

# First officer nurses of the military police of the state of Rio de Janeiro (1994-1995): incorporation of military habitus

*Primeiras oficiais enfermeiras da polícia militar do estado do Rio de Janeiro (1994-1995): incorporação do habitus militar*

*Primeras oficiales enfermeras de la policía militar del estado del Rio de Janeiro (1994-1995): incorporación del habitus militar*

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To analyze the process of incorporation of the military habitus by trainee officer nurses during the Probation Internship for Officers Adaptation at the Officers Training School of the Military Police of the state of Rio de Janeiro. The time frame covers the period from 1994 to 1995. **Methods:** Socio-historical study whose primary sources consist of written documents from the collection of the Military Police and oral testimonies obtained through interviews with 10 officer nurses from the first group of the Health Officers Board. Data were organized, classified, and analyzed in accordance with the historical method and the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu. **Results:** The officer nurses were subjected to a process of incorporation of the military habitus by learning gestures and postures associated with the strict discipline and hierarchy appropriate to the military life. **Conclusion:** Learning the military habitus was critical to the nurses' new professional and social positions.

**Keywords:** Nursing; History of nursing; Military nursing.

## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Analisar o processo de incorporação do *habitus militar* pelas oficiais enfermeiras estagiárias, durante o Estágio Probatório de Adaptação de Oficiais, na Escola de Formação de Oficiais da Polícia Militar do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. O recorte temporal abrange o período de 1994 a 1995. **Métodos:** Trata-se de estudo histórico-social, cujas fontes primárias foram documentos escritos do acervo da Polícia Militar e depoimentos orais, obtidos por meio de entrevistas com dez oficiais enfermeiras pertencentes à primeira turma do Quadro de Oficiais de Saúde. Os dados foram organizados, classificados e analisados em conformidade com o método histórico e o referencial teórico de Pierre Bourdieu. **Resultados:** As oficiais enfermeiras estagiárias foram submetidas a um processo de incorporação do *habitus militar*, através do aprendizado de gestos e posturas adequadas à vida militar, articulados a uma rígida disciplina e hierarquia. **Conclusão:** O aprendizado do *habitus militar* foi fundamental à nova posição profissional e social.

**Palavras-chave:** Enfermagem; História da Enfermagem; Enfermagem Militar.

## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Analizar el proceso de incorporación del *habitus militar* por las oficiales enfermeras becarias durante el Periodo Probatorio de Adaptación de Oficiales, en la Escuela de Formación de Oficiales da Polícia Militar del Estado de Rio de Janeiro entre 1994 y 1995. **Métodos:** Las fuentes primarias fueron documentos escritos del acervo de la Polícia Militar del Estado de Rio de Janeiro y testimonios orales obtenidos a partir de entrevistas con diez oficiales enfermeras pertenecientes a la primera turma del Cuadro de Oficiales de Salud. Los datos fueron organizados, clasificados e analizados de acuerdo con el método histórico. **Resultados:** Las oficiales enfermeras becarias fueron sometidas a un proceso de incorporación del *habitus militar* a través del aprendizaje de gestos y posturas adecuadas a la vida militar, articulados a una rígida disciplina y jerarquía. **Conclusión:** El aprendizaje del *habitus militar* fue fundamental a la nueva posición profesional y social.

**Palabras clave:** Enfermería; Historia de la Enfermería; Enfermería Militar.

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## INTRODUCTION

The urbanization process of the city of Rio de Janeiro has been studied by a number of social scientists, particularly during the decade of the 1990s when the conditions of life that led to increased urban violence were widely discussed. Major newspapers reported the national and international repercussions of crimes every day. Such circumstances gave rise to a crisis in the public security of the state that was aggravated by disclosures of the involvement of police officers and authorities in criminal activities<sup>1</sup>.

In this context, several measures were taken to improve and strengthen the Public Security Bureau, especially the processes to recruit police officers, favoring the admission of nearly 2,000 soldiers. Consequently, the Military Police Hospitals of Rio de Janeiro (PMERJ), the Military Police Hospital of Niterói, and the Military Police Central Hospital became overburdened in terms of number of occurrences, both due to the increased crime rates and to the increased number of officers<sup>2</sup>.

Moreover, it was necessary to expand medical assistance to the new military police officers and their families, thus increasing the number of health care services in the hospitals and evidencing the insufficient number of health professionals in the PMERJ, especially nurses and mid-level nursing staff.

Through the law 2206 of December 27, 1993, the Officer Nurses Board was created by State Governor Leonel de Moura Brizola in order to cope with this demand. This measure converted 163 unused soldier positions into 56 positions for officer nurses of the Health Officers Board. These officer nurses consisted of two majors, 10 captains, 20 first lieutenants, and 25 second lieutenants. Initially the nurses were inserted in the position of second lieutenant with the possibility of promotion, after a three-year interstice, according to the number of open positions<sup>3</sup>.

The selection process took eight months and included two eliminatory stages followed by classificatory diploma-based admission. The first stage consisted of a written evaluation of nursing-specific knowledge; the second stage consisted of practical and oral tests on technical nursing procedures. Subsequently all of those who were approved underwent health examinations and physical fitness testing. Finally, psychological analysis and social examinations were performed<sup>3</sup>.

All of those who were approved at these stages were appointed by the governor of the state of Rio de Janeiro as trainees of Board I of the Health Officers Board, which constitutes the permanent board of PMERJ. This appointment placed the approved applicants in a probationary internship for officer adaptation, a mandatory eliminatory stage of the Officers Training Course.

The group of trainees consisted of doctors and chaplains with the rank of first lieutenant trainee of the Military Police (TEN PM) and 56 nurses (49 women, six men) with the rank

of second lieutenant nurse trainee. To achieve approval the trainees had to complete all of the stages of training successfully<sup>3</sup>. The differentiation of ranks placed nurses at a disadvantage in relation to doctors and chaplains. Nevertheless, the new positions for officer nurses meant the inclusion of a new group in the PMERJ staff, as the nursing staff in its hospitals consisted of civilian nurses and military nursing assistants and technicians with the rank of corporal and sergeant<sup>4</sup>.

The incorporation of the military habitus by the newcomer nurses' group (consisting mainly of women) in the health field of the PMERJ occurred in a very complex way. The following objective was drawn to study the problem-situation behind this process: analysis of the process of incorporation of the of the military habitus by trainee officer nurses during the Probation Internship for Officers Adaptation at the Officers Training School of the Military Police of the state of Rio de Janeiro.

The contribution of this study is evidenced by further discussions on the incorporation of the military habitus as a requirement for the inclusion of nursing in military spaces, and by the publication of research data that enable a reflection on aspects involving nursing professionals in the military sphere in Brazil. It is important to emphasize the relevance of historical studies as an essential tool for the knowledge of the profession<sup>5</sup>.

## METHODS

This was a socio-historical study whose primary sources consisted of written documents (newsletters, official state gazettes) from the collection of the Military Police and oral testimonies obtained through semi-structured interviews with 10 officer nurses from the first group of the Health Officers Board of PMERJ. Criteria for inclusion were: officer nurses belonging to the first group and working at the Central Hospital of the Military Police (HCPM) during the period of the study. There was no intentional exclusion of men, but the only male officer willing to participate in the study was unable to attend the data collection process for health reasons.

The interviews occurred in the period between October and December 2010 in places and times scheduled by the interviewees. A semi-structured script was used, consisting of topics within the subject areas to be utilized by the officers. Ten officer nurses were interviewed. Six interviews were conducted in the HCPM Training Department room; one in the HCPM nursing supervision room; three in the PMERJ General Health Department room; and one in the Federal Hospital of Rio de Janeiro. Regarding the identification of the interviewees, sequenced numbers from 01 to 10 were used to preserve anonymity. As reliability criterion, the transcribed material was presented to the interviewees for text validation.

Data selection, collection, organization, and classification from written documents occurred within the period from September 2010 and December 2012. Inclusion criteria for

the written documents included official documents pertinent to the processes of recruitment and selection of nurses for the corps of the Military Police.

The project that originated the present study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Nursing Anna Nery/Teaching Hospital São Francisco de Assis on August 31, 2010 (Protocol 85/2010). Therefore, the determinations described in Resolution 196/1996 of the National Health Council were met. The HCPM Direction Board authorized this study through a document signed by the director at the time (FR nº 362343 of August 16, 2010). Secondary sources consisted of theses, dissertations, papers, and books that substantiated the analysis of the data derived from primary sources in the study.

Data were organized, classified, and analyzed according to the historical method. Thus, the analysis of the documentary corpus contained: analysis of the context in which the documents were produced and published; external and internal reviews with the aim of identifying the authenticity and reliability of the analyzed documents; and an analysis of the nature of the text with the aim of identifying key concepts<sup>6</sup>. A thorough reading of the documents (both oral and written) was performed to identify elements pertinent to the studied phenomenon and within the scope of the proposed objective.

The thought of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu was the theoretical framework that supported this analysis, especially in relation to the concept of habitus. This concept guided the understanding of the requirements for admission to the PMERJ Corps that should be incorporated by nurses during their probationary internship for officers' adaptation, with the aim of compatibility of future experiences with the experiences integrated into the habitus over the mentioned probationary internship.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Probationary Internship at the Officers Training School: first contact with military life

The first group of 56 nurses initiated the Officers Training Course with the rank of second lieutenant nurse trainee. The probationary internship for officer adaptation lasted six months (from November 1994 to May 1995). The first stage lasted three months and covered the theoretical and practical content of specific disciplines of military training and formation.

The internship took place at the Officers Training School (EsFO), now the Officers Training School Dom João VI, and was intended to train officers of the Corporation since its foundation by Decree 14508 of December 1, 1920 designating it a professional school as an initiative of the General José da Silva Pessoa, the Commanding General of the Corporation at the time<sup>7</sup>.

In the early days of activities at the EsFO the trainees participated in various meetings. During these first days they learned the rules regarding the clothing, including

uniforms, behavior, attendance, punctuality, moral conduct, and others. The guidelines were transmitted on a daily basis in the amphitheater, in classrooms, and even in the school's courtyard by the officers in charge of instruction to the group<sup>7</sup>.

The Probationary Internship for Adaptation included full-time daily activities. Most trainees had jobs at the time; thus it was necessary for them to find night work in order to successfully deal with the activities at the EsFO. In the perception of the interviewees such demands were very stressful:

*It was hard because of the full-time internship. We stayed in the School from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. At the time I also worked at night. Also, there was physical education, which particularly demanded huge efforts [...]. (E1)*

Another interviewee evaluated the internship period as tiring and unendurable, as it was added to their prior private responsibilities:

*[...] It was pleasant for many, but there were also those who experienced moments of affliction. For me, as an example, I lived far away, I had a child, and I had to leave home very early, it was hard... At six-thirty we had to be there, and at seven we had to be standing at attention. I used to cry almost every day, because that was a very heavy burden. When I got home I found my child crying for attention, and I had to study... Also, some days I had to face two and a half hours of traffic jam... I left the School at 5 p.m. and arrived home at eight-thirty, nine o'clock. So it was very hard for me! I used to cry every day [...]. (E3)*

An analysis of the perceptions of the interviewees about the initial difficulties during the adaptation internship evidences the use of suffering inflicted on the body that occurs in initiation rites in any society; numerous psychological experiences demonstrate that adherence to the regimen will be more effective when the initiation rites to which the trainees are subjected are more severe and painful<sup>8</sup>.

Nevertheless perceptions of the probationary internship were reported in distinct ways among the interviewees, who emphasized their experienced difficulties or gains. This ease of internalization of the requirements for nurse officer aspirant is exemplary to demonstrate that the effects of the new experiences on the habitus of the applicants depend on the practical compatibility between these experiences and others that are already integrated to the habitus<sup>8</sup>.

The trainees had to incorporate the military doctrine through a daily learning on adaptation to the new lifestyle transmitted through several unified instructions. Naturally all officer trainees were required to conform to the instructions in order to fit their compatible profile to the military life

requirements. The testimony of one of the interviewees demonstrates this process of adequacy to the new routine:

*[...] I had to adapt to a new routine. The military severity was something new and very cool. I had never been an organized person; at that time I already had a child, and entering this life was like if I went back in time. I was a student again. So we had a schedule for everything, to take a bath, to change our clothes. To review the studies. Actually it was very nice, very different of what I was used to do... I started to learn a new life with discipline, a military life. I managed to adapt myself [...]. (E2)*

Adaptation to military life did not occur in the same way for everyone. In fact, a significant number of interviewees reported certain difficulties. Military doctrine has its peculiarities and the forms of adaptation vary depending on prior family, professional, and social formation of the applicant. Similarly, the social and citizenship references tended to affect the behavior of the aspirants during the process of familiarization with the military routine, as reported by one of the interviewees:

*[...] I had this impact with the transition from the civilian to the military life, and this was evidenced in a situation that happened to a colleague in the school. That really affected me.... That messroom thing.... There was this classmate who was a sergeant nurse. He applied for officer but failed in the psychological exam. I didn't understand that. If he already was a member of the Military Police, why had he failed the psychological exam? If he was already a military man.... He filed a lawsuit and, with an injunction, he attended the course with us. The most annoying thing for me was the fact that at the time we went to the officers' messroom to have our meals while he went to the enlisted rank messroom, apart from us. I think that we don't see this differentiation in the civilian world.... Therefore this is something that really marked me. I didn't like that situation. It was embarrassing for him. In civilian life I had never seen something like that. That marked me [...]. (E9)*

The differences between social classes and categories may lead to discrimination and feelings of depreciation. However, we have to admit that this is not unique to the military life, as in civilian life there are numerous types of differentiation between social classes and categories. Some phenomena are so old that society tends to consider them as natural, without expressing aversion. This occurs because the social spaces are structured according to the volume and weight of the equity capital in that environment<sup>9</sup>. In the case of the military scenario, rank is the criterion that assures

prestigious positions; once an individual attains that rank, they will start to deal or have to deal with the differences as part of their daily life. Also with regard to adaptation, one of the interviewees mentioned other difficulties and her strategies to overcome them:

*[...] When I entered the school I found a very complicated situation. When I went home I thought I wouldn't return the next day. I got home and said: I'm not going back! That life is not for me! In fact I didn't participate in activities that most people took part.... So, I didn't inhale gas, I didn't go into manholes, I didn't fight fires.... I didn't go because I thought those activities were highly unnecessary, and it is a matter of preferences as well. Those who liked that kind of activities would do it. I talked to the Captain: Oh, Captain! First, I can't inhale gas because I have rhinitis, bronchitis, I have asthma! I can't inhale gas because it could cause an edema (of the glottis) and kill me. I'm wearing contact lens; I'm not going there. I participated in those activities that I deemed necessary to my training [...]. (E9)*

Another important aspect is the fact that the disciplines of the curriculum of the Officers Training Course contained knowledge related to military precepts. The incorporation of these precepts worked as a seal to effective admission in the military space. Thus, the formation of the officers considered not only their professional formation but also, and especially, the specific preparation required for them to become PMERJ officers.

In this regard it is pertinent to consider that the military capital acquired from the formation in military courses tends to generate changes of position within the space occupied by members of these groups. This happens due to the existence of a correspondence between social position and the provisions (of habitus) of individuals or groups, which also works as a principle of classification<sup>9</sup>.

Therefore, the process of adaptation and incorporation of the military habitus by nurses was exhausting and complex in relation to the psychic and physical aspects explored during the Officers Training Course, but it was driven by the nurses' desire to become officers, awarding them the desired prestige in the PMERJ and in society.

### **Effect of the training internship on the habitus of the trainees**

The testimonies showed different impressions and feelings in relation to the training course. In fact, the process of adaptation occurred in different ways, certainly due to previous experiences and the expectations of each trainee. However, the fact that all of them were graduates in nursing, as well as their cultural, social, and vocational characteristics, among other factors, may directly or indirectly contribute,

consciously or not, to the choices and representations they make concerning their careers. Therefore, the incorporation of the military habitus would depend on the social position, perceptions, experiences, and cultural values of each trainee. In this context the trainee officer faced different types of challenges during the adaptation of the habitus derived from the previous social structure to the conjuncture with the institution in which they were being inserted during the training course.

In the process of incorporation of the military habitus, unified rules and manners tend to be incorporated by the members of the group. A priori such rules are critical to the behavior of the trainees. If compliance with such rules were not part of the training the course might possibly be unsuccessful. Analysis of the testimony of one of the interviewees in relation to the probation internship is exemplary, as it evidences an understanding of the need to incorporate the military habitus:

*[...] In the barracks you begin to acquire a sense of a new reality.... In civilian life we had time for everything. In military life we had no time to comb our hair or get a haircut.... When I realized I already needed a haircut. I got a "channel" haircut, but sometimes I wanted to run away to drink some water. But no, we had to obey all that severity [...]. (E5)*

But not all interviewees faced the rules with the same serenity, including compliance with the schedules established in the course, as shown by the following testimony:

*[...] I was always in the list of late students. I was the last one to wake up. My name was always in that list. My experience in the EsFO was not nice [...]. (E9)*

It is pertinent to mention that the group was heterogeneous, as those in the condition of enlisted rank were already adapted to the military life. Thus, such experiences gave rise to differentiations in the process of adaptation. Analysis of an excerpt of the following testimony evidences these differentiations:

*[...] To some extent the internship was very fun for me. It was a large group. Certain groups had more in common. It is natural. People tend to have better relationships with those who have more things in common. But I couldn't understand some behaviors, because I had not been an enlisted rank. I thought that not everything was logical [...]. (E4)*

Accordingly, the position of each individual in the structure of objective relationships provides a set of typical experiences that tend to be consolidated in the form of a habitus that is appropriate to their new social position<sup>9</sup>.

Conceived this way, the habitus of the trainee that made her proceed not as any other individual but as a member of a group that occupies a certain position in the social structure in which she is inserted provides safety in relation to the previously incorporated provisions.

According to the evaluation by this interviewee, who belonged to the Enlisted Rank Health Board of PMERJ, many individuals attended the school but did not incorporate the "military spirit". When asked to explain the expression "many individuals attended the school but did not learn to be a military person", she answered:

*[...] When I was a corporal I learned that a military person is a military person. A military person accepts orders, but absurd orders are not to be obeyed. The stance of the group was strange. Concerns regarding lipstick, hair color, shoes, feet, heat, sun... Naturally, there were ways to overcome this. To complain less. The trainees presented some attitudes that I couldn't understand [...]. (E4)*

This focus elucidates the familiarity of the interviewee with the military routine. Her previous adaptation to that life made her unable to understand the difficulties of those coming from civilian life; this is evidenced by her critical speech in relation to the trainees who had no military training.

Thus, regarding the Probation Internship for Officers Adaptation, several situations occurred in the process of incorporation of the military habitus. This was in fact expected, as most officer trainees were coming from civilian life. Moreover, they were graduated from various nursing institutions, reaffirming their previous professional experiences, as many of them had worked in the public and private sectors. This set of factors may have determined the different reactions of the group during the military training period.

In the military life the requirement to use uniforms and badges at work makes individuals feel responsible and representing the corps at all times. Approaches to such symbols were exercised during the training course in the discipline Military Ethics, which covered the importance of the magnitude of the uniform.

The value assigned to the uniform was particularly assimilated aspect by most members of the first group of officer nurses, as evidenced in the next testimony:

*[...] When I wore the uniform I felt like representing a group ideal, a society ideal. I didn't feel more important than the others, but different, like being part of something that made me proud and magnified. When I wear the uniform, I incorporate it. Here, I am an officer [...]. (E1)*

The text evidences the effect of the incorporation of the military habitus, as it demonstrates the recommendation of the disciplinary schemes of the corps, in which care for

the uniform represents an appreciation of all aspects of the military life. The text contained in the Statute of the Military Police (1981) incorporates the ideas contained in the above testimony: "the corps, pride of the military police officer towards the organization; love for the military police profession and excitement in its performance"<sup>10:4</sup>.

Regarding the use of the uniform, another officer mentioned that, when she wears it, she feels different:

*[...]When I wore the uniform I was afraid of touching people. So, in order to avoid touching people I put my hands back. I was warned about this fact. A colleague told me that I should not touch people. People could think that it wasn't an appropriate behavior. This obsession for touching people was one of the most difficult things for me. I have several photos of my first year; I was always with my hands back, holding hands [...]. (E8)*

Incorporation of the military habitus occurred gradually for each one of the nurses during the course. This is evidenced in this study by their speech, as cited above, demonstrating the behavioral changes assumed when wearing the PMERJ uniform, allowing the adjustment and execution deemed necessary for the proper placement of the military position and role.

The importance and influence of the learning process, not only during the course but also during one's professional military career, has in the uniform a solid identity tool. The uniform is an emblematic element, a symbol of the acceptance of the military routine, representing the compliance of the professional, as described by one of the interviewees:

*[...] The uniform is interesting. It shows what you are! What you feel inside.... This is what I think. Some people are negligent. They don't use proper shoes, don't care about their image. On the other hand, there are people who you don't have to say anything; their uniforms are always impeccable! What is the value such people give to their lives? If they can't even take care of the uniform [...]. (E10)*

The school instructed the students that the use of the uniform would make a difference in their attitudes and behavior. Using the PMERJ uniform meant representing PMERJ before society. Therefore, the attitude of the police officer represents the attitude of the PMERJ.

In relation to the military salute we have the following report:

*[...] This has never been a problem to me. To be honest, sometimes the inobservance of this makes me*

*embarrassed.... I see it as a matter of recognition and respect. I think it is very beautiful when someone salutes you, as well as when you salute someone who is older than you. I think it is very beautiful when a person is filled with this spirit... So, I prefer to approach people in a proper manner [...]. (E4)*

The incorporation of the military habitus occurred gradually during the internship. Several strategies were used in this process to standardize the gestures and appearance of these nurses in favor of group unity<sup>11</sup>, thus favoring the development of the identity of military nurse<sup>12</sup>. Thus, the members of the group had to assimilate new habits and roles as they recognized and were inserted into the military police.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

By way of final considerations, this research allows the conclusion that the process of incorporation of the military habitus by the first officer nurses of PMERJ occurred in a heterogeneous manner, as theorized by the study reference. The individual characteristics previously incorporated by the officers were aspects of influence that resulted in either difficulties or ease in the incorporation of the military habitus during the military training. Ultimately it would represent the learning of a habitus appropriate to their new professional and social positions, where most members of this group assimilated the military discipline and doctrine, not tightly but continuously, following this pioneer group throughout its course.

The study enabled the construction of an historical version of certain aspects of the incorporation of the military habitus in the first group of nurses in the officer corps of the Military Police of Rio de Janeiro. However, it is important to proceed with further studies on military nursing, especially regarding the presence of women in such scenarios. Therefore, the present study represents a transitory truth, as fully experienced facts represent a challenge for history.

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