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Militarized racial control: unveiling the subcultural dynamics of meaning that facilitate police performance prone to human rights violations

Controle racial militarizado: desvelando as dinâmicas subculturais de significado que facilitam a atuação policial propensa à violação de direitos humanos

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Resumo

O presente artigo discute o controle racial militarizado, com foco direcionado para as dinâmicas subculturais de significado que facilitam a atuação policial propensa à violação de direitos humanos. O texto utiliza uma pesquisa bibliográfica e emprega a metodologia triádica da Criminologia Cultural e a literatura crítica da intelectualidade negra contemporânea para enfrentar a atuação policial militar racista em três níveis de análise: micro, meso e macro, contemplando o primeiro plano existencial e fenomenológico do crime, as dinâmicas subculturais de negociação de status e a sua inserção em estruturas de maior escopo, como a permanência do poder colonial que visa o domínio e o controle racial, a insegurança ontológica na modernidade tardia e a realidade racista brasileira. Ao final da análise, foi possível concluir que, mediante performances encenadas para si próprios e para terceiros, os policiais militares engajados em práticas racistas de violação de direitos humanos reconstroem a própria imagem em termos de autoestima e pertencimento ao grupo, de forma que um processo de formação e identificação que em si mesmo é violador de direitos humanos contribui decisivamente para que os integrantes da subcultura policial militar(izada) naturalizem e se tornem propensos a encenar práticas racistas de violação de direitos humanos, por meio das quais eles adquirem uma série de recompensas subjetivas que conferem propósito e significado às suas vidas.

Palavras-chave: Polícia Militar; Racismo; Direitos Humanos; Criminologia Cultural.

Abstract

This article discusses militarized racial control, focusing on the subcultural dynamics of meaning that facilitate police action prone to human rights violations. The text uses bibliographical research and employs the triadic methodology of Cultural Criminology and the critical literature of contemporary black intelligentsia to face racist military police action at three levels of analysis: micro, meso, and macro, contemplating the existential and phenomenological foreground of crime, the subcultural dynamics of status negotiation and structures of greater scope, such as the permanence of colonial power aimed at racial domination and control, ontological insecurity in late modernity and the Brazilian racist reality. At the end of the analysis, it was possible to conclude that, through performances staged for themselves and for third parties, military police officers engaged in racist practices of violation of human rights rebuild their image in terms of self-esteem and belonging to the group, so that a process of formation and identification, which in

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itself violates human rights, contributes decisively to members of the militarized police subculture becoming prone to staging racist practices that violate human rights, through which they acquire a series of subjective rewards that give purpose and meaning to their lives.

Keywords: Military Police; Racism; Human Rights; Cultural Criminology

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Introduction

This article discusses, problematizes, and contextualizes militarized police subcultures, focusing on the ideologies, symbols, hierarchies, and flows of meaning that circulate within them and that contribute, on an individual level, to racist actions that are prone to human rights violations and discriminatory approaches, using a series of neutralization techniques. These mechanisms of subjective adherence and group recognition contribute to the materialization of racist social control, through which subculture participants empower themselves and reconstruct their image in terms of expressiveness, excitement, self-esteem, and belonging.

This article seeks to interpret and shed new light on violent police action by grounding the analysis on Cultural Criminology, which employs a methodology that considers three levels (macro, meso, and micro), through which the symbols, ideologies, meanings and neutralization techniques used within the military police subculture will be studied. This triadic structure of analysis aims to produce a comprehensive synthesis of aspects located at the micro level of the foreground of crime (KATZ, 1988) with meso-level processes - such as theories of subcultures and "learned transgression" - and macro structures, such as capitalism in the context of late modernity and issues linked to governance and ideology. In this sense, the article investigates the techniques of neutralization (SYKES; MATZA 1957) used in the military police subculture, as well as how the symbols, images, and meanings that are produced in the respective subculture affect and contribute to racist police action, through which its participants negotiate meaning, purpose and identity.

To this end, the first section will look at the identity transformation of individuals entering the institution and the circulation of ideologies, such as the "war on crime", which is based on binary rationalities responsible for dividing the world into two poles: those who should and deserve to be protected and those that constitute supposed threats to their well-being. Based on this language, individuals are prepared to fight the "enemy". They are introduced to the warrior *ethos,* which is required to ensure survival and comprises hypertrophied masculinity, courage, and strength, among other characteristics.

In the second section, the approach looks at the macro aspects that influence the foreground of crime control. We will confront the larger cultural forces that affect

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existential and expressive issues, to understand the sensitivities and subjectivities that are shared in police action prone to violating human rights. Our aim is to understand the influence that the meanings and ideologies mentioned above have on members of the military police subculture and to find out whether they can be considered as drivers and facilitators of racist and violent approaches. To this end, we will also explore existing alterization processes (YOUNG, 2002).

The following two sections will deal with issues of historical and ethnic-racial relevance that make up colonial power, typical of militarized and racist social control, as well as expressive and existential aspects that deserve attention, such as torture, the the will-to-representation and the search for excitement in a society mortified by boredom, which are mechanisms for obtaining subjective rewards that justify, in the eyes of the subculture's participants, the violation of the human rights of the black population.

Finally, the last section will analyze some neutralization techniques used within the military police subculture to minimize the responsibility of actors who violate human rights and exercise racist social control. To this end, we will discuss the moral economy of illegalities, the denial of the victim and the injuries, racial criminalization, and the desire to acquire trophies to obtain institutional and subjective rewards in militarized performances.

How a military police officer comes into being: symbols, ideologies, and meanings produced, negotiated, and circulated in the subculture

To understand the subcultural workings and neutralization techniques used in racist police actions, it is essential to examine the construction of military police identities and their respective roles. There is a fluid load of symbols, meanings, and cultural values that directly impact the daily actions of these individuals.

The approach used here employs the concepts of Cultural Criminology, involving the macro influence of long-term structural, ideological, and governance issues, as well as the meso-level factors, which relate and are connected to the performances, ways of acting, and behavioral scripts that circulate and are learned within the subculture. This framework can help us understand how certain acts are subjectively neutralized by the individuals engaged in the subculture. Finally, in the micro context, we seek to understand

https://doi.org/10.1590/2179-8966/2023/65582i | ISSN: 2179-8966 | e65582i

the dynamics that encourage an actor to engage in violent and racist practices or to renounce them, to highlight how the subculture leads to identity constructions, which direct the behavior of the individuals who belong to the group and internally shape the attributions and negotiations of meaning involved in violent and racist actions.

In what has already been defined as "policing selectivity", it can be seen that future military police officers belong to the most socially vulnerable sectors and undergo a training process that violates human rights. They are called upon to monitor and repress, including in a subterranean, paralegal, and visibly selective way, people who belong to the same social and ethnic-racial groups from which they originate (ZAFFARONI; BATISTA; ALAGIA; SLOKAR, 2003, p. 56-57). A significant part of military police training involves the assimilation of "war on crime" ideologies that transfer dynamics, values, and meanings typical of large-scale armed conflicts to a civilian environment. This means that from the moment the individual enters the institution, a process of identity construction takes place to form a "warrior" who can face the adversities found in hostile environments, typical of armed conflict zones (FRANÇA; FARIAS, 2015). In this sense, militarized identities are forged with characteristics such as aggressiveness, hypertrophied masculinity, self-confidence, demonizing essentialisms of the other, and a sense of belonging to the corporation, which will provide the foundations for building a warrior *ethos*.

Jock Young has shown how a culture of machismo, in which a single resource, physical force, is mobilized, is typical of subcultures articulated around masculine "powers" and "respect" (YOUNG, 1999, p. 12). In this way, the subculture functions as a collective solution to a shared status problem. This situation parallels the hypermasculinity that characterizes the militarized police subculture. The sense of belonging to a particular subculture provides an ontological security (YOUNG, 1999) for individuals, because recognizing that similar identities share the same values, ideologies, and rationalities, mitigates the insecurities that permeate life. In this way, participation in a particular subculture provides a keen sense of identity and ways of seeing the world and finding oneself in it, giving meaning and purpose to individual existence.

This feeling of belonging makes individuals assimilate a sense of duty to protect that group, the causes it defends, and the people who make it up. Even if, to achieve this protection, they must put their own lives at risk. The idea of defending a certain purpose predominates, and that makes any protection attempt something honorable, even if the chances of success are modest. This means that the individual incorporation into the

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group acquires *sacral* proportions (COTTEE; HAYWARD, 2011, p. 973), and anything that opposes it - be it rationalities, attitudes, or even those who are considered a risk to the group and the ideals it defends - become profane and must be fought against and eliminated.

From this binary rationality, essentialisms gain strength and provide the identity security that individuals aspire to in the late-modern pluralist context, in which identity collapses arise in the face of cultural hybridization. Thus, processes of alterization emerge as a way to seek the superiority of the *self* in the face of the inferiorization of outsiders (FERRELL; HAYWARD; YOUNG, 2019, p. 86-88). The division of the world between "us" and "them" demonstrates a subjective split (KHALED, 2021, p. 49) that can be seen in the subculture of the military police, since there are rituals of passage from one group to the other through experiences that stimulate the construction of the warrior *ethos* in those entering the career (FRANÇA; FARIAS, 2015, p. 143). This situation builds and strengthens a sense of identity and belonging. Individuals cease to be part of the civilian world and become part of the military world, adopting organizational values in their daily actions (LEIRNER, 1997, p.18). As a result, the individual is inserted into a place of exclusivity, in which there is a personification of functional duty. A need arises to contribute to the group's sacred mission of protecting those who do not belong to this circle but are considered worthy of care, even if, to guarantee this protection, it is necessary to exterminate the perceived threats and all those who represent them. According to Góes (2017, p. 20), within police academies, black recruits and those from vulnerable classes are trained more to execute than to criminalize their peers, given the construction of binary rationalities between good and evil, making them less likely to have empathy for those that are perceived as enemies. Although there are similar personal and social characteristics, they will not be highlighted, causing processes of essentialization to occur by overvaluing the collective characteristics of the militarized subculture. In this way, one’s identity comes to incorporate values and rationalities learned in police academies. Therefore, it is pertinent to understand the transition process from the civilian world to the militarized world, which brings personal, identitarian and ideological shifts. A new personality is forged during the formation and training process.

The warrior *ethos* is nurtured during the transition from the civilian world to the militarized world through activities that, in addition to being based on humiliation, instill in individuals militarized and hierarchical rationalities, in which a sense of hypertrophied

https://doi.org/10.1590/2179-8966/2023/65582i | ISSN: 2179-8966 | e65582i

masculinity - which is typical of war - will predominate, since these characteristics, according to Cottee and Hayward (2011, p. 978), are hyper valued to the point of becoming revered skills within certain subcultures. In this way, being entrusted with carrying out a certain task or function becomes a source of pride for the "warriors". There is a symbolic importance both for the *self* and for the group entrusted with a mission, as those entrusted have ideological and character rectitude (MUNIZ, 1999, p.13), and the very act of being entrusted presupposes confidence in one's ability since the maxim that "mission given is mission accomplished" is always considered.

In this sense, the criminalizable underclass comes to exemplify the "other" considered different, who has defective norms because they counter those considered normal within the subculture. And it is precisely in this contrast that criminal issues are presented as uncivilized barbarities committed or about to be committed by enemies. In this attempt to define the other, we also try to define the main problems that make them other in an essentialized way (YOUNG, 2003, p.395). By this logic, we seek to find the demons. And not infrequently, they are located in suburban areas, far from the city center, through stocks of Lombrosian images that guide police action and criminalizing spatial selectivity (ZAFFARONI; BATISTA; ALAGIA; SLOKAR, 2003, p. 55). However, this is a limited view, as the "marginals" are culturally included through the media and engage with the mainstream way of life through work relationships, among other forms of inclusion, although there is a simultaneous process of exclusion, which is an integral part of a bulimic society and directly affects the form of control, as will be portrayed in the next section (YOUNG, 2003, p.395).

The reflections of the uncertainties of late modernity in the foreground of crime

In this section, the analysis shifts to the background (macro) factors that influence the foreground of the crime, focusing on the racist practices of human rights violations perpetrated by military police officers and the sensations and emotions that gravitate around them. According to Jack Katz, crime, criminality, and criminal justice can be understood as a series of contested performances in different theaters of everyday life. Living as a feared outlaw, being respected as a policeman, or surviving as a victim of violence are performances aimed at sensually persuading one or another audience and

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the practitioners themselves (KATZ, 1988, p.4). Our aim is to situate the phenomenological and existential foreground discussed by Katz within larger cultural forces, large-scale structures, relevant conjunctural data, and long-term aspects such as structural racism, colonialism, and slavery. For Cultural Criminology, it is possible to combine structure and subject in a single style of analysis so that "antecedent or structural factors certainly remain present amidst this foregrounding of crime - now, however, understood in dialectical tension with its emerging meanings and emotions, rather than as predictors or causes of it" (FERRELL; HAYWARD, 2018, p.19).

As an initial hypothesis on the topic in question, it is possible to say that the racist and human rights-violating practices carried out by military police officers are directly related to numerous factors that involve the foreground of the crime, which may stimulate or discourage the action. In other words, these factors contribute to both committing the act and desisting from it (BAGGALEY; SHON, 2020, p. 42). In this sense, considering what has already been said about the issues surrounding the negotiation and creation of meanings and the construction of the identity of being a military police officer, it is important to glimpse how these ideologies, cultural forces, and larger meanings influence the practical actions of these individuals and how they can be considered facilitators of violence.

In late modernity, which makes up the current historical period, there is a fluidity in the cultural world which, combined with the intersection between the real and the virtual, provides an increased sense of displacement and of not belonging to social groups. According to Ferrell, Hayward and Young, "the contemporary world is, in fact, a shifting combination of modern and postmodern characteristics, which, for the sake of brevity and clarity, we refer to as late modernity" (2019, p.92). In this context, a strong sense of ontological insecurity will flow over issues involving identity and where one is (or is not) inserted (FERRELL; HAYWARD; YOUNG, 2019, p.4). This leads to a constant search for ontological certainties so that moments of pleasure can be defined (YOUNG, 2003, p. 391) and experienced to rise above the boredom of everyday life. In this sense, Fassin argues that enforcing laws can be monotonous, so proactively searching for suspects in a discriminatory way in disadvantaged neighborhoods can act as a corrective (2019, p.19).

It is of the utmost importance to point out that there is, in fact, a constant interpenetration between the processes of inclusion and exclusion of social groups (FERRELL; HAYWARD; YOUNG, 2019, p. 91), because, to the extent that certain groups are

https://doi.org/10.1590/2179-8966/2023/65582i | ISSN: 2179-8966 | e65582i

culturally included in society, through globalization itself and the consequent cultural hybridization, they are also socially excluded from the conditions of enjoying this inclusion. This movement of successive inclusion and exclusion forms what Young (2003, p. 394) characterizes as social bulimia, which increases feelings of insecurity and detachment.

In this context, the processes of othering emerge, consisting of attempts to define those who are "different" and the main issues surrounding them. In this sense, some groups are demonized to be contrasted with the group one belongs to. In other words, one might seek to find in the other the demons that harm and, simultaneously, define the *self*. It is not uncommon for these "demons" to end up being found (or sought out) in the peripheries, initiating processes of alterization. As a result of globalization, the boundaries have been blurred, and the "others" are present in the group of "us", albeit in precarious conditions (YOUNG, 2003, p. 393-395).

When the discourse of exclusion does not consider this inclusion and, consequently, the blurring of boundaries between the included and the excluded, it is based on a binary structure, which is part of creating barriers and moral distinctions that characterize the processes of essentialization. These processes, based on binary rationalities, linked to the merit and hierarchy of individuals, work as a neutralization technique for disproportionate and even inhumane acts to occur(FERRELL; HAYWARD; YOUNG, 2019 p.88).

This dynamic encourages the proliferation of discontent, which arises from the collision between the ideas that support a binary system - in territorial and identity terms - and the reality that structures it. The fact that there are no defined borders to demarcate - and imprison - social groups in a fixed and delimited space, capable of blocking the fluidity typical of a late-modern world, enables the emergence of emotional states such as punitive anger and resentment, which will target those (whom some social classes would like to be) excluded. In other words, both (pseudo)borders and (pseudo)boundaries don't have the imaginable effects, since they are easily crossed, and therefore incapable of ensuring exclusivity, only promoting resentment. Faced with this identity crisis, ways are sought to reaffirm the existential core of oneself and others. And this happens through an essentialism capable of reaffirming those identities (YOUNG, 2003, p. 398).

https://doi.org/10.1590/2179-8966/2023/65582i | ISSN: 2179-8966 | e65582i

As a result, the cultural and historical reality of human existence is replaced by an artificial structure of interpretation that is nonetheless perceived as "natural" by those who share it.

Ethnic-racial essentialization and colonial powers: the construction of demons and the attempt to re-establish identity certainties

Just as individuals are essentialized, so are the regions they come from and their ethnic-racial characteristics (FASSIN, 2019, p.183). In such areas, there is no preventive policing, which is reserved for the wealthier regions. In poorer areas, police incursions often aim black bodies. Those areas are considered dangerous or "notorious" for their high crime rates and the police acts as if it has an informal license to exercise underground powers. This dynamic provides fertile ground for territorial, biological, and cultural essentialisms to emerge.

Racial profiling politics select targets in advance through the creation of standardized profiles of suspects, that are based in institutional racism and disguised as police training. Such expertise is highly respected and vaunted within the subculture, as it is related to the ability that police officers supposedly have to see and identify suspicious conduct and people. In other words, certain subjectivities permeate suspicion and leave room for discretionary policy approaches. It so happens that this police training is based on criteria directly related to the race and social class of the individuals. No matter how selective are those approaches, they are legitimized and identified as a standard or routine procedure (DUARTE; AVELAR; GARCIA, 2018, p. 3323-3327).

These essentialisms form an interpretative grid about the territory inhabited by these people, which is considered equivalent to devastated or occupied fields, representing areas perceived as war zones. This relates to symbolic demonstrations of power, which refer to long-standing cultural structures and forces. They reflect the manifestations of colonial power, reproduced by a dehumanizing system that structures the police agency, keeping its racist ideology and function unchanged, manifested in its daily actions, that is, the tutelage of an anti-black state, through a mass subjective manipulation aimed at reproducing and guaranteeing colonial values, ideals, and ideas, based on the foundational Christian Manichean ideology. This ideology preaches: 1) the

https://doi.org/10.1590/2179-8966/2023/65582i | ISSN: 2179-8966 | e65582i

ontological existence of dangerous enemies; 2) the indiscriminate use of violence to guarantee the safety of the "good citizen"; and, 3) the need to demonstrate to the "marginals" that their anger at racist (dis)orders, as well as their refusal to survive in a constant state of violation will not be tolerated.

In the intertwining of these factors, an anti-black punitive system is founded, managed by (and for) a colonizing culture. Its demonizing nature sets in motion in different ways the principle of good and evil (BARATTA, 2011). The abstract construction of "*them"* and *"us"* leads to racial violence, showing which bodies are otherfied and why. Thus, without ignoring other colonial premises, it is necessary to pay attention to Christian ideology as the matrix of the punitive culture, that has legitimized black enslavement and which determines the racialized construction of polarities that expresses the salvation of whiteness (and that of a whitened portion of blacks) and the extermination of blackness (CESAIRE, 2010).

These functions fulfill the dictates of the racist order that (pre)determines that everything (things and especially objectified bodies) and everyone should be in their proper place. The construction and demarcation of borders, whether physical or symbolic, that portray the division between human and inhuman, civilized and primitive, good and bad, among other dichotomies, reflects the white ideology that, in its congenital narcissism, repels all diversity, because it only finds meaning in opposition, in conflict, in the extermination of what is different for phenotypical reasons that whiteness has transformed, through its scientific method (scientific racism) into inequality and, therefore, conceived in terms of inferiorization and outrification.

In this colonial dynamic, between the manifestations of racial power (whiteness) and resistance (blackness) lies the *principle of reciprocal exclusion* (FANON, 1968, p. 28-29), since there is no possible reconciliation between a divided, compartmentalized world, where belonging or not belonging to a certain race imposes exclusionary rights, resulting from the city of the settler or the city of the colonized, "a kneeling city, a cornered city, a city of blacks", kept in a constant state of submission and inhibition by force, by the soldiers, the colonizer's spokespeople and bodyguards. As Fanon says, the explosion of the colonial world is understandable, necessary, and inevitable, aligning individual and collective attitudes, because the peoples condemned to survival are not satisfied with resisting attempts at genocide. They draw strength from cosmologies that weave a pluriversal culture (RAMOSE, 2011) that demands full existence, guiding an anti-colonial

https://doi.org/10.1590/2179-8966/2023/65582i | ISSN: 2179-8966 | e65582i

policy of recognizing the violence experienced, that demands both the reparation and the reconstruction of the world on non-white, non-dehumanizing, non-exclusive foundations. In other words, a reconstruction of the very concept of humanity, since these are ancestral epistemologies, of African or indigenous origin, not only contrary to white principles but opposed to them and the support they give to this world project.

It is for no other reason that the colonized margins were built not only as gigantic institutions of kidnapping (ZAFFARONI, 1991), but as places where black death went beyond the right to kill to become institutionalized as a nationalized right to ensure colonizing white supremacy. This is the so-called "natural right" of self-preservation of white superiority, characteristic of the necropolitics that instituted a state of exception for black humanity over racial enmity in *pharmakological* terms, as Achille Mbembe (2017, p. 82) teaches. Such necropolitics have mobilized countless forms of elimination of the right to resistance, insurgency, and insubmission that materialized in organizations that, in Brazil, incorporated quilombist movements that disrupted the most basic (and still current) colonial geopolitics, inaugurating a struggle that will never let the Big House sleep in peace and filling the Senzala with the promise of freedom.

The success of the colonial enterprise was therefore ensured by the kidnapping, imprisonment, and genocide of black bodies, a racist system that is not limited to the physical aspect, because to neutralize and deflate insurgent movements, it was essential to kidnap, imprison and exterminate the original identity of enslaved African peoples. This process involved cultural genocide, epistemicide, and whitening. This has prevented the awareness of the radical complex of violence directed at the diasporic black population, its politicization, organization, and reaction, minimizing risks and controlling threats to the white world. It has facilitated ideological prisons that consolidate sociability processes that lead to belief in the salvation promises of a white god and that should be broken. The process of white sociability, therefore, aligns the culture of punishing black bodies with Christian culture, which, first and foremost, reveals itself as an instrument of salvation for white bodies that handle colonial violence without being condemned to hell (white creation as an indispensable instrument of control based on (in)conscious fear), to raise their flocks and win souls for their master, in a system of genocidal buying and selling that whitens bodies that are not even remotely the image and likeness of their (supposed) creator.

https://doi.org/10.1590/2179-8966/2023/65582i | ISSN: 2179-8966 | e65582i

Racial violence was made sacred in necropolitical societies. It led to the salvation of genociders, torturers and enslavers that atoned the original sins of the inferiorized and their unevolved (non-white) souls in the name of their god, therefore without remorse or any guilt (which dissolves, if it exists, with a simple request for forgiveness). Furthermore, since violence is structural and structuring of all agencies of control, social recognition in colonized lands stems from the use of violence, since the "success story " is the colonizer (lord), make the colonized dream of being him, of having the same things as him, and exercise power with dehumanizing practices that stem from the unlimited lordly creativity in producing pain.

Therefore, violence is both a condition and the essence of being a colonizer, innate to the colonial punitive system, coherent with and deriving from Christian ideology in its mission to save white-painted humanity from the evils of a world dichotomized and disputed between heaven and hell, based on its own logic, white and whitening, of depotentializing counter-colonial emancipatory policies as presuppositions of its security and continuity of a culture of popular disarmament, very much in keeping with a "secular" country like Brazil.

The containment and domination of the constitutive process of Brazilian blackness, resulting from the process of (re)knowledge of being black, is thus the "natural" condition for the security of whiteness and its mode of society, laboratories of violence with the aim of subjugating bodies that deviate from colonial standards and values. Whether on an individual or collective level, the reconfiguration of dominable subjectivities takes place through the indispensable co-optation of equally black bodies whose acceptance of the process of whitened colonial socialization gives them a feeling of "belonging", equality, and commitment to defending Brazil's anti-black structure, whose violence is not recognized by these individuals, who reproduce the mantra "we are all equal" (often complemented by "in the eyes of God").

This tactic of annihilating blackness and strengthening whiteness, which remains hegemonic through its dogmas and its discourse of equality (although increasingly false), reflects a response from the system of racial control that uses and manipulates black bodies to capture and dissuade other black bodies from confrontation, including the continuous production of pain to demonstrate dehumanizing power and send the message: black lives never mattered! The old and ever-efficient tactic of building captains of the bush, responsible for neutralizing the potential of quilombolas, fulfilling Willie

https://doi.org/10.1590/2179-8966/2023/65582i | ISSN: 2179-8966 | e65582i

Lynch's prophecy: "Once a slave has been indoctrinated in this way, he will remain in this mindset, passing it on from generation to generation." From the "shrimp suppers" (BATISTA, 2003, p. 141), passing through the legalized criminalization of black circles in the post-abolition period (to prevent any quilombist spark), the construction of the suspicious element (the black body that clutters spaces and breaks the orders of the non-existence of rights to sub-citizenship), arriving at the racist war called "against drugs" - which results in massacres by carrying out parallel death sentences and the incarceration of the black masses, and "miscarriages of justice" due to the photographic recognition of defendants from "albums" (of stamped stickers), the police force demonstrates that it remains faithful to its anti-black nature, carrying out the orders of a necropolitical state, after all, "the sovereign right to kill is not subject to any rules in the colonies. There, the sovereign can kill at any time or in any way." (MBEMBE, 2019, p. 36). For Mbembe (2019, p. 36), "colonial war is not subject to legal and institutional norms. It's not a legally codified activity. After all, "every enemy killed increases the survivor's sense of security" (MBEMBE, 2016, p. 142).

In a war, entering “enemy” installations, spreading chaos, decimating lives, and emerging victorious is considered an act of bravery by those responsible. In such situations, the subjectivities related to the warrior *ethos* thrive, enabling the individual to achieve a glorified position within the subculture by facing down enemies and proving the possession of hyper-valued characteristics within the group, such as masculinity, strength, and courage. This dynamic illustrates how identity is negotiated within the militarized police subculture.

On the other hand, the elements of black subcultural identification are reinterpreted as criminal evidence, which will provide a solid basis for the essentialist processes of discriminatory police action that violates human rights. Among the criteria that make up a suspicious attitude are the color of the individuals and the way they react to eye contact with the police. In addition to biological criteria, cultural criteria that refer to race also stand out. Cultural characteristics related to blackness are also an object of suspicion. On this basis, there is a preference for black bodies, which are more often subjected to police approach through so-called routine procedures that go beyond the limits of legality and use physical and psychological degradation. Situations like this occur daily and provoke fear and insecurity in vulnerable and black populations (DUARTE; AVELAR; GARCIA, 2018, p. 3323-3324). As Góes (2017, p. 20) points out, "If for whites the

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police presence means safety, for blacks it is completely the opposite, representing a high risk of death". In this way, it seems plausible and almost inevitable that the reaction to making eye contact with the police will differ between whites and blacks since the latter will be perceived as "always" suspicious. It is no secret that police action, in general, operates with high levels of social and ethnic-racial selectivity in an authoritarian distribution of secondary criminalization that demonstrates the continuity between the policies of repression of the black population adopted since the early years of republican Brazil and the current illegal state of affairs, in which the authoritarian rhetoric from a racist translation of Lombroso by Nina Rodrigues still circulates. This phenomenon further intensifies the arbitrariness of racist social control, whose effects are truly perverse. The concept of race is scientifically untenable, but that doesn't change the fact that racism is a cultural artifice with overwhelming effects in reality. Racism is not only a cultural fact of reality that structures a skewed reading of the world full of prejudices; it is also a place where interdictions, naturalizations, and tacit commitments are articulated, aimed at enclosing black bodies in situations of social vulnerability and making their demands for the expansion of citizenship invisible.

The way of the badass: Torture, the will-to-representation, excitement, and the (re)construction of subjectivity

In this section, the analysis is shifted from macro to micro issues. We will explore the meanings at stake during the practice of racist performances of human rights violations by military police officers. Insertion into the militarized world occurs through a pedagogy of suffering, which requires a (re)construction of subjectivity according to the warrior *ethos*. In this sense, Katz's description of the trajectory of someone who becomes a *badass*[1] is illustrative. It consists of a social process in which one develops authority over others and acquires transcendence, with the moral transformation of the world from logic, rationality, and utilitarianism to chaos. The *badass* wants to enter the moral, visual, and spatial universe of others and evoke a feeling of imminent chaos (KATZ, 1988, p.87). He tries to become someone whose identity conforms to the meaning of the moment (KATZ, 1988, p. 233).

[1] The closest translation of the term in Portuguese would be *fodão*.

https://doi.org/10.1590/2179-8966/2023/65582i | ISSN: 2179-8966 | e65582i

It could be said that the *badass* becomes someone prone to crossing all boundaries, including those that most flagrantly violate human rights. Physical and psychological torture is often seen as a subterranean expedient justified to combat "crime". Torture is an abject and intolerable practice that has yet to be banished from the contemporary world and is often accepted as necessary to obtain certain information, particularly in underground scenarios in which socially vulnerable individuals are subjected to police brutality. But torture is not simply a means to an end. It usually has its own meanings and rewards. Often, acts of torture occur because a hierarchical superior demands that they be carried out, but certain feelings are present within those who carry them out and reveal the excitement that exists, regardless of the request (YOUNG, 2007, p. 161-163). Torture is not limited to its physical dimension, as it also implies the exercise of symbolic power over a given body, objectifying it. When this happens, autonomy passes from the individual, who becomes submissive, to the torturer, who becomes empowered and gains subjective rewards from submitting others to the *self*. In such cases, there is an external reinforcement of identity, which provides a feeling of ontological security, combined with a sense of control over the situation, control over one's own life and the life of the submissive person, forming what can be defined as a symbolic exchange, in which the negotiation (and imposition) of meanings is at stake. This dynamic is highly attractive for people who have been or are submissive to others. In this way, subjugating someone can empower the agent, which means regaining a portion of ontological security and recapturing the self-esteem scratched by submission to hierarchical superiors. It is a space for reaffirming certainties and security in a world and, in this case, in a subculture that, on its own, is incapable of resolving the feeling of ontological insecurity, which it integrates, but which does so by violating the newcomers themselves and which facilitates (and encourages) the commission of violence.

In addition, when it comes to police actions and their inclusion in racist "war on crime" narratives, it is important to consider other issues contributing to constructing a brutalized self-image. There is a public and media expectation of punitiveness and confrontation with "criminality" that demands fulfillment. In this sense, violent police action gives concrete form to the alterization and demonization of the other, creating a brief illusion of ontological security in a late modern world that, by definition, removes any form of ontological security. As there is an expectation that these narratives will be "consumed", this leads to a proliferation of spectacular police actions capable of

https://doi.org/10.1590/2179-8966/2023/65582i | ISSN: 2179-8966 | e65582i

generating images for media channels to produce and circulate meanings about crime. These mediated images flow into the culture and provide entertainment for the public, who then indirectly experience the rush of adrenaline that is part of this type of performance, combined with the containment of those considered disposable and undesirable to society, thus providing a double satiety for the population. A satiated society builds its heroes, and warriors often go to war to make a difference and establish themselves as heroes.

Images allow for countless performative possibilities in the contemporary mediascape. For Appudarai, the lines between realistic and fictional landscapes are becoming increasingly blurred (APPUDARAI, 1996, p. 35). In other words, the street scripts the screen, and the screen scripts the street. There is no linearity: the line between the virtual and the real is blurred profoundly and irrevocably (HAYWARD; YOUNG, 2012). In this sense, the saturation of everyday life by different media and media technologies suggests that any sharp distinction between "crime" and "crime images" is a thing of the past. In its place is a world in which criminal events, their mediated images, and other people's perceptions of crime incessantly feedback and amplify each other. If "real" suggests real consequences and real effects, the crime culture is now as real as the crime itself; perhaps, as cultural criminologists point out, they are becoming indistinguishable. Within this context, a will-to- representation arises, especially in a globalized world, where the fluidity of communication makes it possible for images to be widely disseminated and, consequently, for heroes to be widely consecrated and enemies to be widely demonized. For Majid Yar, today's subject no longer just interprets or watches representations produced elsewhere but becomes, herself or himself the source of those representations (2012, p.248).

From this perspective, it is plausible to consider that acts that violate the human rights of the black population can often be carried out due to a will-to- representation so that certain audiences can consecrate those responsible as heroes, thus enabling subjective rewards and, consequently, a reinforcement of one's self-esteem, since at the moment of consecration, there is a feeling of being welcomed from a society that usually distrusts the police. This dynamic is driven by the fact that any kind of concession made to the criminalized person has come to be interpreted as a manifestation of contempt in the face of the victim's suffering, which has boosted the emergence of increasingly aggressive strategies for "fighting" or "waging war" against crime. As Garland has pointed

https://doi.org/10.1590/2179-8966/2023/65582i | ISSN: 2179-8966 | e65582i

out, the new arrangements for crime control have involved a series of social costs, such as the intensification of social and racial divisions; the reinforcement of criminogenic processes; the alienation of many social groups; the discrediting of legal authority; the reduction of civil tolerance; the tendency towards authoritarianism (2008, p.429).

For Yar, the "will-to-representation" can be seen as a new causal inducement to violate laws and rules. It may be that, in the new media age, the terms of criminological questioning sometimes need to be reversed: instead of asking whether the "media" instigates crime or the fear of crime, we should ask how the very possibility of mediating oneself to an audience, through self-representation, can be linked to the genesis of criminal behavior (YAR, 2012, p.246). The same questions can, of course, help to elucidate one of the components behind the human rights violations of the black population, which is why initiatives such as the installation of cameras on police uniforms can curb violent performances since they take away the protagonist's control and the condition of author, which is increasingly valued in a context in which ostentatious display of police corporation symbols proliferates on social networks, with participants from such subcultures posing with firearms in an expressive and stylized way, negotiation identity in social media. For Ferrell, style defines the categories in which people live and the communities they are a part of. It is a visible means of negotiating status, constructing security and threat, and engaging in criminal activity (FERRELL, 2004). Episodes of violence effectively reproduce power and inequality, codifying them in the circuits of everyday life. They are performances of power and domination, staged for various audiences as symbolic conquests through communicative work that degrades the victim's identity, imposing on them a series of unwanted meanings that remain even after the violence has stopped (FERRELL; HAYWARD; YOUNG, 2019, p.13).

Another aspect to consider is the excitement of putting yourself at risk and committing illegal acts. Lyng considers that the seductive nature of many criminal activities may stem from the particular sensations and emotions generated by the high level of risk involved (LYNG, 2004). The concept of edgework demonstrates how, within a criminal event, issues of stigma, honor, and respect can become powerful - albeit fleeting - spurs to violent, brave, and courageous behavior. Undeniably, a significant part of police work is permeated by adrenaline. As Muniz (1999, p. 17) shows, police officers have heightened expectations of threats, especially because they are used to living in situations of risk, uncertainty, and intensity. And precisely, these adrenaline-fueled situations

https://doi.org/10.1590/2179-8966/2023/65582i | ISSN: 2179-8966 | e65582i

compensate for the boredom and monotony in other aspects of the job, which could be defined as bureaucratic and boring. By committing violence, the subject can experience an immediate adrenaline rush when they voluntarily submit to certain risks - including death - and regain control when they escape unharmed (FERRELL, 2010, p. 346-350). In this sense, it seems feasible to think of violent police action as a form of edgework due to the risk-taking and adrenaline rushes it provides. And because these situations involve risks, violence, and strong emotions, they provide excitement that is directly related to the search for ontological security, thus providing an existential meaning in the face of this risk-taking and search for adrenaline (FERRELL; HAYWARD; YOUNG 2019, p. 107-108).

Subcultural techniques of neutralization, trophy economies, and racist performances of human rights violations

The last section of this article portrays the neutralization techniques used within the military subculture to minimize and diminish self-responsibility in the face of racist human rights violations. It is important to clarify that using such techniques does not mean that individuals explicitly reject the legal system or dominant cultural values. On the contrary, they accept them and have them internalized within their subjectivity and subculture. However, although there is an internalization, the agents violate this normative structure and manage to preserve a positive image of themselves before the system, neutralizing the situation and qualifying their imperatives as necessary or acceptable, given the factual situation in which they find themselves (SYKES; MATZA, 1957, p.666-667). It's as if the techniques of neutralization were causes of justification not recognized by the normative system but accepted in the subculture as excluding behavior that would be reprehensible in the eyes of the hegemonic culture. Some of these techniques refer directly to the classic text by Sykes and Matza, with special emphasis on the denial of the condition of the victim, which can result from the processes of demonization and alterization, which deny black bodies the condition of subjects of law, attributing to them a status of deserving harm. In this dynamic, those who should legally provide protection take on the role of avengers, placing any victims as essentialized offenders. Although Sykes and Matza's text was not intended explicitly to portray the practice of illegalities by state agents, the arguments seem pertinent to illustrate such criminal practices. The denial of condemners

https://doi.org/10.1590/2179-8966/2023/65582i | ISSN: 2179-8966 | e65582i

is another technique that can be important since discourses defending human rights and denouncing racist and violent practices are often interpreted as narratives that connive with criminality and foster impunity. Following in the footsteps of Sykes and Matza, it is possible to argue that neutralization techniques contribute to reducing the effectiveness of normative controls aimed at enclosing the exercise of police force within the limits of legality.

A contemporary re-reading of the authors' arguments can help reveal other dynamics that contribute to neutralization and, consequently, to preserving a positive self-image on the part of police officers who violate human rights. Among these neutralization techniques, it is worth highlighting the construction of a moral economy of illegalities (KHALED JR, 2021, p.100) based on the perspective of a crusade against evil and the consequent construction of a warrior *ethos* within the subculture, which leads individuals to a constant search for the "protection" of society through the elimination of those considered to be its enemies. Combined with the will-to-representation, aspirations of glory, and belonging to the fraternity (FERRELL; HAYWARD; YOUNG; 2019, p. 196), as well as the insertion into the racist rhetoric of the "war on crime", this technique illustrates how the practice of violence can be a way of demonstrating to the population and one's comrades in uniform that the individual is willing to engage in situations of extreme risk in the name of the cause, even if they have to face the sanctions arising from the violation of the rules of the normative system itself.

A significant part of this dynamic consists of the use of police approaches and, consequently, the fruits of these as trophies to demonstrate certain skills related to domination and even death (LINNEMANN, 2017, p.68-69). In this context, trophies are not just images of police officers with seized weapons, drugs, and money but also represent the state's prerogative to search, seize, and accumulate individuals' private property. This form of exercising power can also be observed in the use of human bodies, and especially black bodies, as trophies, as Linnemann denounces. This insight makes it possible to interpret and comprehend police power as a sovereign power over life and death. In this way, photos and videos of trophies (whether corporeal or incorporeal) demonstrate and make visible state violence and the police power to seize, hunt, capture, and even kill to impose social order. The use of trophies is even more recurrent in a precarious late capitalist society (LINNEMANN, 2017, p. 123-124), in which violence can resolve identity instabilities. According to Katz (1988, p. 109), exercising violence is part of constructing

https://doi.org/10.1590/2179-8966/2023/65582i | ISSN: 2179-8966 | e65582i

the "*badass*" image. And it's not sadism or utilitarianism, but the search for certain ontological meanings, such as the feeling of superiority over others. The *badass* desires to demonstrate chaos, seeking to become so intimidating and gain respectability, that he takes on this characteristic in all life situations, perpetuating this meaning and, consequently, this identity in time and space. In this way, the author highlights what he calls "righteous slaughter": the motivation behind impulsive murders, which - paradoxically - are committed because, from the aggressor's point of view, the victim violates fundamental values. People often kill to defend what they consider "good" and thus justify their actions, disregarding the legal consequences of their actions. Through violence, the aggressor defines and defends his respectability (KATZ, 1988). As Katz mentions, for "righteous slaughter" to take place, there must be founding reasons capable of justifying it, such as the existence of pro-social values. In addition, for the act to be committed, it is necessary to (trans)form certain feelings that stimulate the practice of the act. Humiliation must be the first feeling to be experienced, which will turn into anger to follow the path that leads to the act itself. Humiliation will turn into anger as soon as the officers who will eventually kill are successively demeaned and degraded ontologically, which is why the military police's human rights-violating training process can be thought of as a facilitator of human rights violations. In this way, killing is also a way to obtain revenge, morally rebalancing oneself in the face of the ontological degradations suffered. Killing can be considered a moral ontological project because it is through killing that lost morality and respectability are recovered (KATZ, 1988, p.22). In addition, killing can be a sign of appreciation within the subculture, of meeting society's expectations, and of contributing to a crusade against evil.

As can be seen, there are many different currents of meaning that contribute to militarized and racist actions that are prone to human rights violations. Shooting can mean survival once the belief in a war is ingrained, and one comes to believe in the existence of an enemy. Surviving means killing in a territory conducive to dying. Thus, when shots are fired during police operations, the perpetrators feel glorified for not having died since they must be alive to shoot. Shooting then becomes a feeling of power over life and death: a trophy. This symbolism of power and glory from firing a firearm can be seen in various practices, such as firing shots into the air as a form of celebration and into the ground - in death - as a form of respect and honor. In any of these forms, the shot materializes the meaning of homage, especially to power. This will-to-representation is

https://doi.org/10.1590/2179-8966/2023/65582i | ISSN: 2179-8966 | e65582i

directly related to the desire for glory, which makes the actors willing to act violently to protect what is considered sacred within the subculture. Violent acts are carried out in the name of this cause, and precisely, this provokes a feeling related to this individual's identification as a being. In other words, it is a symbolic reclaiming of oneself. It's the opportunity to "acquire" or consolidate a certain identity about who you are and how you represent yourself based on your place. In this way, the state of "glory" is achieved by certain identities, which are considered worthy of honors and can be attributed either to someone who has performed a certain act in a violent way or to someone who has died for a certain cause (COTTEE; HAYWARD, 2011, p. 973).

In this sense, self-representation is paramount if individuals gain recognition and respect from others. In a late-modern world, it's not enough to have attitudes that are considered glorious. They need to be demonstrated using the visual economy and shared publicly. It can, therefore, be seen that police work goes far beyond promoting the good and guaranteeing social security, as it also includes exercising power over certain groups of people. And that's why trophy shots can demonstrate police power and, consequently, legal brutality (LINNEMANN, 2017, p.61). The ceremonial display of a certain trophy by the police clearly shows binary relations between the hunter and the hunted. The use of technology and heavy weaponry, and the trophy shots themselves, demonstrate the assertion of hunting power by the state and the consequent reduction and unacceptability of the possibility of suffering humiliation, only practicing it, because there is a political-institutional culture that considers the use of humiliation and domination over certain bodies, and especially black bodies, to be positive. Thus, to be recognized within the environment, it is necessary to use these cultural elements intrinsic to acting as a way of feeling part of the group (LINNEMANN, 2017, p.61).

Also noteworthy is the neutralization technique described by Sykes and Matza as an "appeal to greater loyalties", since the values of the subculture come to predominate over the limits imposed by legality (SYKES; MATZA, 1957, p.669-670). It should be emphasized that belonging to a subculture and desiring representation is also related to the search for self-affirmation. Although there are differences of opinion about their actions in society, the group members believe they are doing the right thing. They believe this and reproduce these beliefs within the group, as seen in the first section, which makes the lifestyle attractive since the combatants are recognized as heroes (COTTEE; HAYWARD, 2011, p. 974).

https://doi.org/10.1590/2179-8966/2023/65582i | ISSN: 2179-8966 | e65582i

The dynamics above consolidate a constant flow of racial criminalization, which will also function as a neutralization technique, as it places black bodies under constant suspicion. In this way, their labeling as potential threats leads them to acquire, as Góes (2017, p. 4) mentions, an *ethos* of being non-human, demonstrating the overlapping existence of a colonial power that was (and is exercised, through the discretionary power of the police) over black bodies, especially by considering them "suspicious elements", reneging on the existing humanity by characterizing them as elements, objectifying them and thus legitimizing authoritarian practices disguised as a search for the security of society and the "human beings" that make it up.

Considering racial criminalization as a neutralization technique is directly related to the search for recognition and prestige within the subculture. It's a way of confirming the assertiveness of the police shooting. In addition, it is a way of trying to convey to society an idea of safety and fighting crime since, according to Duarte, Avelar and Garcia, there is an association between black bodies and crime. In other words, the idea is constructed that black individuals are always suspects of possible crimes, which is more intense when it comes to the reproduction of patterns of suspicion by the institutions responsible for security, thus constituting police expertise about suspicion (DUARTE; AVELAR; GARCIA, 2018, p.3321-3322).

In this way, it is clear that racial criminalization is directly related to the other neutralization techniques mentioned, to the trophy economy and the moral economy of illegality, as well as to the will-to-representation, because it doesn't just convey a notion of protection to society. It also means that the police will eliminate actual threats and even future threats - when it comes to the extermination of young people - security will be guaranteed. Based on this logic, outlined by racism, the victim is denied the *status of* victim, and the injuries committed against he or she are denied. These techniques of neutralization come into play when colonial powers are exercised in Brazilian favelas. And that go far beyond the borders imposed on them. It is no coincidence that there is a great desire for self-representation, as displaying the trophies of dead hunts is directly related to violent masculinity based on the representation of power and the delimitation of spaces between human beings and animals. These hunts must be shown off as trophies. Otherwise, they will be denied and discredited since demonstrating the power of one body over another strengthens a policy of reproducing the domination of one over the other (LINNEMANN, 2017, p.67-68), and the police have this need for domination. In this

https://doi.org/10.1590/2179-8966/2023/65582i | ISSN: 2179-8966 | e65582i

way, we can see that this will-to-representation is directly related to the militarized identities constructed during police training. These values circulate and are negotiated in the subculture until they are absorbed and put into practice to glorify the warrior ethos and practices of violence through a binary rationality refractory to human rights and prone to racist social control.

Final considerations

Through bibliographical research and the triadic methodology of Cultural Criminology, it was possible to conclude that, through performances staged for themselves and for third parties, military police officers engaged in racist practices that violate human rights reconstruct their image regarding self-esteem and belonging to the group. A significant part of this dynamic consists of neutralization techniques. These techniques circulate and are shared within the group due to the direct influence of the cultural values and rationalities introduced into the individuals who are part of this social circle, giving purpose and meaning to their existence. Subculture members use these techniques to minimize self-responsibility for their actions, allowing them to preserve a positive image of themselves, even though they often practice violence and human rights violations outside the limits of their legally established functions and powers. Within this subculture, anti-black racism still thrives, based on Christian ideology and intertwined with the colonial need for security through the elimination of black resistance, articulated in the construction of demonic enemies to legitimize the use of dehumanizing violence to save society. Militarized police performances retrace the steps of conversion and the manipulation of violence to save whitened souls, invoking the Christian god who blesses the new civilizing crusades (such as the (mis)dubbed racist war on drugs). Between the condemnation of blackness and the beatification of whiteness, the violation of human rights reconstructs its narcissistic image in terms of self-esteem and belonging to the militarized group, which consolidates itself as an instrument of control and elimination of the reaction of those who have always been the target of dehumanizing violence, even if this reflection is not so different from the black bodies that make up the corporation responsible for maintaining racial order and guardianship of the necropolitical state. In the dynamism of illegalities made legal, acceptable, and vital to the racial structure, the

https://doi.org/10.1590/2179-8966/2023/65582i | ISSN: 2179-8966 | e65582i

colonial punitive culture, generated by Christian ideology based on the demonization of the other, is transmitted by the police agency, from its conception to its agents, mobilized and mobilizing an anti-black military subculture structured on trophies, as a need for social recognition, guaranteeing in many ways the security of whiteness. In this way, what is considered illegal or objectionable in the eyes of others becomes something valued within the cultural subsystem in which the agent is inserted, earning him appreciation, admiration, and space in the subcultural hierarchy to which he is linked, being recognized as a hero within the subculture and sometimes even outside it.

Ultimately, by tracing the flows of subcultural meaning negotiation, it was possible to see that a process of formation and identification that is in itself violates human rights contributes decisively to the members of the militarized police subculture naturalizing and becoming prone to enacting racist practices of human rights violation, through which they acquire a series of subjective rewards that give purpose and meaning to their lives.

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