

Foucauldian contributions on racism: parallels between Indigenous soldiers from the United States and Brazil

Contributos foucaultianos sobre racismo: aproximações entre soldados Indígenas estadunidenses e brasileiros

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Abstract: This paper reflects, from a Foucauldian perspective on racism, on the participation of Indigenous individuals as military professionals in the Armed Forces of the United States and Brazil. It is a qualitative study based on bibliographic and documentary analysis, complemented by data collection from websites (e.g. YouTube) and institutional videos using the key term *Indigenous soldiers*. The primary finding is the presence of biological racism, either through the stereotypical expectation of Indigenous individuals as *natural warriors* or through the simplistic perception of their contribution as mere exchange of knowledge. These practices reinforce class distinctions, characterised by differences in rank and compensation received for their service.

Keywords: Indigenous Soldiers. Foucault. Racism. United States of America. Brazil.

Resumo: Este artigo tem como objetivo empreender um esforço reflexivo acerca da participação de indígenas nas Forças Armadas (FA) estadunidense e brasileira, na qualidade de profissional militar, a partir da perceptiva foucaultiana sobre o racismo. Trata-se de pesquisa qualitativa, com base em análise bibliográfica e documental, além de coleta de dados e informações em sites (YouTube) e vídeos institucionais, com o termo indutor *soldados Indígenas*. Como resultado destacou-se o racismo biológico, seja na expectativa do estereótipo de guerreiros naturais ou na ideia do compartilhamento de saberes do efetivo indígena, reduzido a perspectiva da troca de conhecimento, estabelecendo uma maior distinção de classes, caracterizada pela diferença de patentes e valores recebidos pelo ofício.

Palavras-chave: Soldados Indígenas. Foucault. Racismo. Estados Unidos. Brasil.

Introduction

Drawing on Foucault's theoretical contributions on racism, this paper examines the participation of Indigenous peoples as military professionals in the U.S. and Brazilian Armed Forces, aiming to identify parallels between them. The dialogue with Foucauldian contributions is powerful when considering racism as a *device*, an element of governance by the State in relation to Indigenous peoples, specifically those within this population who serve in the U.S. and Brazilian Armed Forces.

Building on stereotypical images that associate Indigenous peoples as innate warriors and considering the implications of such stereotypes in social practices and the means by which Indigenous individuals have accessed military service, this study explores the potential for analysing the participation of Indigenous peoples in the United States and Brazilian Armed Forces employing Foucault's theoretical contributions on racism. For Foucault (2019, p. 304), "[...] racism is the means by which to introduce, in the domain of life over which power presides, a break between what must live and what must die". He emphasises that "taking life" is not restricted to direct killing but extends to political death, exclusion, or rejection (Foucault, 2019, p. 306). Given this, we believe that his perspective provides a fertile avenue for reflecting on this issue. Within this framework, war is not simply armed conflict, but an extension of political power permeating all aspects of social life. The analysis of biopower provides a deep understanding of how the state uses and controls different populations to serve its interests. In the case of Indigenous soldiers, we see a clear example of how biopower operates through a double process of co-optation and discardability. This understanding is crucial for questioning and challenging the subtle and explicit forms of control and marginalisation that continue to exist in our contemporary societies.

It is understood that the warrior stereotype and the search for better living conditions and citizenship itself are present in the recruitment and engagement of Indigenous peoples not only in the U.S. military, but in other social realities, such as Brazil, which constitutes a fruitful analytical possibility for questioning racism as a technology of power at work in the relationship between the military and Indigenous peoples.

This study employs a qualitative methodology. Data collection consisted of bibliographic and documentary research supplemented by information obtained from institutional websites and official Brazilian Army videos. Broadcasted reports retrieved from YouTube using the search term *Indigenous soldiers* were also analysed.

North American Indigenous peoples and the Armed Forces

The involvement of Native Americans in military campaigns dates to the American Revolution (1775-1783). Since then, they have been present in every war of the nation, even though the majority were only recognised as citizens after World War I (1914-1918). Native Americans were among the first combat units to arrive in France in 1917 and fought in all major battles until the end of the war. It is estimated that up to a quarter of adult Native American men served in World War I (Harris; Hirsch, 2020).

During World War II, after the attack on Pearl Harbor, about 44,000 Indigenous people, including 800 women, volunteered to serve, from an estimated Native American population of 400,000. According to estimates from the studies of Harris and Hirsch (2020), Bartgis

(2021), and Viola (2022), 1.4% of all troops in the Vietnam War (1955-1975) were Indigenous, at a time they represented 0.6% of the population of the United States of America (USA).

Despite a history marked by broken treaties, cultural repression, and discrimination, Indigenous peoples continue to serve in the U.S. Armed Forces at rates significantly exceeding their proportion in the general U.S. population (2.9%). They currently enlist at higher rates than any other demographic group. Since September 11, nearly 19% of Native Americans have served in the Armed Forces compared to an average of 14% from other social segments (Harris; Hirsch, 2020; Viola, 2022). Data from 2021 indicates that approximately 15,000 active service members identify as American Indian or Alaskan Native (Nalewicki, 2021).

It is important to note that casualty rates for Indigenous soldiers in U.S. exceeded that of American soldiers overall. During World War I, about 5% of native soldiers were killed compared to 1% of the rest of the entire American Expeditionary Force, which suffered a total of 50,280 deaths and 95,786 wounded. Some ethnic groups experienced even higher losses; approximately 14% of Pawnee soldiers died in combat, while various Sioux groups had an average casualty rate of 10% (Viola, 2022).

In this respect, the image of Indigenous peoples as natural warriors constitutes a stereotype fuelling the idea that they would be *super soldiers*. Such a stereotype led many officers to send Indigenous soldiers to the front lines or assign them to more dangerous duties¹ and missions, exposing them to a higher risk of death. Consequently, they suffered more casualties than their white comrades in combat. As remarkable as these records are, they were and continue to be largely neglected and overlooked by most of the American people (Harris; Hirsch, 2020).

Indigenous soldiers in the Brazilian Army

The involvement of Indigenous peoples in the Brazilian Army dates to the Paraguayan War (1864-1870). Records indicate that they served as informants to Brazilian authorities, as rowers of river transport vessels, and labourers in the construction of forts in the region. Although they were important in these roles, many of them returned from the war without the prestige they deserved for their combat achievements. Consequently, they were left on the margins of society, forgotten by national memory and historiography (Almeida, 2005; Cunha, 1992).

During World War II, Indigenous peoples also took an active part in the Brazilian Expeditionary Force (FEB). They were recruited either as reservists – individuals who had already completed military service – or as volunteers, many of whom had no prior military training or experience (Revista Verde-Oliva, 2015).

Most Brazilian Indigenous soldiers are currently serving in Special Border Platoons (SBP), primarily located in the Northern region of the country. In total, there are 23 SBPs scattered along the Northern border of Brazil, positioned at strategic points along each entry route to the country (Arantes de Moraes, 2021). Their purpose is to maintain the Brazilian State's strategic presence, ensure sovereignty, protect national assets, and uphold the country's territorial integrity (Brasil, 2020).

¹ Most of the Indigenous soldiers took on the role of scouts, meaning they were the military personnel who went ahead of the group to scout and clear the path, exploring it.

The performance of Indigenous soldiers in fulfilling the SBP's mission, particularly because of their expertise in jungle survival, is highlighted by the Brazilian Army as a key reason for incorporating them into its ranks. Indigenous peoples possess extensive knowledge of regional foods and river courses, enabling them, as military personnel, to serve effectively as guides and trackers. The official narrative of the Army emphasises the importance of learning from the natives to effectively combat potential foreign invaders.

Racism as a technology of power in Foucault

During a lecture delivered on March 17, 1976, for the course "Society Must Be Defended," Foucault provides an enlightening elaboration on what he calls "racism" and its function within the exercise of modern powers. In this lecture, he raised a simple yet profound question: How can a form of power whose primary and ultimate object and goal is life – the maintenance of the populations' lives, their growth, optimisation, and multiplication of opportunities – manifest itself through killing, calling for death, exposing not only its enemies but also its own citizens to death? Foucault propounds that the answer lies in racism.

According to Foucault (1988), the era of biopower was established in modern times, under which, among other things, it studies and controls, "[...] the birth rate, longevity, public health, housing, migration [...]" (Foucault, 1988, p. 131) of a region or a country. Techniques were also developed "[...] to achieve the subjection of bodies and the control of populations" (Foucault, 1988, p. 131). Biopower has become one of the most useful tools available for advancing capitalism, as it ensures "[...] controlled insertion of bodies into the apparatus of production and adjusts population phenomena to economic processes" (Foucault, 1988, p. 132).

From this perspective, the modern state barely functions without resorting to racism, and there is no state "[...] which, at a certain moment, at a certain limit and under certain conditions, does not pass through racism" (Foucault, 2019, p. 304). What Foucault understands by racism is a central device of current political power, particularly in the West, shaping governmental strategies and creating the conditions for governance to be possible. There is a profound link between the modern state, biopower and racism, the latter being a means, part of a device designed to make the population governable, which is done through separation: "Cutting between what must live and what must die" (Foucault, 2019, p. 304).

Foucault suggests that modern power, biopower, much like the power Machiavelli postulated for absolute monarchy, divides to govern, imposing this division on its own terms. In this sense, the primary function of racism is "[...] to fragment, to censor within this biological continuum, at which biopower is directed" (Foucault, 2019, p. 305). Fragmentation is thus a political act of the state. Beyond the repetition in the difference of this gesture, what must be seen is its inherent relationship to death. The division that Foucault describes points towards death and includes this dimension in the calculations underlying the governance of the living.

Expanding on this discussion, Foucault highlights the second function of racism, which aims to establish a positive relationship of the type: the more you make people die, or the more you let them die, the more you will live. He points out that neither the modern state nor racism invented this logic. Rather, what the racism of the modern state redistributes under its own conditions is simply "[...] the warlike relationship: [...]" "In order to live, you must massacre your enemies" (Foucault, 2019, p. 305).

Foucault insists, however, that what must be examined is how modern and contemporary racism makes this maxim work *in an entirely new way*, by integrating it into the codes and calculations of biopolitics. The relationship with the enemy is no longer openly warlike or military but fundamentally biological. It is no longer about achieving great victories on the battlefield, but about quotas, exclusion, and the elimination of inferior species: “[...] the death of the bad race, the inferior race (or the degenerate, or the abnormal), is what will make life in general healthier; healthier and purer” (Foucault, 2019, p. 305).

Indeed, at the core of modern racism lies a desire, the goal of death. Thus, inscribed within the ambit of racist discourses and mechanisms is the death of the *other* produced by this fragmentation.

From this perspective, contemporary racism functions as a device – a technology of power employed by the modern state. It is not limited to conflicts between countries but is actively embedded within the dynamics of Western societies, mobilising state institutions and policies, and activating knowledge and practices aligned with its objectives.

It could be argued that the current forms of racism in Western democracies do not openly advocate for the death of the undesirable other, nor explicitly for their exclusion from humanity. It is precisely for this reason that an analysis of the active devices and the gestures embedded within the strategies and practices becomes fundamental.

In this sense, even a brief review of such participation enables us to identify racism, following Foucault’s conceptualisation, as a device of power that is central to state governance, particularly regarding Indigenous peoples in the United States and the context of military service in Brazil.

Examining racism in the participation of Indigenous peoples in the U.S. military

Why have American Indians served so steadfastly and in such great numbers – at times at a higher proportional rate than any other group in American society? [...] Why have Native people fought for a country that broke nearly every promise it ever made to tribal nations? (Harris; Hirsch, 2020, p. 1).

These questions are the starting point taken by Alexandra Harris and Mark Hirsch, authors of “Why we serve: Native Americans in the United States Armed Forces [...]” (Harris; Hirsch, 2020), to explore, through testimonies from Indigenous peoples and documentary analysis, the reasons that led and still motivate a significant number of them to enlist in the United States Armed Forces.

Contrary to reductionist and stereotypical view held by society and even the military itself, the research presented in the book demonstrates that Native American military service has historically been – and continues to be – driven by factors that go beyond and in opposition to perspectives that associate Indigenous peoples with great natural warriors. According to the authors, although some among the country’s 574 Indigenous ethnic groups that identify with combat, each one has its own culture, traditions, belief systems and positions on war.

The definitions of *warrior*, as well as the reasons for serving, are as diverse as their ethnic origins. This fact is also well showcased in the documentary *The warrior tradition* (2021)

which, through testimonies of Indigenous veterans, discusses the motivations for their participation in the Armed Forces. About this Means, member of the Ogala Sioux Tribe and Marine Corps veteran, shed light on this issue:

A warrior has always been someone who fights for their Native nation. For the most part, that was militaristically. But now that has expanded to fighting for your native nation in any context: legally, socially, culturally, politically. Women are taking a tremendously active position in today's battles because it's no longer just about military prowess. It's about intellectual prowess. It's about cultural prowess. It's wonderful to see so many native people from all walks of life fighting for their rights and sovereignty (Means, 2019, not paginate).

It is also important to note from the testimonies in the documentary that the Armed Forces still uses the image of the warrior at recruiting stations located near the country's Indigenous reserves, mobilising young Indigenous peoples to commit to military service. It is worth mentioning that, as in other segments of society, military service is also seen as an honourable family tradition for some ethnic groups. This is suggested by the testimony of D. J. Vanas, a Navajo war veteran who served in the Marine Corps during World War II:

Family heritage was one of the things I was imbued with growing up with stories and firsthand experiences of relatives, including my dad, who served 21 years in the Air Force. We had relatives who served dating back to World War I. It not only seemed like a comfortable path to follow, because there's so much familiarity, but it's almost an expectation just because it was a common family theme (Vanas, 2019, not paginate).

It is worth highlighting from MacDonald's testimony that the Navajo are widely recognised among Native American ethnic groups for their unique contribution to World War II. During the conflict, the U.S. Marine Corps recruited 29 Navajo men to create an unbreakable code based on the Navajo language – recognised not only for its complexity but also because it existed solely in spoken form, with no written counterpart at the time. The use of such a language in the conflict made it possible to send and receive critical information via radio without risk of enemy interception or decipherment. The code, which assigned specific Navajo words to various military terms and commands, led to the successful victory of the Marines during the Battle of Iwo Jima, resulting in Japan's defeat.

It is also noteworthy that throughout American history, in an effort to erase the culture of these people, many Indigenous individuals were forced to attend strict boarding schools as an outcome of legislation passed in 1819 (the Civilization Fund Act), which allowed *benevolent* societies, such as the Catholic Church, to establish schools on Indigenous reservations in an effort to *civilise* the students by teaching them to read and write in English and to practice Christianity. This practice also included policies such as changing the names of native students to American ones and punishing those who spoke their native languages or practiced their religious beliefs (Pember, 2019).

Considering this debate, Bartgis' (2021) study, which discusses the motivations behind the decision of students of Carlisle Indian School to fight in World War I, points out that they entered combat not merely to defend their homeland but mainly to escape mistreatment at the institution and to obtain the desired U.S citizenship.

Founded in 1879 and closed in 1918, the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, was a boarding school funded by the U.S. federal government specifically for

Native American students. Operating under the disciplinary motto *kill the Indian, save the man*, the school implemented policies such as changing the students' native names to American ones and imposing punishments for those who spoke their native languages or practiced traditional religious beliefs. When World War I broke out, students at the school were encouraged to join the Red Cross, military industries, and the armed forces. Such encouragement, combined with the conditions under which they lived at the school and the pursuit of citizenship, contributed to 90% of Carlisle's male student population volunteering for the war effort (Bartgis, 2021).

In fact, until the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act² in 1924, the U.S. government leveraged the existence of separate tribal nations on reservation lands as justification for denying many Native Americans the benefits and protections of citizenship. After returning from the war, numerous Native Americans lobbied the federal government seeking reward for their loyalty and service at the front. The Indian Citizenship Act granted citizenship to approximately 125,000 of the 300,000 Indians who had not previously been classified as such (Bartgis, 2021).

When examining Indigenous motivations for military service, it is also important to acknowledge that, like many non-Indigenous youth, many Native Americans enlist to learn a trade, access education, explore new horizons in life, experience adventures, or in many cases, escape from a life of extreme poverty: "Because Native Americans have been forced into this horrible economic and cultural position on reservations, the U.S. and the military exploit that by providing the military as an option out of poverty and hopelessness" (Viola, 2022, p. 56). This was the case of Jeff Means, a member of the Ogala Sioux ethnic group and a Marine Corps veteran

My reasons were financial. I had been kicking around since high school doing really a whole lot of nothing. I went to a little strip mall where all four branches had recruiting offices. The Air Force wouldn't take me, then the Army turned me down. I got in my truck and left, but came back when I realized I hadn't checked out the Marine Corps. I stuck my head into the office and there was this gunnery sergeant. He was like 6-foot-6 and 240 pounds of muscle. I said, 'Hey, I already tried with the Air Force and Army. Should I even bother coming in?' This gunny walks over, takes me around the shoulders and says, 'Son, let's see what the Marine Corps can do for you' (Means, 2019, not paginate).

Regardless, this brief overview of Indigenous participation in U.S. military service enables us to identify racism – aligned with broader discursive practices –, specifically biological racism, as a power mechanism for mobilising Native American engagement in the ranks of the Armed Forces.

Since racism, within multiple practices of governance, is not just the belief in a superior lineage or prejudice against different ethnic groups, but rather a set of practices and techniques for governing oneself and others. It is historically rooted, firstly in discourses around racial struggles, and subsequently in biological racism. When analysing Indigenous

² The Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, enacted on June 2, granted American citizenship to the Indigenous peoples of the United States. Although the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution defines a citizen as any person born in the United States and subject to its laws and jurisdiction, the amendment had previously been interpreted by the courts not to apply to native peoples. The law was proposed by Representative Homer P. Snyder (R) of New York and signed by President Calvin Coolidge on June 2, 1924. It was enacted partly in recognition of the thousands of Native Americans who served in the armed forces during World War I. (Estados Unidos, 1924).

participation in military service under varied situations and circumstances, it becomes evident that the discursive framework of race, along with its distinctions and hierarchies, remains operative. This discourse is rooted in either the naturalisation and exaltation of the warrior figure or through regulations, restrictions, and motivations for access to military service.

Under these conditions, we observe that racism acted to prohibit or exclude Native Americans from military service, particularly prior to the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act in 1924. Until that point, the U.S. government would not officially recognise Native Americans as citizens and, therefore, they were generally not recruited for military campaigns. Nonetheless, they were exalted as a warrior race, often exposed to the greatest risks, and sacrificed on the battlefield so that others might survive. They were frequently assigned the most dangerous duties and missions, and approximately 5% of Native combatants died during World War I, compared to 1% of American soldiers overall (Ault, 2020).

Alexandra Haris statement in an interview for the Smithsonian Magazine (Ault, 2020) is a good illustration of this process:

Native peoples as a whole have been stereotyped throughout history [...] They are typically viewed as having innate warrior skills. 'It seems on the surface that this would be a positive stereotype — something that wouldn't necessarily be harmful.' But the idea that Native people have some inborn talent at tracking, scouting, martial skills emerges as the military placing them in the most dangerous roles (Ault, 2020, non paginate [Alexandra Haris, interviewed]).

Under this guise, the same discourse continues to operate. Foucault teaches in the second function of racism: “[...] the more you let die, the more you will live” (Foucault, 2019, p. 305). Particularly striking in this evocation of the warrior figure is how biological racism – somewhat discredited by Europe’s experiences in the twentieth century – is now mobilised and transformed into praise.

Examining racism in the participation of Indigenous peoples in the Brazilian Army

Historiographical data shows that during interstate military conflicts in Brazil, Indigenous peoples were assigned military roles consistent with their subordinate status. This clearly illustrates the first characteristic of racism presented by Foucault, as a biological continuum whose *modus operandi* is to hold back some groups in relation to others.

In a video titled *Indians use army rifles and teach soldiers how to survive in the jungle*,³ Indigenous army soldiers are portrayed as more than mere recruits – they serve as instructors, sharing vital knowledge about extracting the necessary resources for survival in jungle combat. According to one colonel interviewed, “[...] in the jungle, they are more adept and better adapted” [...] “Applying these techniques to jungle life is not an easy task, and through this knowledge the Army fulfils its role of training effective warriors, whether Indigenous or not” (Índios..., 2014, 3:17min. - 3:32min, free translation).

³ Original title: Índios usam fuzis do exército e ensinam os soldados como sobreviver nas matas (2014).

The testimonies of two sergeants, featured in a video titled *Indian Soldier*⁴, who served as jungle instructors, reinforce this perception: “We learn from them camouflage techniques, how to track footprints of small and large animals, as well as humans [...],” and “This is essential for us to survive and remain operational in the jungle by learning what we can and cannot eat [...] and they clearly show us what we should avoid” (Soldado Índio, 2014, 4:30min. – 5:05min., free translation).

Unlike in the North American Armed Forces, racism in Brazil, leading to the stratification of groups according to their importance, is presented in the form of a discourse of knowledge sharing. According to Widlok (2017), this regime is based on the receiver’s demand for sharing, whether it is explicit or not. People share what others value and what is valuable to them: “What I teach is what I’ve known since I was a child, [...]” (Soldado Índio, 2014, 5:17min. – 5:22min., free translation) says an Indigenous soldier in the video. The sharing system is also a way to foster relationships, as it makes the involved parties more aware of their mutual dependence.

These aspects are also present in the video titled *Op Ágata 4 - Indigenous soldiers patrol Brazil’s triple border* (2012),⁵ which highlights activities of the 4th Border Platoon in Cucui, Amazonas State, responsible for safeguarding national sovereignty along the border region shared by Brazil, Colombia, and Venezuela. In this video, an Indigenous soldier named Alzimiro, from the Baré ethnic group and stationed at the unit, is interviewed, stating:

I contribute here through my knowledge of the local communities and language, because most people living downstream speak only Baré, and those coming from Manaus do not know the language [...] Besides teaching, I also learn many new things that I never expected to learn, and it makes me feel even more Brazilian (Op Ágata 4, 2012, 0:57min. – 1:24min., free translation).

The soldier’s statement provides a glimpse into the relationship of *exchange* mediated by the gift-giving system between Indigenous peoples and the Brazilian Army. This is because, within such a system, the exchange involves not only material goods and services but, above all, symbolic transactions aimed at building social ties. An alliance in which the parties are mutually dependent and interconnected, albeit asymmetrically (Gregory, 1982). It is understood that by joining the Brazilian Army, Indigenous soldiers receive, in return, recognition of their inclusion as citizens within the nation. This perspective is clearly expressed by the officers featured in the analysed videos: “The Indigenous soldier is very proud to serve in the Army, to feel Brazilian, [...]” (Índios..., 2014, 3:33min. – 3:35min., free translation) and “[...] the Indigenous person here effectively feels like a Brazilian citizen” (Índios..., 2014, 3:23min. – 3:33min., free translation).

However, the prestige described by these officers does not translate into the ranks held by Indigenous peoples, who rarely advance beyond the rank of Private, never reaching higher positions. According to a BBC Brazil report titled *Prestige and Money Attract Indians to a Military Career* (Kawaguti, 2012) the primary motivations drawing Indigenous peoples into military careers are economic stability and community prestige. The report notes that, in cities where Border Platoon are located, military service is a good source of significant economic benefits and enhanced social status within their communities. This situation

⁴ *Soldado Índio* (Free translation).

⁵ *Op Ágata 4* – “Soldados Índios” patrulham tríplice fronteira do Brasil.

reveals two interacting regimes: a market-oriented logic that transforms Indigenous labour into a commodity, and a gift-giving system that governs exchange relationships between Indigenous peoples and the Brazilian Army.

When it comes to Indigenous labour as a commodity, it is worth noting that in 2020, the salary for a soldier was R\$ 1,078.00. With the addition of a special location bonus of 20%, this amount increased to R\$ 1,293.60. It should be emphasised that this salary applied specifically to mandatory military service. If soldiers volunteered to remain in the Brazilian Army (EB) and were accepted as engaged soldiers, they could continue serving for another seven years. In this case, their base salary would be R\$ 1,765.00, and with the special location bonus included, their monthly remuneration would rise to R\$ 2,118.00. This salary exceeds the average income typically earned by young people in the border cities where Army Recruitment Centres are located.

Final Remarks

Drawing on Foucault's contributions, particularly his insights into racism, and utilising academic output, websites, and documentaries addressing the participation of Indigenous peoples in military service in the United States and Brazil, this study analytically explored Foucault's influential formulations on the topic. In doing so, we seek a deeper understanding of Indigenous peoples' engagement in the Armed Forces.

Inspired by Foucault's developments, we argue that biological racism is at the heart of this participation, mobilising the engagement of Indigenous peoples in the Armed Forces either to fulfil stereotypical expectations associated with the figure of the *natural warrior*, or to seek a sense of belonging to the nation in the face of historical exclusion and/or curtailment of their citizenship rights. It also prompts individuals to join to escape mistreatment and the cultural erasure experienced in boarding schools, or to flee from extreme poverty on reservations resulting from the seizure of their lands and the state's failure to improve their living conditions.

We understand that in all these situations, the racial discourse operates, producing the effects of distinction, hierarchy, and fragmentation (as Foucault would say) within this population group. We believe that this fragmentation has created conditions for the governmentalisation of this group within military service, producing the kind of division or cutting-off discussed by Foucault – a cutting-off that points toward death, and which, in the specific case of Indigenous soldiers, becomes urgent from the moment they are recruited. Fragmentation thus emerges as an important political gesture, one that reveals the state's intimate connection with biological racism.

We further argue that Foucault's analytical key *make live and let die* is useful for understanding the employment of Indigenous soldiers by the Armed Forces, revealing a dual process of co-optation and discardability. The recruitment of Indigenous soldiers can be interpreted, on the one hand, as an attempt to integrate these marginalised populations into the dominant social and economic structure by providing opportunities for social mobility and access to resources, such as earning a stable income. On the other, this integration also represents a form of biopolitical control: by incorporating Indigenous peoples into the Armed Forces, the state not only exploits their skills and traditional knowledge but simultaneously exercises control over their lives, disciplining their bodies and minds to serve specific military and national interests.

The Foucauldian analytical key of biopower also reveals the process of discardability to which Indigenous soldiers may be subjected. Often, as pointed out in this work, after military service, these individuals face marginalisation, lack of support and recognition, and are discarded by society. This *let die* is identified in the abandonment of many Indigenous peoples after they have served the state's purposes in situations of war.

However, it should be borne in mind that “[...] where there is power there is resistance, and yet (or rather, for this very reason) this resistance is never found in a position of exteriority in the power relationship [...]” (Foucault, 1988, p. 91) and, in this sense, the Indigenous peoples react and seek to re-signify the figure of the warrior and his access to and permanence in military service.

In the case of the United States, although the federal government banned Native traditions as part of its assimilationist policies, military service provided Native peoples with spaces – sometimes secretly, sometimes openly – to revive some of these practices. The significant number of Natives serving during World War II, for example, led to a resurgence of traditional practices, including protection ceremonies, prayer vigils, and the use of traditional medicines in battle. Notably, the Lakota of the Standing Rock Reservation performed their first Sun Dance in 52 years, praying for the defeat of German and Japanese forces and the safe return of approximately 2,000 of their soldiers. Additionally, research suggests that Native veterans of the Vietnam War may have better managed anger, depression and post-traumatic stress due to their engagement with traditional war rituals and healing ceremonies (Viola, 2022; Harris; Hirsch, 2020).

In the case of Brazil, the redefinition of the warrior figure and access to the army is expressed through the sharing of Indigenous knowledge within its ranks, providing the military with essential survival skills in challenging regions, such as the Amazon, which are characterised by extensive borders and extreme logistical difficulties. Consequently, this knowledge becomes crucial for the military's survival and effective operation in this environment.

For Indigenous peoples, affiliation with the Armed Forces can offer social mobility through regular wages, foster a feeling of inclusion within the Brazilian nation, and confer status and distinction within their own communities as military professionals.

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