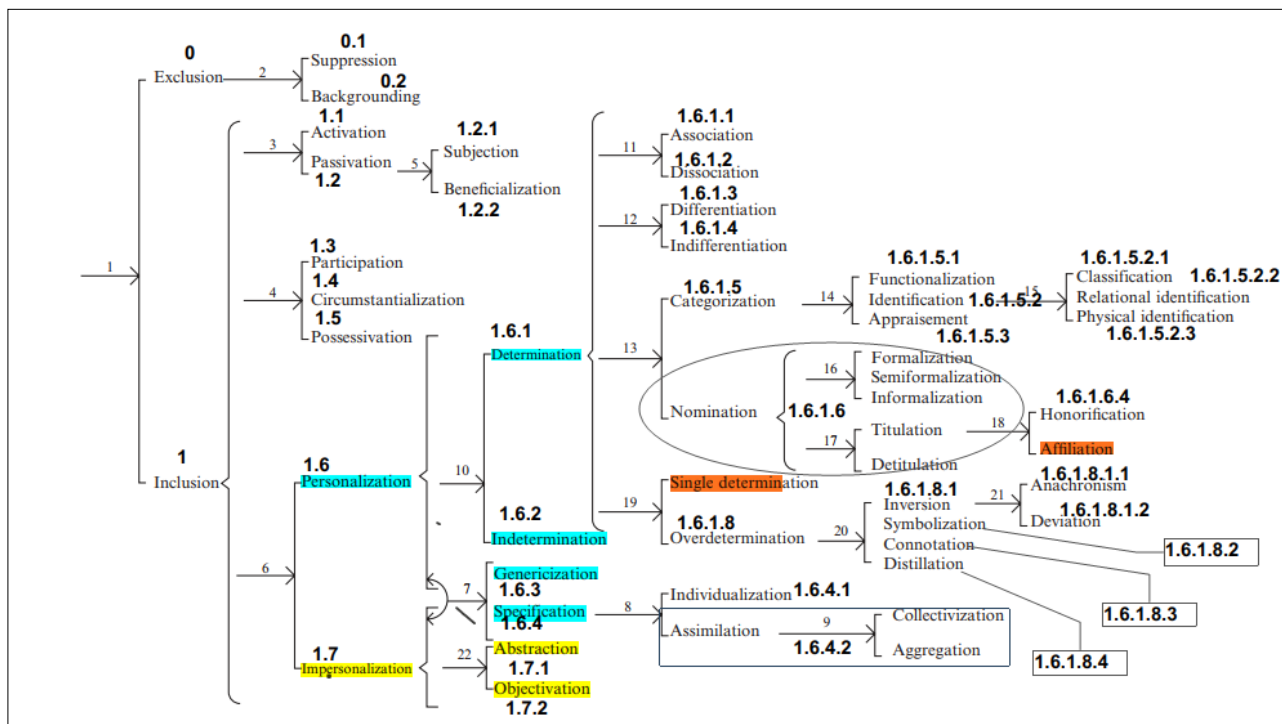
In CDA, we understand that texts not only give life to ideologies but can also refract them, that is, transform or distort them.

There are several approaches within CDA, and in this study, we employ the one developed by Theo Van Leeuwen (2007, 2008). For Leeuwen, we can investigate the ideological content of what is sought to be socially

legitimated by analyzing how social actors are represented in texts. This is because, for him, all representation is, in itself, a form of legitimation (Leeuwen, 2008).

The reason for this perspective is that legitimation (or delegitimation) does not exist in a vacuum; it must be linked to something or someone. Leeuwen (2008) proposes a complex network of forms of representation of social actors (as shown in Figure 1).

Despite this complexity, it is common for research using this theoretical-methodological framework—even in the field of linguistics—to employ a limited number of these forms of representation (Novodvorski, 2008). This choice depends on the specific objectives of each study and its relevance to answering its main research question.



**Figure 1.** Identification of IDs in the representation network.

Fonte. Prepared based on Leeuwen (2008).

To prepare the analysis, the following steps were taken: transcribing all texts from video format into written format, incorporating the latter into the other content previously written, and finally, standardizing all the material in PDF and Word formats to facilitate counting and filtering specific terms.

Regarding the analysis procedures, the first phase was based on the question: Who are the social actors most frequently cited in the texts? (Vieira & Resende, 2016). At this point, the material was read and the different groups of social actors that emerged were marked using distinct colors. This procedure revealed two groups that were most representative in quantitative (number of citations) and qualitative (relevance to the guiding question) terms, which were defined as the central actors under analysis: teachers and military personnel. In the second phase, discursive legitimation strategies were observed (Leeuwen, 2008). The guiding question of this phase was: what is said, how is it said, and by whom is it said? (Vieira & Resende, 2016). At this stage, we analyzed how the groups of social actors previously identified as central were represented in terms of their actions, reactions, and practices in which they engaged (Leeuwen, 2008). This survey led to the finding that military personnel were represented primarily through symbolization, and teachers through activation, passivation, and deflection. Table 1 below summarizes the content of each of these modes of representation and presents the identification code (ID) used to identify them based on the network proposed by the author (Figure 1).

The corpus of this research was delimited by the fact that all the texts analyzed discuss the same social practice—school militarization—and refer to discursive forms of its legitimization. Leeuwen (2008, p. 6) clarifies that even when working with generally diverse texts, to constitute the research corpus, it is important that they appear united "[...] in the sense that all these texts represent the same social practice or some aspect of it." The text selection and collection period lasted 12 months, from April 2021 to March 2022.

**Table 1.** Description of the forms of representation of social actors..

Network Identifier Code (ID)	Modes of representation	Characteristics considered in the analyses
1.1	Activation	Social actors are represented as ‘dynamic forces’ in an activity, carrying it out.
‘	Passivation	Social actors are represented as either ‘subjected’ to an activity or as being on the receiving end of it.
1.6.1.8.1.2	Deviation	The actors are depicted participating in another practice in which they should not be involved. For this reason, the deviation ‘adds negative layers to the form of representation.
1.6.1.8.2	Symbolization	In the case of symbolization, a certain group is used as a ‘symbol’ of something idealized/fictional and that acts in favor of a “[...] weak society [...]” which “[...] they are in charge of defending” (Leeuwen, 2008, p. 49). For this reason, symbolization (in itself) ‘adds positive layers to the form of representation’.

Fonte: Prepared based on Leeuwen (2008).

The sources that comprise the corpus came from i) official texts produced and disseminated by the then-Bolsonaro administration through its Ministry of Education, such as the Civic-Military Schools manual and seminars on best practices in the ECIM; ii) statements/interviews by representatives directly linked to PECIM (and about PECIM), including former President Jair Messias Bolsonaro, the former Minister of Education responsible for implementing the Abraham Weintraub Program, and the first National Director of Policies for Civic-Military Schools, Aroldo Cursino; and iii) five interviews conducted with informants. Table 2 presents this coding, as well as the content of each source, its scope, and details justifying its selection for the purposes of analysis.

The next section presents and discusses the research findings, with the textual fragments used to illustrate the analysis results followed by the identifying codes shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Research Corpus

	Code	Contents	Extension	Details
Manual of Civic-Military Schools	M1	Regulation	75 págs.	Document containing the guidelines for implementation and operation of the program. Available at: <a href="https://bit.ly/42t5V5F">https://bit.ly/42t5V5F</a> Accessed: Feb. 2024
	M2	Political-pedagogical project	80 págs.	
	M3	Project values	23 págs.	
	M4	Pedagogical support	14 págs.	
	M5	Assessment	13 págs.	
	M6	Supervision	14 págs.	
	M7	Management	20 págs..	
	M8	Conduct and attitudes	30 págs.	
	M9	Use of uniforms	20 págs.	
	M10	Handbook for guardians	2 págs.	
Presidential speeches	PR1L		83 min.	Pecim (PR1L) launched in September 2019. Available at: <a href="https://bit.ly/3qFcws9">https://bit.ly/3qFcws9</a> Accessed: Aug. 2023
	PR2I	Official speeches by the former president of the republic	49 min.	Inauguration of the first Ecim in the city of Rio de Janeiro (PR2I) in August 2020. Available at: <a href="https://bit.ly/3Uyevy6">https://bit.ly/3Uyevy6</a> Accessed on: Feb. 2024
	PR3C		62 min.	Ecim's Certification (PR3C) in November 2021. Available at: <a href="https://bit.ly/3ueg2yE">https://bit.ly/3ueg2yE</a> Accessed: Feb. 2024.
	PR3C		62 min.	
Interview	Min1	Interview with former minister (youtube)	16 min.	Abraham Weintraub, responsible for creating and launching Pecim. Available at: <a href="https://bit.ly/36i0F1N">https://bit.ly/36i0F1N</a> Accessed: Feb. 2024
Informants	IT	Teacher	38 min.	IT (43 years old, Teacher)
	IFF	Student's father	62 min.	IFF (42 years old, Hairdresser)
	IG	Student's grandmother	52 min.	IG (68 years old, Child Protective Services Counselor)
	IM	Student's mother	47 min.	IM (35 years old, Homemaker)
	IFM	Student's father	60 min.	IFM (45 years old, Driver)
Interview	Diret.Pecim1	Aroldo Cursino (youtube)	27 min.	First Director of Policies for Civic-Military Schools. Available at <a href="https://bit.ly/3w58AX8">https://bit.ly/3w58AX8</a> Accessed: Feb. 2024
Events	Semin1	1st National Pecim Best Practices Seminar - Day 1 (YouTube)	240 min.	Document that addresses daily practices in Ecims. Available at <a href="https://bit.ly/3M8RFFY">https://bit.ly/3M8RFFY</a> and <a href="https://bit.ly/3N5lPTZ">https://bit.ly/3N5lPTZ</a> Accessed: Feb. 2024.
	Semin2	1st National Pecim Best Practices Seminar - Day 2 (YouTube)	300 min.	

Source: Prepared by the author (2023).



## Military: (self-proclaimed) protectors of the 'Pure People'

In the texts analyzed, the discursive positioning of the military as defenders of the people, or simply 'good citizens', in the Bolsonaro lexicon, stood out. The form of representation that best elucidates this dynamic, within the adopted analytical model, is symbolization. The following excerpt illustrates how this group is portrayed as saviors of an idea of homeland/nation, as observed in:

The 'Armed Forces are intended to defend the homeland' and guarantee constitutional powers, a mission carried out with commitment and dedication by its professionals [...] (M2, p. 46, our emphasis).

This role is discursively constructed as the military are, in a generalized way, represented as a professional and morally superior 'class', as exemplified in:

[...] 'the feeling of duty, military honor and class decorum impose' on each member of the Armed Forces, Military Police and Military Fire Brigades 'irreproachable moral and professional conduct' (M3, p. 46, our emphasis).

In the text above, it is clear that the military 'class' is seen as possessing a unique distinction ('pundonor'). This quality imposes on its members a moral and professional conduct of such excellence that other members of society (civilians) would have no right to censure or disapprove. Military personnel would, in this sense, be 'irreproachable' people.

In turn, what is described as "[...] irreproachable moral and professional conduct" (M3, p. 46) would be the result, from the speakers' perspective, of an unrestricted observance of ethical precepts thus described:

[...] love truth and responsibility as the foundation of personal dignity; comply with and enforce the laws, regulations, instructions, and orders of the competent authorities; be fair and impartial in judging the acts and assessing the merits of subordinates; ensure their own moral, intellectual, and physical preparation, as well as that of their subordinates, with a view to fulfilling the common mission; employ all their energies for the benefit of the service; practice camaraderie and constantly develop the spirit of cooperation; be discreet in their attitudes, manners, and in their written and spoken language; refrain from dealing, outside the appropriate scope, with confidential matters of any nature; observe the rules of good manners; ensure moral and material assistance to their home and conduct themselves as a model head of a family; conduct themselves, even when off duty or inactive, in such a way that the principles of discipline, respect, and military decorum are not harmed [...] (M3, p. 46-47).

In the excerpt above, it is possible to note that this group is symbolized within a framework of almost mythical, almost heroic attributes (Leeuwen, 2008). That is, military personnel would be abiding by 'all' social laws and regulations, endowed with a sense of justice and impartiality to judge themselves and others, endowed with relevant moral, intellectual, and physical preparation, as well as cooperative, discreet not only in how they present themselves socially, but also in how they act, speak, and write; they would be individuals who keep secrets ('confidential matters'), polite, exemplary 'heads' of families, acting with discipline, respect, and decorum both on and off duty.

In the texts, in turn, these precepts would be directly linked to 'military values', among which the "[...] cult of historical traditions [...]" stands out (M3, p. 46). This is an important element to highlight, as it highlights the conservative bias of militarism toward preserving traditions (Boer, 1980). Furthermore, this ideology, linked to the worship/defense of traditions, which the military would defend, is based on an assumption: that they are eminently good. This is a problematic premise when we consider that Brazil is shaped by many oppressive traditions, such as slavery and the exploitation of indigenous peoples, which, nevertheless, were coined and reproduced throughout the 20th century with the support of military institutions (Martins Filho, 2021).

However, this "[...] cult of traditions [...]" (M3, p. 46) still proved to be strongly anchored in an anachronistic idealization of a past based on the rescue of hierarchical forms of respect that do not necessarily speak to ways of considering others, differences, and multiple points of view. On the contrary, its content proved to be mobilized by disrespect as a way of guaranteeing an idealized state of order, as the following excerpt illustrates:

[...] When the teacher arrived in the classroom, there was no conversation. Every now and then, a student would wet their pants because they were too shy to ask the teacher to go to the bathroom. I remember this at my school in 1964, Grupo Coronel Siqueira de Moraes in Jundiaí. I lived in Vianello and walked to school. How many times did we see,

as a punishment for a student who had done something wrong, sitting at a desk that was doubled next to a girl, and we would blush with embarrassment. It was a way of punishing them (PR3C).

The anachronism present in content that evokes violence, abuse, and atonement, as in the then-president's speech, reveals possible reasons for Bolsonaro's nostalgia for the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship. This era is seen by his supporters as a historical moment to be redeemed (Solano, 2018). This vision is echoed in the educational sphere through the militarization of schools, where the military is represented as agents capable of promoting this redemption. Bolsonaro's speech at the launch of the PECIM program is explicit in this regard: "We want to integrate, to instill in all these kids the importance of civic-military values, as we had recently, under the military government" (PR1L).

### Teachers portrayed as part of the 'corrupt elite'

In the texts analyzed, teachers were particularly represented as part of the 'corrupt elite'. This is a pattern already identified in radicalized right-wing populist movements (Mudde, 2019; Rocha, 2021; Sant & Brown, 2021). The evidence of this representation for the group of teachers confirmed what other authors had already pointed out: populists tend to act more incisively against strong professional bureaucracies, such as those in education (Bellodi et al., 2021; Peci, 2021).

The mode of representation that best illuminates this dynamic is deviation. Deviation, in turn, is a form of overdetermination, indicating that social actors are represented as simultaneously participating in more than one social practice.

The social practice in which teachers appear (deviantly) overdetermined in the texts, and which transcends their professional practice, is political activism. This idealization is based on the premise that there is a widespread ideological apparatus in Brazilian public schools, aimed at promoting leftist ideals or, in the Bolsonaro lexicon, simply 'communist' ideas. At the heart of this idea is the belief that the left has abandoned armed revolution to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat, devoting itself to culture and books, waging a kind of cultural war (Rocha, 2021).

An aspect that was shown both latently in the texts and when in Chapter IV of the Civic-Military Schools manual, curiously (or not) called "[...] theoretical and philosophical foundation" (M1, p. 10), the authors use as an example a social moment marked by polarization and struggle between two world powers, one capitalist and the other communist, to justify how "[...] the school must be attentive to the demands of society" (M1, p. 10), as illustrated in the following excerpt:

Another example of how schools must be attentive to society's demands was the launch of the first artificial satellite, Sputnik I, by the former Soviet Union (USSR), in 1957. [which] caused great disappointment in North American society with public schools in that country (M2, p. 10).

As was explicitly shown in Bolsonaro's (PR3C) speech during the certification ceremony of the Civic-Military Schools (Ecim) or even in an interview given by one of his former education ministers, Abraham Weintraub (Min1) illustrated below:

And what has gone wrong in Brazil in recent decades is a distortion [...], militancy prevailing in the classroom (PR3C).

[...] Our society has been torn apart by cultural Marxism. Unfortunately, in our society today, not only in Brazil, but worldwide, the ugly has become beautiful, the wrong has become right. And then when you bring back military discipline, deep down, it stalls (Min1).

The representation of teachers as deviants emerges as a discursive and operational strategy to subordinate them in the Civic-Military Schools (ECIM).

This is also evident in their representation through passivation (1.2), that is, as passive subjects in the situations in which they were involved. Even when represented through activation (1.1), that is, as active agents, their actions and activities were strongly linked to operational and bureaucratic aspects, such as administering tests, meeting the workload, and monitoring student attendance (M1).

One of the elements of the corpus that illustrates this subordinate position of teachers is a seemingly simple but highly symbolic activity: "Giving Praise" to Students (M8, p. 9). As Figure 2 shows, teachers became the last, in the general structure of the school, to be considered capable of bestowing praise on students in these environments:

### 3. COMPETENCE TO GIVE COMPLIMENT

- 1) School Principal
- 2) Educational Management Officer
- 3) Pedagogical Coordinators
- 4) Teachers

**Figure 2.** The subordinate position of teachers

Source: M8, p. 9.

## From representations to practice: visible implications

Forms of representation have the power to shape perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors toward different groups, which, in turn, generate social effects (Leeuwen, 2008). Thus, the coexistence of a derogatory representation of teachers with an apologetic attitude toward the military favors (and even produces) practical effects in the educational field. Since the interference in the school environment is caused by the insertion of the military into an organizational structure of which they were not a part, this group will be the focus of the following discussion.

The analyses show that the representation of the military opened the way for this group to be projected as a kind of 'technical/operational resource' for the maintenance of school 'rules'. These latter can refer, in a militarized context, to forms of censorship, including restrictions or limitations on freedom of expression and student expression (such as the girl's pink hair), as observed in the following text:

[...] 'we have monitors' from both the armed forces and the military brigade who take care of the students' discipline in the corridors, to avoid rushing, 'they avoid that state of disorder in the school [...] with the military the students and parents respect more, we have rules, people follow the rules'. [...] If the girl arrives there with pink hair, they will talk to her, she has to adapt, right? (IT)

The way in which the military was represented also favored their positioning as 'responsible for resolving conflicts in the school environment' as provided for in Chapter V of the manual entitled "On the monitors' body [...]" (M1, p. 29) which defines the 'attributions' of the military and under which it reads:

'Respond to students' guardians whenever requested, treating them with respect and civility; 'seek to resolve conflicts between people in the school environment' based on dialogue and negotiation; (M1, p. 31-32).

Just as it predisposed military personnel to become agents who rely on informants, that is, those who rely on 'private sources of information.' This aspect is represented in the figure of the 'class leader' students. This position evokes a simulacrum of what a class leader would be (in a civilian context), but within these schools they assume supervisory 'responsibilities' such as "[...] informing [military] monitors [...]" about their classmates who are missing classes or about "[...] any incidents with classroom materials [...]" as well as controlling the teacher's class time (M1, p. 55).

These are aspects that reveal 'direct and indirect interference in the educational process,' and this is also illustrated by the fact that military personnel begin to work directly with students, as described in:

The objective of the monitors is to contribute, especially, to ethical, moral, affective, social and symbolic formation, with lectures, chats, reports of lived experiences, demanding compliance with school rules, guidance and answering students' questions on different subjects [...] (M2, p. 48).

The text above portrays military personnel as those whose "[...] objective [...]" (M2, p. 48) is to contribute to the education of students. To this end, and assuming that they lead spotless lives, they could use their own personal accounts (their 'lived experiences') as a resource. One element in particular stands out: their ability to answer students' questions on 'various topics'. This presumed versatility leads to reflection on what kind of counseling and/or guidance these military personnel, mostly middle-aged or older men, would be qualified to provide to a student facing an early pregnancy or a student abusing drugs.

This demonstrates how militarization can legitimize precariousness and devaluation of a broad range of professionals involved in education, such as school psychologists or even guidance counselors, who would be better prepared to deal with issues such as those discussed above (sexual abuse, drugs, etc.). It also reveals how anti-scientific content, present within radicalized forms of government (Carvalho, 2021; Mudde, 2019), can find channels of social legitimacy through militarization. Particularly when military personnel begin to

work directly with students, using "[...] their lived experiences [...]" (M2, p. 48) as theory and method, this places school education in a position of common sense, depriving it of the capacity to produce scientific knowledge produced by different areas of knowledge such as education, pedagogy, and didactics.

Interferences in the educational process also occur when the diversity and individuality of/among students are discouraged and, in their place, mechanisms of 'aesthetic and behavioral homogenization' are implemented, as envisaged by the PECIM regarding the presentation of this group:

[...] Regarding personal presentation, the school must follow certain criteria to ensure uniformity [...] 1. FOR THE MALE SEGMENT: Considering that the uniform requires the use of a beret, hair must be cut to maintain clear contours around the ears and neck, facilitating the use of the beret and harmonizing personal presentation. Students must be clean-shaven, with hair and eyebrows in their natural color and without accessories, when in uniform. 2. FOR THE FEMALE SEGMENT: 2.1 HAIR: [...] Hair must be carefully styled to allow for the correct use of the beret and to maintain aesthetics and harmony in the student's personal presentation. [...] Hairstyles must be a ponytail on the top of the head or a simple braid. They must be kept combed and well-presented. 2.2 ACCESSORIES: When in uniform, female students may wear only discreet accessories (watches, bracelets, earrings) (M9, p. 18).

As can be seen in the excerpt above, militarization produces modes of bodily and behavioral standardization that relate to broader guidelines and involve aspects such as haircuts (for boys), hairstyles (for girls), how body hair (such as beards and eyebrows) should be displayed, and the types of accessories permitted—in other words, an entire body aesthetic.

Even broader interferences are visible, such as those directly related to the 'school system as a whole', and in this regard, it is worth noting:

Art. 18. The School Management Officer is the advisor to the Principal on matters related to the educational, didactic-pedagogical, and administrative areas and has the following responsibilities: I – to advise the Principal on the implementation of the Ecim model; II – to participate in the training of school professionals for the implementation of the Ecim model; III – to supervise educational management activities; IV – to advise the Principal on the administrative management of the school; V – to advise the Principal on didactic-pedagogical management, on matters related to the specificities of the Ecim model; VI – to accompany the Principal at general graduations and civic-military ceremonies of the school; VII – to participate in the investigation, application, and judgment of appeals of educational measures within their functional competence and in accordance with the Standards of Conduct and Attitudes; and VIII – to maintain contact with the Ministry of Defense on matters related to the military (M1, p. 8).

As can be seen in the text fragment above, the military's responsibilities involve working with teachers, such as ensuring that the pedagogical and didactic models proposed by Pecim are applied (M1). They also encompass corrective actions regarding students, in which they participated as adjudicators in cases of non-compliance with the established 'Rules of Conduct and Attitudes'. Consequently, the Management Officer is a new (military) agent inserted into the staff of these schools with extensive capacity to interfere in activities for which they have no training or even technical/professional experience.

This leads to two conclusions: i) the fact that military personnel are endowed with the capacity to interfere in didactic and pedagogical matters, which in itself would be incongruent, as this is a group that enters Pecim without the need for training in the field of education; and ii) related to the same issue, that is, their lack of pedagogical training also calls into question their ability to influence students.

In effect, this generated a series of other events that 'call into question the quality and legality of education provided in these locations'.

For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the aim of reducing school dropout rates, 'the [military] monitoring team created its own mechanism', namely, preventing access to food vouchers for families whose children were not 'participating' in online classes (see Semin2). This measure could be interpreted as irregular, given that Law No. 13,987 (2020) guaranteed the provision of food during the pandemic to all enrolled students, regardless of attendance criteria.

Furthermore, student evaluation criteria were reshaped from a moralistic perspective, as students were classified as 'poor' if they failed to meet the objectives proposed in the Program, as illustrated in the following image (Figure 3). And in this regard, it is relevant to consider that, in the Portuguese language, the adjective 'mau', when referring to people, is mainly used to indicate 'someone who does bad things', that is, it assumes a moral and evaluative aspect; different from the expression 'mal' which indicates something done incorrectly, unsatisfactory in terms of its final result. (Neves, 2019).

Student behavior is classified by numerical grade, according to the following criteria:

- a) Grade 10: Exceptional
- b) Grade 9 to 9.99: Excellent
- c) Grade 6 to 8.99: Good
- d) Grade 5 to 5.99: Fair
- e) Grade 3 to 4.99: Insufficient
- f) Grade 0 to 2.99: Poor

**Figura 3.** Uma perspectiva moralista de avaliação.

Fonte: M8, p. 7.

Or, even when values anchored in punitive/militaristic ideals served as a stimulus to forms of institutional violence such as humiliation and public embarrassment as in:

[...] When it was time for the kids to leave, they would file in single file and at the front someone [referring to a soldier] would ask:  $7 \times 8$ , square root of 4, the formula for water, who discovered Brazil. Questions were asked according to their level of education, if the student got it wrong, they would go back to the end of the line and when they managed to be released, I saw a father grabbing them by the ears [...] (PR3C).

The representation of the military as almost heroic/almost mythical figures additionally created conditions for this group to be elevated to a 'position of guarantors of a feeling (or 'sensation') of security' in the school environment and outside it, as seen in:

[...] and I was a father like that who had to take her and bring her to school, due to the crime that had become there, drugs... the young people went there to be hostile to the girls, so... I saw it, I grew up in that school and I was very sad to see that I was regressing, right, for me there was no way, but I was happy when they said that the military would come [...] Because like, where there is no security, there is insecurity, right? (IFF).

In addition to or in reinforcement of the duties defined in the Ecim Regulations, the monitors' duties are: IX - promote a sense of security in the school environment (M1, p. 29).

Highlighting the excerpt above, from the statement of a parent of a student at an Ecim (IFF), militarization would create a context of security regarding the supply of drugs and sexual or gender-based crimes. Families are right to recognize that the school does not provide the necessary security for their children, as stated above. However, violence is not something that occurs within the school or only in its surroundings; it reflects what exists in society as a whole, as it is embedded in a macrosocial context.

The representation of the military also favored them 'symbolically assuming the role of parental figures', as observed in:

They [the military] will help reorganize the school, contribute to comprehensive education, and serve as role models for many students who unfortunately lack good role models (M2, p. 47).

School monitors will play the role of tutor that many students lacked in their families, providing support and dialogue, setting an example, and serving as role models—all aspects so necessary for the student's development as a person. (M3, p. 50).

Positioned in this position, military personnel would serve as family references as adults capable of providing protection, care, guardianship, and support, which, for the students, appeared in the texts as something presumed to be missing in their families, as seen in the excerpt above (M2, p. 47).

Following this same theme, the analyses reveal that military personnel were also projected into a position as 'family-benefiting agents':

Yes, with the military, there's discipline. They [the students] enter in a line, they don't push each other in, they speak softly, they talk quietly, right? So, for me, this is very good, and for my son, it's also awakened a side of him to become a soldier... it opened his mind to something big, right? (IFM).

The expression 'something big' mentioned above reinforces the imposing social and organizational position attributed to the military in the texts. This abstraction also reveals a father's (IFM) desire for his son to conform to the prevailing norms. This conformity, in turn, is part of a social imperative that values massification over the uniqueness of individuals. The forms of discipline referred to by the speaker—such as

behavior in line or acceptable tone of voice—are modes of homogenization that, when internalized, become something ‘very good’ within a vision that understands education as a disciplinary resource.

## Final considerations

The aspects presented in this study show how the populist-militarist relationship legitimizes a whole set of social practices, behaviors, and operating methods of schools that become militarized, such as those promoted by the Civic-Military Schools Program (PECIM).

They also highlight a set of challenges facing education in general, but particularly the teaching of Social Sciences and Humanities in Brazil. This is particularly true when we consider that these are fields of knowledge that aim to aid in the development of critical analysis skills of our social reality and context, aspects that Bolsonaro's militarization is determined to suppress.

‘Restraining critical capacity’ means creating social mechanisms, as the analyses reveal, that lead to the false perception that non-technical agents (such as military personnel) can assume positions of status and influence within schools. This reproduces simplistic social perceptions expressed through equally simplistic public policies like PECIM, which, ultimately, are not intended to solve the most pressing problems in education, but rather to create a state of expectation.

It leads people to believe that education, in general, can be the object of common sense and not a scientific endeavor produced from different areas of knowledge. When this happens, punitive ideals become acceptable and transform into forms of violence against certain groups, be they teachers, students, or the community itself.

It promotes modes of physical and behavioral homogenization as a resource capable of fostering forms of respect. This also leads to a misinterpretation of what respect (for and with others) is, as it becomes interpreted as equivalent to obedience, especially that of a domesticating nature.

It's about resonating with the idea that current insecurity is something that exists within and within the confines of schools, thereby obscuring the idea that it reflects a broader and more complex social context.

It's about turning corruption into a highly malleable concept, a particularly favorable aspect to the interests of corrupt populist leaders, making the misappropriation of public resources a lesser evil while discussing gender and sexuality issues in the classroom a greater form of corruption and moral bias, a ‘corruption of people's minds’. This makes teachers, across the board, a target of social repudiation.

It promotes an anachronistic ideal, not invariably resorting to dictatorial times marked by the most varied expressions of violence, the weakening of social ties, and forms of social solidarity. Ultimately, it promotes an ideal of society that views education with suspicion, especially that aimed at promoting critical and emancipatory perspectives, as emphasized by the Social Sciences and Humanities.

In particular, regarding the new fronts of study that could arise from this proposed analysis, we would investigate other social actors (parents, family members, and other school personnel), as well as discursive processes of delegitimization that express, for example, forms of resistance to school militarization.

Finally, considering what has been presented throughout this material, it seems urgent to expand spaces for confrontation, and in the meantime, we agree that “[...] the role of education is crucial in the fight against populism” (Sant & Brown, 2021, p. 418). A role that can be played through ways of deconstructing the contents that form this type of ideological discourse, such as the one proposed in this article, but also by rescuing the bonds of social solidarity that begin with the (re)construction of small possible alliances, not invariably weakened by radicalized right-wing populist movements, as was experienced (and still is) with Bolsonarism in Brazil..

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**Data availability:**

The data resulting from the study are presented within the body of the article itself. Specifically, the research corpus is detailed in the Section 'Methodological Approach, Analysis Mode, and Dataset', with Table 2 ('Research Corpus') presenting the sources and their characteristics. The textual excerpts, informant statements, and documents analyzed, which constitute the primary data, are illustrated and discussed in the Sections 'Military: (Self-Proclaimed) Protectors of the 'Pure People'', 'Teachers Interpreted as Part of the 'Corrupt Elite'', and 'From Representations to Practice: Visible Implications'. Thus, readers have direct access to the empirical material that supports the study's analyses and conclusions.