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Professionalizing the Amazonas military police through training

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This article examines a new national program of professional education for military police officers, and how it was implemented in the State of Amazonas, in Brazil. Police reform has taken a high place on the Brazilian political agenda due to their low legitimacy, inefficacy in the execution of their duties, and constant allegations of police corruption and abuses of power. Education is seen as an important instrument for improving policing in Brazil. In an exploratory study, in-depth interviews were conducted with training participants in order to understand the political and organizational issues involved in implementing new guidelines for high-level officer training.

The continuing issues facing this reform agenda item include a culture fostered during the authoritarian military era, the lack of police legitimacy in the eyes of the public and elites alike, and the inadequacy of its organizational models for a democratic context. The discrepancies between policy and practice observed in Amazonas were not a question of training efficacy per se, but reflected persisting problems at the local and national levels in Brazilian policing.

Keywords: Brazil; police reform; education; training; democratization; demilitarization

Introduction

This article examines the role of high-level officer training in the police reform agenda of Brazil, and how in one setting federal guidelines designed to improve training were implemented in practice. The first new training class for the Amazonas State Military Police in Brazil was the setting chosen for this study. They were trained under new guidelines developed by the Ministry of Justice, which is attempting to standardize police education across the nation. This training initiative is part of a larger police reform effort in Brazil, one aimed at increasing the professionalism, efficiency, and civility of the police. The Ministry’s guidelines provide a direction for change, but there is large variation among the Brazilian states in terms of how far they must come.

Police reform is a major issue on the Brazilian political agenda due to the historical positioning of the police forces in the country. They suffer from low legitimacy in the view of society, inefficacy in the execution of their duties, and a reputation for corruption and systematic abuses of power. Professional education for high-level leaders is seen as an important instrument for the improvement of the police in Brazil, one route to making them more efficient and capable of integrating with civil society. These issues are addressed by the new training program, and they are its objective.
This article was structured as follows. First, we describe the Brazilian context and the issues it raises for police education, and police reform more broadly. Then we present a few details regarding the new national training plan. A third section describes the actual implementation of the program in Amazonas State. This is followed by the findings of our observations and interviews with participants in the course. In-depth personal interviews were conducted with several members of the first graduating class after they had been serving in the field for three years, in order to understand their experiences and gauge the impact of the program on practice. The paper concludes with some conclusions regarding the progress of police reform on the ground. The conclusions are critical of program, due to the flawed execution of this innovative education program for the Amazonas State Military Police.

The origins of police educational reform

Police and policing policies have been the subject of much discussion around the world, for they are linked to other emergent problems in contemporary society. These include increasing social, economic, and political risks, plus high or fluctuating crime rates, which reduce the legitimacy of the police and imposes the need for reform (Ericson & Haggerty, 1997; Kelling & Moore, 2005). The resulting model that has emerged in many places envisions a results-oriented performance culture in organizations that make use of new information technologies, and at least in poorer areas operates in closer collaboration with the community, with greater transparency, and with more measured use of force (Bayley, 2005; Roth, Roehl, & Johnson, 2004; Skogan, 2004, 2006). However, in practice too often what has actually emerged has been instead more tough traditional policies aimed at deterring crime that has continued to under-value integrating the police and the community (Hough, 2007). Further, even managing traditional policing resources ‘smartly,’ through modern practices such as hot spot policing and making better use of information technology, also calls for improving the academic qualifications of police leaders (Jasche & Neidhardt, 2007).

Another general trend is cited by Bayley and Shearing (2005), who noted the ‘pluralization’ of policing. The monopoly enjoyed by the public police has eroded, and we have witnessed the appearance of parallel organizations aimed at crime prevention that are rooted in the community and in business. In parallel, there has been increased acknowledgment of the limits of traditional, reactive ‘professional’ policing, and its focus on motorized patrol. These challenges to traditional police practices and culture also call for changes in police education that would inform more nimble and innovative reactions to these shifts in the policing environment.

Finally, democratization processes are at work around the world that also call for more sophisticated policing. In societies marked by recent democratization, one of the changes called for has been the implementation of democratic forms of policing (Bayley, 2005; Beato, 2005; Frühling, 2009; Mesko & Klemencic, 2007; Scott, Evans, & Verma, 2009). The focus of many new democracies has been to reconstruct the legitimacy, efficiency, transparency, and civility of the police, usually in parallel with reform efforts more generally. The police reflect the central characteristics of the state that sponsors them, and how they act is crucial to the maintenance of the basic conditions of democratic life, such as the right to come and go, freedom of speech, the right of association, and the right to vote without intimidation (Bayley, 2005). An important point to be highlighted is the fact that the police education must reflect this emerging social complexity.
All those themes are connected. The complexity of society and the growing complexity of some forms of crime, the obvious benefits of using information technologies, a growing emphasis on crime prevention, and the expectation that police will reform in parallel with the growth of other aspects of democratization, all call for changes in police perspectives. One lever for changing these perspectives is leadership education. The issue of police education has been discussed from several perspectives in the literature. These studies revolve around themes such as the distinction between the training received in the academy and the daily practice of the profession (Bayley & Bittner, 1984); the impact of curricular changes (Chapel, 2008; Jaschke & Neidhardt, 2007; Jaschke, 2010); the importance of higher education in the policing practice (Domincoy, 2010; Farrow, Hughes, Paris, & Prior, 2010; Jones, Jones, & Prenzler, 2005; Paoline & Terrill, 2007; Roberg & Bonn, 2004; Vickers, 2000); and the process through which training reinforces the obedience of new recruits (Paes-Machado & Albuquerque, 2006; Conti, 2009).

The question here is, how can police education in a recently democratized country such as Brazil be structured in order to deal with high levels of urban violence without losing sight of other trends calling for a more innovative policing paradigm? The re-democratization of Brazil’s police forces near the end of the twentieth century took place in parallel with an increase in urban violence as well as mounting criticism of the way in which they operated. The difficulty in reducing violence persists in Brazil even though there has been progress in alleviating social disparities recorded over the last decade. There has been significant improvement in the lives of many Brazilians, especially the poorest. One example is the evolution of the per capita income of the poorest 10%, which increased by 57% between 2001 and 2006 (Neri, 2009). But in spite of this, violence remains high, especially poorer areas.

In the Brazilian case, one of the legacies of the earlier authoritarian regime was the subordination of police forces to the Army. The resulting approach to internal security and public order problems was characterized by harsh crime fighting (Costa, 2004). The division of police work in Brazil puts most of the responsibility for law enforcement into the hands of the federal states. There are two police forces that dominate: the military police and the civil police. The former is responsible for street patrolling, and the second for criminal investigations. In both cases, there are two entry points into the profession. In the military police, officers (superiors) and soldiers (privates, corporals, and sergeants) are separately recruited, and trained. The same is true in the Civil Police, where the relevant distinctions are between delegados (superiors) and detectives. The military police have adopted an organizational hierarchy that mimics that of the armed forces, with the highest rank being colonel (Lino, 2004).

In this article, the term ‘officers’ refers to recruits to the upper level ranks of the military police, or the officer class. The different training regimes for various ranks are most striking in military police. In that institution, officer training lasts an average of four years, while soldiers are trained in between six months and two years, depending on the state in question. But the education that they have been receiving is considered inadequate for the complexity of operating democratic society (Basilio, 2004; Ponceion, 2005). Public security in Brazil until recently has been guided more by judicial regulatory criteria than by the adoption policies aiming at promoting police problem-solving, community policing, and other innovative practices (Sapori, 2007).

Among the questions raised by crime and criticisms of Brazilian police practices has been police training. It is widely believed that each new generation receiving inadequate police training essentially reproduces the existing model of policing, one that emphasizes
crime fighting, reactive strategies, strict adhesion to the organizational guidelines, and rote decision-making (Poncioni, 2005). Albuquerque and Paes-Machado study (2004) of training in the Bahia Military Police points to the maintenance of traditions of military training and war fighting. There, recruits routinely endured punishment and humiliation, which was deliberately inflicted to set the stage for their socialization as officers. Such practices were an expression of an informal culture that was not adapted to the requirements of a new training curriculum that was based on modern thinking and emphasized respect for human rights and community-oriented policing practices.

The impact of the global human rights movement on police roles in societies that have democratized can be observed in the inclusion of the human rights themes in the training of the Northern Ireland Police Service. Engel and Burrs’ study (2004) discussed this change towards a democratic training model. The inclusion of the human rights themes was one of the key aspects of this initiative. The difficulties in doing so had to do with the historic context of that society and the fact that big divisions had been structured due to the conflicts that had occurred there. The inclusion of the human rights theme came with its acceptance, which indicates a focus on a more democratic model of policing. Curricular changes, in turn, require proper institutional support; otherwise, the effects expected from its adoption shall have little or no result. This aspect is relevant in relation to other aspects such as the adoption of community policing, the use of information technologies, and assessment mechanisms. Education is relevant since its objective is creating a new culture of policing practice.

**Brazil’s national curricular plan**

In 2000, the Brazilian Ministry of Justice, through the National Department of Public Security (SENASP) released a new police training plan, with the purpose of standardizing police education among the different federal states. The absence of specific police training policies and assessment criteria led the federal government to define the first set of national requirements for police education. These were redefined in 2003 with the incorporation of new elements, as part of an initiative taken in the first term of office of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. In 2005, there was another revision in the training plan, which was once again amended in 2009. This latter change was for the purpose of coordinating training with perspectives created by PRONASCI (the National Program of Public Security with Citizenship). PRONASCI was launched in 2007 by the Ministry of Justice to support actions to reduce violence in accordance with the principles of safety and citizenship. Enhancing the quite low status of public security professionals was one of the goals of PRONASCI, and in the training realm this included education grants (bolsa-formação). These were financed by the Ministry of Justice, and provided a salary supplement to those who attend training courses. This included military police officers (officers and soldiers), civil police officers (delegados and detectives), firefighters, and other professionals connected with public security, such as prison staff (Riccio & Basílio, 2007). The amount of the allowance was R$400.00, and in the first year more than 250,000 security professionals were receiving grants.

PRONASCI was a program that has gathered multiple initiatives under its umbrella. Some of those actions had begun before the program’s launch and other ones were established later. The guidelines for police training in the Brazilian Curricular Plan were established before PRONASCI’s launch, but all of its policies were continued and state training programs for Brazilian officers and other security professionals were obliged to follow them. Thus, one of PRONASCI’s main goals was to enforce the new curricula.
For example, an important PRONASCI policy was the creation of national educational grants for police employees (Bolsa-Formação), and to quality their officers for these grants the states had to follow the guidelines. These kinds of strategies for strengthening training guidelines continue today.

The program envisioned ensuring basic cognitive, operational, and attitudinal competency in the following areas: fast learning, flexibility of thought, objectivity, method of organization, being observant, oral and written expression skills, interpretation ability, responsibility, ability to be cautious and adapt to new situations, coordination spirit, physical fitness, and ability to work in teams, among others. Attention was also given to enhancing professional’s skills in planning, implementing, and assessing programmatic activities.

The new curriculum also involved an ethical dimension that emphasized respect for human rights as an element underlying all decision-making and action. The idea was to ensure compatibility between human rights and police efficiency. A great deal of stress was placed on valuing different social groups, especially the most vulnerable ones, and stressing how they provide a context in which the police action will be carried out. For example, in case of Amazonas, which is considered here included diverse indigenous groups that lead a traditional life, who are turn linked to the region’s vast biodiversity.

Other important contexts involved racial minorities, disfavored populations, and gender issues.

The model training plan that was instituted allowed for some flexibility in its implementation, so that additional content that could be combined in accordance with regional need. Training was understood to be an open process, and aimed at the formation of networks among the teachers and security institutions, so as to spread a new pattern of practice among Brazilian security institutions. The knowledge and experience of public security professionals was accordingly respected, and the pedagogic principles for training made space for taking these into account.

The guidelines set forth by this new national training plan were ambitious, aimed at changing fundamental aspects of Brazilian police forces. The research question was, where the police and other security institutions involved able to incorporate its content?

Training military police officers in Amazonas

The region of Amazonas was selected for study because military police training there was brand new in all respects and could be responsive to our research findings. Until 2002, all officers of the Amazonas State Military Police were trained in other states, such as São Paulo, Ceará, and Rio Grande do Sul. Due to its geographic isolation and limited economic development, there was no independent training academy there. It could be observed that military police officers responsible for street patrolling and managing their department were trained in ways that were distinct from the reality they faced on the ground. There was no special focus on what was going on in their state, nor on fundamental characteristics of their region and its diverse cultures. Most obviously, this state includes almost 20% of Brazil’s land area, but has a population of only 3,590,985 million inhabitants. The population is concentrated in Manaus (the capital), which has with 1,861,838 inhabitants. Logistics in the state are complex, and several cities and regions can only be reached by air or by river.

The first locally conducted officer training class in Amazonas was the result of a partnership between the Military Police and the State University of Amazonas (UEA). This Bachelor course in Public and Citizen Security was held between the 2002 and
2005, lasting a total of four years. Fifteen students were selected by public entrance examination to be part of the class. They were all unmarried; 40% had attended private rather than public secondary schools; nine were studying at another university when they joined this new career; and four students already had a higher degree. The course of study they pursued was prepared based on federal guidelines, and, taking into account local adaptations to take into account the reality of working in this vast region, the central concepts of the national plan were incorporated into the program.

The course ran for four years. The faculty members were employees of the UEA and the Military Police of Amazonas. Each institution was responsible for the selection of teachers and instructors, all of whom had the equivalent of at least a university degree. The ‘basic’ training subjects anthropological, sociological, philosophic, psychological, ethical-professional, political, behavioral, and economic in nature. There were also courses on information technology and legal topics. The ‘professional’ training subjects included theories and practices of police techniques, but there were also courses on operations research, statistics, and technology applications in public security. The participants also fulfilled a required number of internship hours with different police units, taking on both operational and administrative duties. Finally, each student was required to submit a thesis paper at the end of the course (Universidade do Estado do Amazonas, 2002). Students were awarded a university Bachelor’s degree upon its completion.

**Views of participants**

This research adopted a qualitative methodology for examining student’s perceptions of the training process in Amazonas. This approach was chosen in order to understand in an exploratory way the details of implementing federal training guidelines in a particular locale, and how local issues (which in Amazonas are particularly unique) were incorporated into the training regime. Because the training program was new and still small, it offered the possibility of responding to the findings of our study. Those interviewed were among the first class of officer candidates trained in Amazonas. The objective of the research was to understand how the first police officers to be trained under this program formed perceptions about their profession, the meaning of policing in a democratic society, and their role in the specific Amazonian context.

In-depth interviews were conducted rather than employing familiar closed-ended survey questions. Many of the cultural and political issues involved in transitioning from an authoritarian tradition to democratic policing are not reflected in research on policing in the northern hemisphere, nor are the dynamics of an officer class that is as socially and economically distant from street-level workers as they are in the Brazilian Military Police. Instead, we opted for an approach that would let us discover and clarify the subtleties involved in these issues, letting the respondents speak in their own words. The paper thus provides a first step toward developing a research agenda for policing in Brazil. The conclusions presented here are based on a collaborative analysis by the authors, who also conducted the interviews.

The program had 13 original graduates, of which four could be interviewed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with them in March and April of 2008. All were serving as officers in the Amazonas State Military Police. It was difficult to reach other graduates in their class, because they were serving in cities throughout the state of Amazonas in locations that could be reached only by boat or airplane. As a result, only graduates who were serving in Manaus were interviewed during the research. Other class members were contacted were agreeable to being interviewed, but could not be
reached and could not be in Manaus between March and April 2008. So, only graduates
serving in Manaus were able to schedule an interview. Despite the small sample, the
officers who were interviewed and those not responding to the research shared a
common profile.

The interviews were conducted by one of the coauthors. They were conducted in
the battalions in which each of the officers was designed to serve. Complete privacy
was provided during the interviews, and they were conducted in a room in which only
the interviewer and the interviewee were present. The interviews lasted between one
hour and a half and two hours on average. The interview sessions were recorded and
then transcribed for analysis. We gave particular credence to the accounts of different
respondents who had similar experiences, for these suggested common themes. We paid
particular attention to aspects of the major competing views in Brazilian policing, those
reflecting tradition and reform. The training guidelines are part of a more general fed-
eral project aiming to promote a democratic and plural society. Those values impact
directly the visions police officers have of their occupational identity, their relationship
with society and the meaning of their careers in this context.

The first point to be emphasized is that the officers we interviewed choose a military
police career. The interviewees introduced themselves not only as policemen (they were
all male), but also as military officers; they had taken on two identities, in a combination
that – as we have seen – are not always compatible. Second, it was striking how much
the interviewees were aware that they will be responsible for providing protection to the
citizenry. State public security agents have the duty of ensuring the preservation of pub-
lic order, as well as safety of people and property. A third theme in the interviews cen-
tered on the stability of public employment and its opportunities for career development.

Lieutenant ‘A’ was certainly interested in job security and career advancement:

The main reason is linked to the fact that it is a profession in which you deal directly with
the society, where the values of discipline and hierarchy are respected; besides the fact that
I have always wanted to be a police officer and have always respected this profession, in
addition to the security of having a public job which could give me the conditions needed
to evolve in this career (Lieutenant A).

Lieutenant ‘A’ also stressed discipline and hierarchy. His construction of his new
identity is interesting, since the reproduction of the Army military model and its rank
hierarchy in the military police is required by the Brazilian Constitution.

Another point that arose in the interviews referred to guiding and monitoring the
behavior of their subordinates, with the objective of maintaining order, discipline, and
efficiency in the ranks. They worried about their subordinates’ performance, since their
own reputations would depend on that. Again, Lieutenant ‘A’:

The officer has a great responsibility in the deployment of troops, guiding the actions which
shall be taken during the service, in addition to inspecting its progress, to lead in those
events in which the presence of an officer is requested, to keep constant contact with their
immediate superiors who are coordinating the service all over the city, to check if the vehi-
cles are where they are supposed to be, to keep order and discipline, and from there, the
contact with the citizen who needs this crucial service for his/her protection (Lieutenant A).

The interviewees focused on the quality of the service rendered, and about the nega-
tive consequences for their image that might result from managerial mistakes they
might make. In their view, public order and social peace depend on their competent
performance. They very much voiced a conservative, bureaucratic view of police work,
rather than the more innovative – and risky – perspective advocated in their training curriculum. Reform meant acknowledging the role of police as members of a bureaucracy and applying its rules.

In addition, they referred to contradictions between democratic values, policing, and the realities of Brazilian society. Differentiating themselves from the past was an important consideration. Among these officers, condemnation of the anti-democratic acts of the old military regime was strong. In today’s values, the police stand as the ‘guardian of democracy.’ The corporate spirit does not change, but the ways of thinking and acting are altered. One officer noted that police needed to change because in the recent past it had supported authoritarian laws and military dictatorship. However, this justification for change did not translate into a vision of a more contemporary policing model, less structured by bureaucratic hierarchies, and more aimed at prevention and integration with other institutions of the criminal justice system.

We saw evidence of a vision of democracy which is connected with a very important aspect of the country’s recent history, which is the precedence of social rights in relation to the political ones. This is an enduring feature of the Brazilian political culture. In the twentieth century, during Vargas’ authoritarian period, social rights were granted to the working masses before they achieved any political rights. The idea was that the state had custody of the people, since the people were unable to responsibly exercise their civic freedoms (Werneck Vianna, 2001). Officer ‘E’ articulated this view, that more humane policing is required, because society acknowledges the police as their main guardian, and is largely unable to manage its own path:

For some, democracy is still a word distant from reality, maybe due to a recent past in which the police practiced some acts on behalf of national security, and in order to end this distortion, we have the duty to progress as soon as possible to undo this absurd misunderstanding. Democracy is the exercise of the rights that each one of us has and owns, through the evolution of conquests and constitutional guarantees throughout our republican history. It is a historic legacy in which each one of us has a share, since it is meant to offer equal opportunities to all within a country, even one as big as ours; it means to respect the principles adopted by it and apply them to the benefit of the greatest possible number of citizens, to distribute the revenue and create jobs; it means to provide enough job for as many people as possible; it means ensuring the right to ask protection from the State, it means much more than being able to elect their representatives, it means much more that voting and being voted on; all of this represent the base of a democracy that gets more consolidated every day and that progresses in the improvement of quality of life to everyone, everything ensured by a more human police, which begins to appear now, designed to protect a society that considers the police its greatest guardian (Lieutenant E).

This view is similar to that revealed in Heyman’s (2002) study of the relationship between American police officers of Hispanic origin and Mexican and Central America immigrants. Officer’s perceptions of newcomers were marked by moral judgments based on the idea of mercy, superiority due to their position, and paternalism.

Our interviewees also saw an association between the practice of democracy and security. One perspective on the military police was that it was the main instrument guaranteeing the order and safety on which democracy depends. Lieutenant ‘A’ reaffirmed this view:

Democracy is the power of the people, by the people and for the people. It is a society turned to the achievement of the common well-being and it is through the police forces that this same society is ensured the feeling of safety it desires, the Military Police being in charge of keeping the public order focused on the citizen. Democracy is extensive; it is for
all, based on respect, on the protection and in the fundamental rights provided for in the Federal Constitution (Lieutenant A).

Concerning their training, the interviewees stated that the course lived up to their expectations and was of satisfactory quality. The courses objectives, as they understood them, both in terms of the facilities offered and the quality of the instructors:

Yes, definitely, all of them, officers and teachers were always ready to settle any doubts. Our officers are constantly taking courses outside the state to improve techniques and tactics that are needed in the performance of the Military Police Officer in his/her daily service, where all the instructors were chosen through a rigorous selection within the PM, such as the presentation of résumés and qualification internships; as for the teachers, they were recruited among the best ones available, which gave us the chance to be able to count on the best possible qualification in the basic subjects, where all the knowledge acquired made it possible to have a better performance in the service (Lieutenant O).

Nevertheless, they highlighted points that could be improved, such as the preparation of the faculty members:

I believe that concerning the Academy instructors, there should be a staff of officers destined exclusively to teaching and instruction, this way there could be a greater dedication and consequently, a higher level of learning, more qualification courses should be open to deal with the teaching, that if it were possible to allow the teachers of UEA to experiment the routine inside the headquarters, make them familiar with the situations that are part of the police officer routine, and even with the language used, then we would have, the way I see it, a better integration among all the people involved in the teaching process (Lieutenant E).

According to Marion (1998), instructors should be chosen based on their knowledge, their skills to instruct, and having good personal qualities such as camaraderie, maturity, enthusiasm, confidence, and high self-esteem. In spite of the flexibility in the classroom practice, it has been observed that the instructor’s concern is to transmit the syllabus established in the course plan. One of their responsibilities was to adapt the national plan to local conditions and resources. In this, despite their attempts, there was room for improvement. Interviewees were satisfied by the opportunities for participating in community events that were provided. These allowed them to interact with the kinds of communities that they soon would be working in:

Yes, we participated and with positive results, in several activities that were carried out by the Course Coordination throughout the semesters, such as seminars, lectures, visits to institutions such as Gustavo Capanema, which takes care of children, And also escorting several international authorities which came to our State. It worth mentioning that we took part in great events in which there were lots of people, thousands of people, as was the case of football games, Parintins Folcloric Celebration, among others (Lieutenant O).

Class visits, internships, and classroom instruction helped them learn about areas that had previously been unknown, especially places where there were large numbers of destitute people and land invasions by squatters. They allowed students to get in touch, in a fragmented way, with a bit of social, political, economic, and cultural features of the cities in which they were to perform their new duties.

Once we graduated in our own state, all the subjects were focused on the reality we experience here, and it was not necessary for us to get familiar with these aspects, as it happened in the past when the officers graduated outside Amazonas and a considerable time was required to adapt themselves to the conformities herein existing (Lieutenant A).
On the other hand, none of those interviewed reported learning anything about the connection between this new knowledge and innovative policing models. The students also formed the view that society did not know much about them, and were unaware of the ‘non-coercive’ aspects of their work:

We were always invited to integrate work teams and destitute communities and that was very good, since we had a direct contact with the citizens near to us, asking why were those students wearing the Military Police uniform, so we would say: ‘We are students officers of the Military police, we are graduating, and soon we will be the newest class of officers’ and this was a surprise for almost everyone who heard us, which the way I see it, is due to the fact that the serious projects, the projects which are born with the public spirit, unfortunately are not duly clarified or informed to the community where we are going to work, and that is too bad because we are getting to know the community in which we will work, but the community does not know whom they are working with (Lieutenant E).

This discourse indicated a lack of integration between the police and the community. While they acknowledged the distance between the two, they offered no thoughts on ways to establish any relationship with the community. This signaled that they had not internalized important aspects of their training course.

Another concern of these officers was the possibility that the course might be discontinued.

What I’m afraid is that this great project that was the first class will get lost in time, I mean, there should be continuity, or even better, regularity in the provision of this course. I assess that the compliance with these expectations is not from one side only, but from all of us: Authorities, societies and police forces, not only the military, the civil, the federal and all the others comprising our public security system. I believe that we are performing our role and that this activity is the motive power to keep believing that it is possible to provide public security really citizen-oriented (Lieutenant E).

This doubt over the survival of the course reveals the fragile environment in which reform-oriented police training operated in Brazil.

Conclusion

This research aimed at understanding how training of the Brazilian officer class under new guidelines established by the Ministry of Justice implemented in a local context. Federal policy provided clear guidance to local training academies, and was in accord with a new model of policing for the nation. The guidelines emphasized prevention, proactivity in engaging the community, the adoption of modern crime-fighting strategies, and the role of the police in protecting human rights. It provided the regions with flexibility for accommodating local situations and resources, while promulgating clear new national expectations for policing.

In the case of Amazonas State, military police officers prior to 2002 had not been locally trained, and clear locally relevant guidelines for their performance had not been created. This was a problem in a Brazilian state with many indigenous inhabitants living in isolation, the widest expanse of rainforest in the world, and distinctive problems with eco-crime and land seizures. A qualitative study was carried on with the graduates. Only a few of them could be interviewed, because others were not reachable. Those who were interviewed agreed to do so voluntarily and did so in a very cooperative way. They participated in semi-structured interviews. They were questioned about
their decision to become a police officer, the meaning of this career in contemporary Brazil, the role of police in a democratic society and about their training experience. Those were the core issues of the project.

Among the findings were, first, that despite the training orientation toward a more responsive and less bureaucratic policing model, the officers shared a common identity as military personnel rather than as civilians in uniform. This a feature of Brazilian policing rooted in the military era. This characteristic was accompanied with the view that civil society is weak. In their perspective, the police are the protectors of this ‘weak’ society, from itself. Third, the training was seen as a satisfactory, but they did not see it as integrating with society in a sophisticated way. For them, joining in some meetings means community integration. In the end, we can conclude that despite their formal adherence to a modern pattern of policing, they still operate within the framework of the traditional perspective that dominates Brazilian policing. The training had little or none impact in changing this view.

Despite the innovative prescriptions of Ministry of Justice concerning officer class training, there are many obstacles to its implementation. There is a gap between the local reality and the guidelines from Brasilia. The discrepancies between policy and practice observed in Amazonas were not a question of training efficacy per se, but reflected persisting problems for implementing policies by the Federal government to improve Brazilian policing. The local reality must be considered and object of specific policies. The impact of police training in Brazilian police, as we could see from a particular experience, must be considered with other aspects such as organizational and cultural ones. The adoption of new policies is not simple and a better knowledge of its contexts is required. This paper tried to explore the issues concerning the police training. Further research is necessary to understand the distinctive dimensions of policing in Brazil.

Notes on contributors

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