# Os profissionais de segurança: Creating Moral Security Subjects in Bolsonaro's Brazil

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# Os profissionais de segurança

## Creating Moral Security Subjects in Bolsonaro's Brazil

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*Brazilian police and security personnel are generally known for their embrace of conservative, hardline positions on crime and on politics more generally. In this article, however, we seek to bring a fine-grained ethnographic perspective to bear on understanding the formation of conservative subjectivities in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo's security arena in the Bolsonaro era. Departing from traditional studies of police and state centered actors that have long dominated the literature on state violence in Brazil, we focus on the private guards working for Brazilian and multinational companies that are part of a recent boom in the commodification of security. We argue that in the past several years, the industry trains guards to become racialized security subjects through the elaboration of an aspirational identity that our interlocutors referred to as the "*profissional de segurança*." Drawing on long term ethnographic research, we demonstrate how guards were trained to think about their labor through a series of masculine, moral registers which contrast righteous work and being a "*cidadão de bem*" with a reimagined threat—the* vagabundo. *A better understanding of these discourses and their circulation is key to unpacking how nascent security identities found resonance in Bolsonaro's discourses.*

*A polícia e o pessoal da segurança brasileiros são geralmente conhecidos por adotarem posições conservadoras e de linha-dura contra o crime e contra políticas sociais. Neste artigo, porém, buscamos trazer uma perspectiva etnográfica fina para compreender a formação de subjetividades conservadoras na arena da segurança carioca e paulista durante a era Bolsonaro. Partindo de estudos tradicionais sobre policiais e atores centrados no Estado, e que há muito dominam a literatura sobre violência estatal no Brasil, focamos o caso dos vigilantes e seguranças que trabalham para empresas brasileiras e multinacionais e que são parte do recente boom de mercantilização da segurança. Argumentamos que,*



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*nos últimos anos, a indústria treina e socializa no trabalho estes seguranças para se tornarem sujeitos de segurança racializados por meio da elaboração de uma identidade aspiracional que tem sido chamada de* "profissional de segurança." *Com base em pesquisas etnográficas de longo prazo, no Rio de Janeiro e em São Paulo, demonstramos como estes profissionais pensam e falam sobre seu trabalho por meio de uma série de registros morais masculinos que contrastam trabalho justo e ser um* "cidadão de bem" *com uma ameaça reimaginada—o* vagabundo. *Uma melhor compreensão desses discursos e sua circulação é fundamental para desvendar como as identidades de segurança nascentes encontraram ressonância nos discursos de Bolsonaro.*

> You want to know about the *vagabundos*? Well, I'll tell you about them. They steal. They misrepresent ideas. They kill dreams, alienate the youth, and promote their total legacy of destruction.
>
> —Adilson, private security guard, retired military

In his last year of teaching before leaving the Rio-based private security training facility to go work as a manager for one of Brazil's largest electronic surveillance companies and study for the police entrance exam, instructor Mauro focused on cultivating a moral sensibility in the classroom. He explained that teaching security is not just about showing guards how to shoot a gun or chase after bad guys: "A lot of my work is to change the way that security guards think about their labor, to show them how their effort has value, to show them a path to respect. I always say to my classes, 'On your way here to training today, did you see anyone who was still at the bar drinking since 10 p.m. the night before?' They always know what I mean. Of course they did. 'But that wasn't you,' I tell them, '*You* are here! *You* are in class at 8 a.m. on a Saturday morning training to be a professional.' When I say this—that they matter, that they are professionals—their perception changes." As Mauro's discourse suggests and as we heard during nearly all the security guard trainings that we accompanied, aspiring guards are lauded for choosing righteous, professional work instead of what Mauro referred to as "*vagabundeando na rua*."

In late 2017, at another training school in the Tiradentes neighborhood of São Paulo, shooting instructor and bodybuilder Pedro told the aspiring guards that their new profession would require them to sacrifice themselves every single day for clients who do not deserve them. "Do *they* deserve your life?" he rhetorically asked the class, shaking his head. "Always be aware and protect your own life first in any situation." Much of Pedro's teaching went on to focus

on survival. Most of the precautionary YouTube videos he showed the students were of security guards being robbed and violently killed on the job. In these videos and in his narratives in the classroom, security guards were presented as the victims of *bandidos* and *vagabundos,* from whom they must constantly protect themselves, be it in physical or in moral terms. The trainees in the room commented on the images among themselves, and for a few moments they paid attention to their instructor's serious and severe tone. After class let out, we talked with one of the trainees, who was already working unofficially as a guard. "One thing is for sure true," he told us, "the guards who survive in the profession are those who identify with it. If we want to live, we must see private security work as at the heart of who we are."

As Mauro and Pedro's narratives in the classroom suggest, security training courses are about much more than education or technical preparation for the job. *Professionalism*, as cultivated in the schools above, is in part about acquiring skills needed to work effectively as a guard. But it also entails the cultivation of a specific (superior) moral identity. As aspiring security professionals, guards are taught to altruistically put themselves in danger for meager wages, gaining mainly in the symbolic currency of moral righteousness.

In both these discourses, and in many others that we heard during our fieldwork, clear lines are established between guards—who are positioned as hardworking, sacrificial, upstanding citizens—and their imagined lazy, immoral counterparts, signified by the figure of the *vagabundo,* a multivalent term with no precise English equivalent but whose meaning lies somewhere between thug, bum, and criminal. Private security is thus an important site for the cultivation of certain politicized subjectivities, which work to attract aspiring guards to the sector while also offering them an identity—that of security professional—and encouraging them to perform the low-wage work that protects the social order.

In this article, we explore how the Brazilian private security industry fosters the creation of moral security subjects using discourses surrounding "professionalism," positioning guards in opposition to imagined immoral, *vagabundo* others. We argue that this politicized moral security subject is a distinct product of the emerging far right and Bolsonaro era, a time which coincides with the expansion and consolidation of the private security sector.[1] As such, the growth of the notion of the virtuous "security professional" helps us to understand the resonance of Bolsonaro and far right discourses in practice and their dissemination and adoption in everyday security work.

The data used in this text draws on two in-depth research projects on private security undertaken between 2014 and 2020. Erika Robb Larkins's study was based on observation and interviews with company owners, managers, and low-level private security guards employed in commercial settings such as country clubs, shopping malls, and sports stadiums, mostly in Rio de Janeiro

city. Both projects included significant fieldwork in guard training facilities. Susana Durão focused on fieldwork in residential condominiums (both houses and apartments) and also accompanied security services in neighborhood associations and private security firms in São Paulo state. During the pandemic years of 2020 through early 2022, we conducted collaborative interviews and focus groups trying to better understand the influence of far-right politics on security guards' professional outlooks and understandings of their work. This article is generally informed by our long-term fieldwork and is also based on 35 jointly conducted interviews with security laborers split evenly across the two cities.[2] In the following sections, we provide a short history of the private security industry in Brazil, subsequently turning to an exploration of how guards think about and perform against the *vagabundo* as an oppositional category. Lastly, we examine how professionalism emerges as a morally inflected way of being in everyday labor practices and presentations of self.

## The Expansion of Private Security: A Political History

Over the last several decades, private security has become ubiquitous in Brazilian cities. Security guards are a common sight, protecting schools, offices, commercial spaces, and condominiums. Nationally, the current number of registered guards employed in the sector is over 525,790.[3] If we consider the sizeable unregistered security market, which is estimated to be much larger than the formal one, then private guards vastly outnumber police.[4] Furthermore, far more guards are certified to work than are employed in the sector, suggesting the presence of an excess labor pool, which functions to keep wages low and guards easily replaceable.[5]

The private security sector grew substantially in the 1980s and 1990s, decades that analysts have referred to as an unfinished or disjunctive democracy.[6] Rising violence, a dysfunctional justice system, and constant security-related rumors, or what Teresa Caldeira calls the "talk of crime," all fed demand for increased forms of security, leading to the emergence of an entire microeconomy of private protection.[7] Security guards became a fixture of the urban landscape, as access control services proliferated along with the growth of gated condominiums and other semiprivate spaces. Guards were also employed to transport valuables and protect banks, and to provide an additional layer of personal protection to the businesspeople and VIPs who found themselves the frequent targets of kidnappings.

From the 2000s onwards, during the Lula and Dilma administrations, private security became more formalized, as the sector underwent organization and unionization. In 1990, there were only 82 private security companies nationally. This number had grown to 1,386 in 2002 and to 2,282 in 2012.[8] At the same time, as was the case in many industries across Brazil and globally,

private security work underwent significant outsourcing, as in-house service provision was replaced by third-party labor.[9] Competition for contracts grew, driving guard salaries down. And while formalization of private security standardized wages, set forth labor regulations, and created contractual obligations for companies, it also stabilized and cemented private security as low-wage, unskilled work with very little career mobility. Private security work became one of the few ways for men with little education to secure a *carteira assinada,* or formal employment contract.

Symbolic discourses about security's centrality to urban Brazil also gained steam from the 2000s onward—not that security workers were well viewed or trusted, but the idea of armed men in uniform came to be considered essential and normal in all sorts of middle-class environments. Today, private security draws predominately on the precarious labor of poorly remunerated security guards, who come from the bottom echelons of the social structure. In Rio, most are low-income Afro-Brazilian men and in the São Paulo metropolis more are Northeastern migrants. Consequently, and as we have written elsewhere, security work is racialized work rooted in anti-Blackness. Security guards are trained to guard and preserve white commercial and residential spaces, discern who is a client or guest and who is a suspect, a process which often relies on racial profiling.[10] Furthermore, guards are themselves subject to constant suspicion, and when violence occurs and goes viral in the media, they are the ones that are blamed.[11] In this way, security guards are a part of the racialized labor hierarchy, less akin to blue-collar police and closer to lower-class service workers like maids, janitors, gardeners, and drivers.[12]

As antipathy towards the leftist government grew starting with the mass protests in 2013, and with the subsequent election of Bolsonaro in 2018, security was placed at the center of the electoral agenda, a shift which had important repercussions for the private security sector. The emergent far-right political discourse configured security—in its different and combined national, public, and private modalities—as a pillar sustaining not only an authoritarian political economic order, but also a new social and moral order that had been under threat by the Workers' Party (PT) during its presidencies and by left-wing state-level leadership. The left and its governments were cast as inattentive, if not adverse, to security and security workers. In the narratives of the guards we interviewed, the PT was described as morally corrupt, responsible for weakening the country by undermining security agents. The left and its politicians were particularly criticized for their embrace of human rights, which were generally described by our research subjects as "*bandido* rights."[13] These rights were seen as directly fostering criminality,[14] threatening all *cidadãos de bem*, who are seen as victims of the corrupt political system.[15] Thus, quite ironically, human rights have been and continue to be seen as putting unfair constraints on security laborers, and they were understood by many of the


Figure 1. Rodrigo Leão: *Privilégios ameaçados* (2015).

guards we spoke with as an affront to security laborers' autonomy and to *their* right to do their work and to inflict violence as they see fit.[16]

Debates about security also figured into new reactionary middle- and upper-class politics that cast the Left as taking away supposedly hard-won class status and affluence.[17] This discourse is extremely well captured by graphic artist Rodrigo Leão's 2015 revision of the painting of Debret's dinner scene, entitled *Privilégios ameaçados*. The piece, which depicts a wealthy couple being served by a cook, a nanny *and* guarded by a private security guard, underscores the endurance of racialized privilege and servitude in contemporary Brazil and locates private security guards within that discourse. The rendering also illustrates the ambiguity of the professional security subject we analyze here: situated between the low-status domestic servant and the promise of being part of a modern, desirable, technologically advanced, and dignified professional path, even if in service to ongoing racial and social inequality, as the painting so well exposes.

In contrast to the Left, which was framed as undermining and undervaluing contributions from security personnel, the emerging far right was viewed by the security guards we interacted with as an ally—a force with the potential to save society that would open friendly channels of communication between

the government and agents of law and order. As we mentioned above, security was at the heart of Bolsonaro's campaign for president. Security's centering came in two primary forms, both of which were resonant for guards. The first way this occurred was through Bolsonaro's positioning of himself as a security world insider. The idea here was that, through his own personal history in the military, he intuitively understood and was sympathetic to the concerns of police and security workers more broadly.

Bolsonaro spoke directly to the lowest ranks of the army and police forces, winning their support.[18] But while some observers have underlined the advancement of militarism within the government—with the Bolsonaro administration functioning almost as a "military party" and rehabilitating the military's historic role in government and public opinion[19]—they have not included the immense group of security guards, which outnumber police, in the analysis. These guards are also spread throughout the country and diffused throughout private companies and organized in private unions. Our point is that Bolsonaro's political popularity among security professionals not only stems from his past and his military legacy; it has also reflected the way he promotes an understanding of a morally polluted Brazil that he and his supporters should clean up, based on an idea of a transversal presence of *vagabundos*. According to the political philosopher Marcos Nobre, this ideological resonance is visible in the way Bolsonaro presented himself as the "candidate of the collapse,"[20] and afterwards as the head of the government based on a "logic of war and death."[21] During his government, he has continuously undermined democratic institutions.

The guards we spoke to regularly talked about Bolsonaro as "one of us," evoking an image of him as a familiar and intimate figure. Bolsonaro was appreciated "for being in solidarity with the suffering of those who work in this area," as Roberto, a 36-year-old guard working as a supervisor in a shopping mall explained it. "He knows how to value us, how to value the security worker. This motivates the worker to do his job—to do a really good job actually. To get better results." Guards felt empowered by what they saw as Bolsonaro's carte blanche trust in them, especially as opposed to the sorts of constant (meddlesome) regulation they expected from leftist politicians.

Bolsonaro also circulated a second, related discourse pertaining to security. He presented himself and his administration as the only force that could bring order and good family values to the disorder of contemporary Brazil. This vision was to be achieved through the adoption of hardline positions on crime and *vagabundo* ways of thinking and acting and by empowering security agents to resolve these problems. "The *vagabundo* no longer has a face," João, a 37-year-old police officer working "*bico*" in private security told us. "He wears a suit and tie and promotes what is wrong, so there has to be someone in power who will go head-to-head with him and say: I'm the boss of this shit."

For nearly all the guards we spoke to, Bolsonaro was that someone. He was the "defender of legality and morality," as Vitor, a 32-year-old security manager put it. Bolsonaro thus presented (and continues to present) himself as an advocate for an imagined good citizen—the *cidadão de bem*—by which he meant the armed male citizen who puts property and private security ahead of everything and every right. This heteronormative, anti-feminist, capitalist ideology resonated powerfully with many security workers, since it was aligned with their personal beliefs and also reflected the foundational norms of the profession. Indeed, the great majority of the security laborers we met told us, in one way or another, that good Brazilian citizens live in a morally polluted society, full of *vagabundos, bandidos*, and immoral opportunists. Security work was seen as one crucial mechanism for them to fight against these corrupting forces.

In sum, right out of the gate, Bolsonaro and the far right contributed to the construction of the notion of security work as a dignified profession, aligned with a moral campaign to instill "order." Yet this symbolic and moral strengthening occurred mostly in the discursive realm. To date, there have been no efforts to meaningfully reform the sectors' precarious labor conditions or to help push through new legal provisions that the entrepreneurial wing of the private security industry has been trying to get approved by the Senate since 2010.[22] Instead of developing a clear policy for security reform, the president focused on a policy of liberalizing citizen access to guns as well as promoting personal self-defense.[23] Therefore, deployment of narratives around security professionalization that have gained prevalence in the past several years do not reflect systemic or policy-level changes, instead focusing on opposing the demands of left-wing citizens.[24] As we shall now explore in more depth, guard work has become about the implementation of these ideologies through the micro-everyday work of both containing and eliminating the *vagabundo* and performing a professional identity as moral men.

## Containing the *Vagabundo*: Security Discourse in Action

### *Bandido*, *Marginal*, and *Vagabundo*: A Review

In the Brazilian cultural imaginary, *marginal, bandido, and vagabundo* are discursive figures that are the target of crime prevention efforts but are also impregnated with contextual historical meanings.[25] On the one hand, these terms, and the identities they depict, embody morally charged categories of accusation that are used to justify police actions. However, and as we highlight here, they also work collectively as oppositional categories against which the identity of the righteous moral security laborer is constructed. Rather than attempt a genealogy of these terms and how they differ from one another in the eyes of security personnel, we draw on the specific narratives of the security guards we interacted with to show the presence of a new, politicized

overlay superimposed on top of these terms—mainly encapsulated in the word "*vagabundo*"—that works to reinforce the struggle for law and order as a moral and political conflict.

In law enforcement in Brazil, the traditional, longstanding foe of police is the *bandido*, a signifier which refers both to drug traffickers in favelas and to other members of organized criminal activities. *Bandidos* are sometimes also referred to as *marginais,* denoting a subject position located at the margins of the law. In anthropology and sociology scholarship in particular, scholars have historically sought to contextualize the *bandido* identity, showing similarities and differences between the old cultural category of *malandro* and *malandragem,*[26] and connecting the notion of *bandido* and *marginal* to the state's failed attempts to incorporate a significant portion of society, especially young people, into the formal job market as productive law-abiding citizens.[27] Alba Zaluar, for instance, drawing on local discourses she observed in her ethnographic work in Rio de Janeiro's Cidade de Deus, sees the "*bandido* identity" as diametrically opposed to the idea of the honest and humble "worker."[28] Other social scientists have sought to explain the social and economic roots of the *bandido* through the correlation between crime and poverty, especially since the nineties when violent crime rose significantly. As such, scholars sought to add complexity to the polarization between worker and *bandido* by noting that political and economic conditions did not provide sufficient jobs or offer dignified pay, creating a situation where living and earning in the margins was (and is) one of the only options for poor city dwellers.[29] Yet another thread of literature sought to shed light on the ongoing realities of structural violence and armed conflict that define life in Brazil's cities as related to the weak presence of democracy,[30] and even as an integral part of everyday social relations, especially in favelas.[31]

Further reflective of the violence that permeates life in Brazilian cities is the widespread societal discourse surrounding the *bandido* as one who deserves violence, as expressed in the common expression: "*Bandido bom é bandido morto.*" Many scholars attribute the collective feeling of public revenge encapsulated in this phrase to the normalization of police violence, vigilante justice, and the disdain for the Human Rights agenda even after Brazil began democratizing its institutions post-1984.[32] Such so-called "populist punitivism," as encapsulated in the saying, has also been interpreted as an ideology rooted in Brazilian history,[33] reflecting an inquisitorial mindset that informs the war on drugs and frames *bandidos* as "enemies" of the state who must be physically eliminated at all costs.[34] It is also suggestive of how little room there is in the Brazilian context for the resocialization of Brazil's nearly one million incarcerated individuals, condemned to be forever *bandidos*, better off dead. Recent expressions of this same sentiment—that criminals should be exterminated to save society—have been conveyed by President Bolsonaro and

his supporters. For example, the president tweeted the increasingly common phrase "*CPF cancelado,*" incorporating cancellation of the basic form of Brazilian identification into his praise for hardline police action.[35] This is just one way in which Bolsonaro has repeatedly lauded police for their extremely violent behavior, including celebrating massacres in Jacarezinho (28 people killed) in May 2021 and Vila Cruzeiro (24 people killed) in May 2022 as successful instances of police efficacy.

## Instability of Traditional Categories of Identification: Who is the *Vagabundo*?

With the conservative political turn of the last few years, we have observed in our interactions with security workers that the notion of *bandido* has expanded to intersect with the more ethereal category of *vagabundo*. That is, the idea of the morally corrupt enemy of the state has shifted from being directly related to drug dealers, robbers, and those engaged in illicit activities and lifestyles to now include new forms of "moral predators," such as politicians and all the invisible people involved in corruption. If the *bandido* was seen as the opposite of good, working-class people and as an illicit challenge to the legal norms of the state, or even an identity "apart" from organized society, the *vagabundo* denotes something more ambivalent. In Rosana Pinheiro-Machado's analysis, "*Vagabund*o is an empty signifier that encompasses lots of people: Street vendors, the unemployed, the homeless, the poor, northeasterners, prostitutes, LGBTs, activists, bandidos. . . . But the vagabundo is defined not only in opposition to honest work (and worker), as the bandido is, but is structured in unequal relations of power along racial, class, and ideological lines."[36] For the conservative citizen, the *vagabundo* is always the "other." "We" are human, good, intelligent achievers endowed with Christian morals. Everything we have is the merit of the sweat of our work, and what we don't have is because the *vagabundos* receive privileges; they are nursed and babied.[37] *Vagabundagem* is seen as a decaying and morally bankrupt stain on society, and the *vagabundo* as a person who refuses to embody the attributes of the secure life of organized society.

From the perspective of security workers, the *vagabundo* defies the moral sense of social order itself, the one that they are supposed to protect. In some contexts, *vagabundo* is even recognized as "the technical term in use in policing environments," the correct one to use to refer to suspects, as one right-wing federal deputy publicly admitted in the program *62 Minutes*, featured on the YouTube channel for Jovem Pan, a Brazilian commercial radio and TV network which promotes the positions of the Bolsonaro government.

"There are *vagabundos* everywhere," guards say. But adding to the problem of the *vagabundo*'s prevalence is the fact that is increasingly hard to tell who

precisely they are. "Today, it is impossible to identify the *vagabundo*. He is everywhere! He is in all parts of society," José, a 25-year-old guard working in a condominium said. "The *vagabundo* exists at all levels, from politicians to traffickers," Adilson, a 51-year-old retired military officer working in private security, told us. As José and Adilson suggest, this means that the *vagabundo* is not reduced to just being lazy or accepting handouts nor are they simply outside the law like the *bandido.* Rather, the idea is that there is a kind of a *vagabundo* mindset at work that is eroding the efforts of good, hard-working citizens. The *vagabundo* is thus seen as a great deceiver, one who appears to be a person they are not, and who must be revealed for what they are via the careful observations of good citizens. Guards, therefore, and by extension all *cidadãos de bem*, are required to be vigilant in order to suss out the potentially hidden *vagabundos* among them. This requires them to be particularly attentive to behavior: "You can only tell a vagabundo by how he acts. You have to know how to look and observe because a lot of times that's the only way to really tell," explained Carlos, a 55 years-old security guard working as a supervisor in a mall. "Just at first glance, it's hard to identify the vagabundo," said Adilson, the retired officer. "But in the majority of cases, it is his attitude that sets him apart."

One area where we heard about a significant *vagabundo* presence was in the political realm. *Vagabundos* were said to occupy the executive and the judiciary, where *vagabundo* mindsets define guard's impressions of civil servants, and in particular the left-wing politician who is believed to proffer impunity to criminals by defending human rights and by engaging in corruption. As Douglas, a guard working in residential security told us, "Our Brazilian politics is a disgrace. It's a bitch. We live in a culture of deception." The central political enemy in these narratives was none other than Lula, who many guards represented as chief *bandido* and a king of the *vagabundos*.[38]

In summary, what we have observed is an everyday discourse, present across the security hierarchy, which marries criminality and leftist politics, merging these imagined figures into a single entity for targeted elimination. Playing with moral categories that clearly identify crime and criminals with a left-wing humanistic agenda and the leftist politicians themselves, guards reflect Bolsonaro's far right discourse, which advances the idea of a generalized decay of values associated with these actors. The discourse works, in turn, to nurture a more general hatred of the *vagabundo*, as the epigraph of this text suggests, as the one who "steals, misrepresent[s] ideas, kills dreams, alienate[s] the youth, and promotes a total legacy of destruction." As such, the *vagabundo* becomes the moral opposite of what a professional security worker should be. Albeit with some slight variations depending on who you talk to, in recent years, physically and politically neutralizing the *vagabundo* has come to be seen as at the heart of the work of the security guards and many others working in the *carreira das armas.* Positioning themselves as the saviors, they promote

an alternative society where private, modern, technological, and militarized professional protection is the solution for the country's return to a lost social and moral order.

## Eliminating and Controlling the *Vagabundo*

Generally, private security work is often militarized, even if asset protection work in practice is more tedium than action; the occurrence of crime is not so regular as the extremely aggressive narratives or the combat-style military guns and symbols that circulate on social networks and in WhatsApp groups would suggest.[39] When it comes to the *vagabundo,* an ethos of moral and material elimination predominates. During fieldwork we heard the following phrases: "The *vagabundo* has to be treated with iron and fire." "When it is possible, arrest; when not, use force and eliminate." "Everyone should have a weapon to defend themselves." "If a guard kills a thief, he should win a medal." "Security is the last brake on society." One of the most radical sentiments we heard came from Marcos, a 35-year-old aspiring guard: "Only violence generates understanding."[40] For Marcos and many others we spoke to, violence was framed as the only way to save the social order, to purge *bandidos* and *vagabundos* and their accompanying mindsets from society. Security professionals, therefore, see themselves as the last bastion of social morality in a country of *vagabundos*. Working in security is not just about protecting property and assets (as most previously conceived before 2018), but is also a way to access a moral superiority.

Despite such hardline statements, (unlike police) guards are seldom authorized to inflict such violence in the line of duty. As such, the moral work of controlling the *vagabundo* must be performed through everyday micro actions aimed at preventing them from entering secured spaces of leisure and consumption. Many security guards work in access-control settings, such as residential condominiums, shopping centers, sports venues, clubs—all settings which require a specific set of practices we call "hospitality security." As we have written elsewhere, hospitality security is a socio-technical assemblage which draws upon the built environment, technology, and the performances of security workers. It promotes feelings of safety and reassurance for guests and clients through a combination of vigilance and care.[41] Particularly paradigmatic of middle- and upper-class spaces of consumption and leisure, hospitality security creates environments that are supposedly distinct (and safe) from the imagined chaos of the wider city *and* free from manifestations of ostentatious violence typical to public security situations.[42] Much of guards' work in these places then, requires them to decide who is an invited guest or desirable potential customer and who is a potential *vagabundo,* whose presence would disrupt the sanctity of the space.

In anthropological terms, hospitality signifies the ability to receive and invite people to a private familiar environment, but also means permitting the unknown stranger to achieve the status of a guest.[43] Hospitality can also entail acting as an intermediary, performing the work of receiving a potential guest on behalf of a host, as is the case with service workers. As such, in hospitality security the cordial attributes of a guard's performance play a central role, but not as much as in the culturally ambivalent, traditionally rural terms analyzed by Buarque de Holanda's classic oeuvre.[44] In hospitality security, the urban cordial guard acts from a specific sense of order, which is tied directly to business concerns. The major task of cordial guards is to please clients and their guests and to find out who is not welcome and who might disrupt customers' sense of order, i.e., the *vagabundo.* Hence, hospitality is fundamental to Brazil's functioning as a "status society," that is, a society where social groups have developed "rights" to certain privileges in relation to the state and other social groups.[45]

Even if the *vagabundo* deserves violence, and may only speak in the language of violence, as Marcos suggested, to allow such violence to manifest openly in hospitality settings would destroy the myth of these spaces as safe and tranquil. To maintain harmony in residential and commercial environments, guards must domesticate violence, along with their own moral desires to impose order through violence, in order to ensure predictable social interactions. They may therefore surveil or stop those they suspect clients or guests will deem to be "undesirable" bodies and persons. But they will preferably do so through nonviolent actions or with relatively invisible force, to carefully maintain the crafted security bubble that has been constructed in these places. In malls, for example, when guards are informed by video surveillance monitors that someone is stealing, they are instructed to carry out what they call, sometimes ironically, "*abordagens sociais,*" not unlike the police concept of stop and frisk, but with caution and good manners.[46] Thus, in a subtle and often discreet way, guards must weed out those they suspect might become "problems"—in other words, people that guards think might look like *vagabundos*. Although guards, when pressed, will say that the *vagabundo* has no particular look and that *vagabundos* are prevalent across the social spectrum, guards also say they must think like those they are charged with protecting. This means mirroring the prejudices of their clients, for the sake of the security business. In practical terms, guards will profile Black, low-income youth panhandlers, and those they see as "badly dressed." The moralization of violence and the social authorization to decide who is perhaps a *vagabundo*—and therefore deserves to be followed, questioned, or even expelled from guarded spaces—reinforces private security as moral work.

## The Everyday Moral Work of Private Security: Performing Good Citizenship

In addition to curtailing the advance of *vagabundos* in guarded spaces, guards also see their work and their general position as professionals as one which exemplifies what it means to be a good citizen. In their narratives, the *cidadão de bem* is a gendered term, denoting the citizen who derives standing from being an honest taxpayer, a father of a heterosexual family, and one who obeys the law. "To live as a good citizen means to be able to raise your family with dignity," said 45-year-old Pedro, a residential guard. Similarly, 36-year-old Tiago told us, "A good citizen is one who chooses to live within the order. He's the guy who, regardless of social injustices, wakes up early, does his part at work and brings food home to his family." Notably, the guards paint a picture of the good citizen as someone who, even while experiencing the same structural prejudices as the *bandido*, still choses to be on the side of good. As Julian, a 37-year-old aspiring guard put it, "A good citizen believes in human virtue and cultivates virtue inside himself and in his life regardless of his social context."

Such a choice, in the opinion of the guards, leads to exploitation. Marcelo, a 34-year-old former bank guard, affirmed that: "Being a good citizen means that you are exploited. It means making less money." The virtuous guard, therefore, subordinates himself to an exploitative work regime rather than rebelling against it. Unlike the *vagabundo*, he graciously accepts it, clinging to the accompanying moral capital rewarded by such a choice. In the words of the same guard, "The worker is enslaved by the law. The *vagabundo* doesn't accept enslavement." While at first glance this perspective seems to almost extoll the *vagabundo* for choosing freedom, it also helps us to understand the festering resentment that can lead to hatred and violence. The fact that guards, because of their moral commitments, must opt for exploitation while the *vagabundo* gets off scot-free, is seen as fundamentally unjust. Such injustice can only be justified through the advancement of a hero narrative, which constructs guards and other low-wage workers as self-sacrificing moral professionals, constantly challenged by the daring freedom of the *vagabundo* to escape that same "normal" destiny.

In contrast with the *bandido*—who always makes more money—guards see themselves as poor but moral. "The worker is gold," a guard named Phillipe affirmed. "Marginals live on stolen money. And the public employees, well, their salaries are all paid by taxes, which is stolen money too." The bridge between the *marginal* and the public employee made by Phillipe, and by other guards as well, reflects how the category of *vagabundo* has expanded across society, paradigmatically mirroring the government's moral politics. Thus, *vagabundo* or *marginal* includes state employees, who are not considered as

productive as the private sector poor workers are. Guards become morally valued for enduring this condition of life. As Pedro, a commercial security guards put it: "The good citizen wants to live his everyday life without exploiting anyone, just through his own sacrifice and with his own sweat."

The *vagabundo* is someone who not only breaks the law but also defies the social order, ultimately undermining how a society should function—through hard work, sacrifices, not cheating, and freedom. Therefore, with the emergence of the new authoritarian far right, the humble private security guard is repositioned as a key player—an essential building block necessary for the construction of a renewed Brazil—a moral Christian, defender of family values and of the man as head of the family, humble and poor, but ideally incorruptible in his professional subjectivity.

We do not intend to imply that there is complete ideological uniformity among guards. Rather, we underline the tendency of "professionalism" to work as a moral principle for guards, antagonistic to the notion of *vagabundo*. In that sense, the ascendance of the moral professional guard is related and is driven by the Bolsonaro discourse promoting a public and private securitized social order for Brazil. This discursive tendency was already being expressed in training classes for security guards even before Bolsonaro's rise, but it has become even more prevalent over the last four years, as evidenced in our fieldwork and interviews. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that other ideological discourses have also emerged from within the *carreira das armas*. One crucial example is the anti-fascist police officers, a police movement born in 2017 aimed at combatting what they saw as a growing tendency of fascism within the police and in society in general.[47]

The anti-fascist police promote the defense of human rights and associate themselves with groups of the left-wing parties. Thus, even within those who work in these armed professions, we can see the kind of polarization that has become prevalent within larger society. The vast majority of the guards that we interacted with, however, understand their work through the lens of Christian values, a life sacrifice, and the injustice of having to deal with a society full of *vagabundos*, including *vagabundo* guards.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it is essential to understand the significant role that the security guard as "professional" occupies in today's urban Brazil. Most residential, commercial, industrial, cultural, educational, transport, and leisure establishments have some form of private security, access control, or surveillance. These security professionals do not merely guard spaces. They also embody good manners and amicable behavior, modeling a kind of social order and set of moral values and discourses about professionalism. Furthermore, we underscore that the

moralization of the security field is a consequence of its politicization over several years. The growth and expansion of private security coincided precisely with the wider moralization of social life and order in Brazil.

What has emerged is a way of performing security that allows for both hard-line discourses and the deployment of more cordial modalities where necessary. Working in security means embracing the moral mission of cleansing society, even if that means using violence. As such, the new security professional does not have to be concerned with working under the constraints of human rights, where the violence used to resolve situations would be regulated and comply with the law. Rather, as a professional, the guard is free to use his own moral compass to determine who deserves violence and when. In that sense, to be a professional security guard means playing by the moral values and rules of the profession, which repudiates the *vagabundo* lifestyle.

With the rise of the far-right government, the security guard was offered an attractive proposition—the possibility of being elevated from a worker to a professional—a professional capable, with his president, of saving Brazil. In these terms, private security professionalization is not merely about the technological fetish of modernization and risk management tools; it also has to do with the sense of being a moral professional, capable of ordering socially and politically polluted Brazilian cities. In that sense, working within an anti-*vagabundo* morality, the humble security servant becomes a giant, a pillar of a new moral order. Becoming a guard and doing security work, as we have argued, is increasingly linked to the creation of a specific moral and political identity that has grown with the acceleration of the far right in Brazil. The rise of Bolsonaro to power coincided with the advancement of a certain set of moral discourses around security work which were in circulation before, but which became more acute under his leadership. This text has demonstrated the correlation between anti-*vagabundagem*, the formation of guards' professional identities, and the imperative of cordial work performances in hospitality spaces.

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## Notes

1. Jair Bolsonaro was elected President in 2018 in the second round, surpassing the left-wing PT candidate Fernando Haddad.

2. From the outset, we would like to acknowledge that our own subject position as researchers—both white women, one from the United States and one from Portugal and residing in Brazil—shapes the data that we are able to gather, our access to research subjects, and our ability to share (or not) in the experiences recounted during fieldwork. Despite the challenges of working in a highly masculine environment, our overall experience was that our "outsider" status facilitated access to the security worlds under study, especially when it came to creating rapport with hard-to-access elite security workers and discussing right-wing opinions.

3. Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, *Anuário brasileiro de segurança pública: 2021* (São Paulo, Brazil: FBSP 2021), 170.

4. Although officially the number of state security agents is larger (686,733), many analysts note that if we consider the number of guards that are estimated to be working in the *informal* market, the number of private security workers is likely around double that of all military and civil state police forces combined. See Susana Durão and José Correia Paes, *Caso Carrefour, racismo e segurança privada* (São Paulo: Editora Unipalmares, 2021).

5. In Brazil the "pluralization of policing" [Trevor Jones, and Tim Newburn, *Plural Policing: A Comparative Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2006); Ian Loader, "Plural policing and democratic governance," *Social & Legal Studies* 9, no. 3 (2000): 323–345] is not recent; it is in fact an historical pattern [Cleber Lopes, and Eduardo Paes-Machado, "A segurança em mutação: concepções, práticas e experiências no século XXI," *Lua nova: revista de cultura e política*, Número especial: A segurança em mutação, no. 114 (2021): 13–28]. Today, the presence of military and police agents in private security is widespread, even if it is often technically illegal and in violation of the Federal Law (Law 7,102 of 1983) which provides oversight in the industry. For example, high-ranking police often (illegally) own private protection firms, and low-ranking police often (illegally) work moonlighting with these same companies.

6. James Holston, *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

7. Teresa Caldeira, *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

8. Susana Durão and José Correia Paes, *Caso Carrefour,* 29.

9. In-house security today totals less than 5% of the formal market, which is monopolized by outsourced firms. Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública. *Anuário brasileiro de segurança pública: 2021* (São Paulo, Brazil: FBSP, 2021), 170.

10. Susana Durão and José Correia Paes, *Caso Carrefour,* 2021; Erika Robb Larkins, *The Sensation of Security: Private Guards and Social Order in Brazil* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press).

11. Ibid.

12. The proximity to low-level service workers is in direct tension with the aspirations of many private security workers, who see themselves as quasi-police and who often position themselves narratively as being on par with them in the larger security

hierarchy. Their police counterparts, however, view low-level security guards as a different, and much lower, class of laborers. In the field, we frequently heard police disparage private security workers as uneducated, unprepared, and uncouth.

13. After the democratic turn, in the 1990s, Brazilian cities experienced a rise in crime, along with a political and economic crisis. Even with the election of a leftist government and the introduction of stronger discourses around human rights, the traditional societal notion of "a good bandit is a dead bandit" did not go away. It did, however, mute the open expression of these violent discourses in certain settings. The political campaigns of 2018, however, expanded "police fetishism" [Susana Durão and Wellynton Souza. "The (Antifascist) Police Officer as Worker: Futurizing." *Society for the Anthropology of Work, Policing and Labor* (2020): 1–7] and reopened the door to the blatant expression of hate discourses, now leveled against the idea of the *vagabundo* as the principal foe to the new right and Christian order. Also, as Feltran underscores, state order has long coexisted with the power of criminal factions and militias in urban favelas. Gabriel Feltran, "Polícia e política: o regime de poder hoje liderado por Bolsonaro," *Novos estudos CEBRAP*, Debate (2021). The difference is that with the rise of Bolsonaro, that coexistence was taken to the center of national political life.

14. Julita Lemgruber, Ludmila Ribeiro, Leonarda Musumeci, and Thais Duarte, *Ministério público: guardião da democracia brasileira?* (Rio de Janeiro: CeSec, 2016).

15. Ether Solano, *Crise da democracia e extremismos de direita* (São Paulo: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Brasil, 2018), 12.

16. Social media has great impact in displaying the rage against *vagabundos* and the defense of security as the central technique for restoring order in Brazil. One of the most fundamental channels is "Brasil Paralelo," a company founded in 2016 that produces videos about politics and history with a far-right and Christian bias. The "Jovem Pan" radio station has grown so much that in 2017 the network had a total of around 100 owned and affiliated stations, spread across Brazil. Since Bolsonaro's election, this network's programs have specialized in ultra-conservative content, much of it based on generating moral panics and celebrating public security agents as heroes. Military and civilian police officers, many with their own YouTube channels, have reached levels of media popularity unthinkable in previous decades. Although social media contributed to the expansion of Bolsonaro's public support, WhatsApp and Telegram groups were definitely the main avenue for creating social adhesion to ultra-right and anti-*bandido* discourses.

17. Rosana Pinheiro-Machado, "No Brasil de Bolsonaro, as definições de vagabundo foram atualizadas," *The Intercept Brasil*, February 12, 2019. https://theintercept.com/2019/02/12/definicoes-vagabundo-atualizadas-bolsonaro/; Antonio José Bacelar da Silva and Erika Robb Larkins, "The Bolsonaro Election, Antiblackness, and Changing Race Relations in Brazil," *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean* Anthropology 24, no. 3 (2019): 893–913.

18. Marcos Nobre, *Ponto-final: a guerra de Bolsonaro contra a democracia* (São Paulo: Todavia, 2020).

19. Leonardo Avritzer, *Política e antipolítica: a crise do governo Bolsonaro* (São Paulo: Todavia, 2020).

20. Marcos Nobre, "O candidato do colapso: poder de Bolsonaro nasceu da devastação social e dela dependerá," *Piauí*, Oct 17, 2018.

21. Marcos Nobre, *Ponto-final,* 10–11.

22. Susana Durão and José Correia Paes, *Caso Carrefour*, 2021.

23. Isabel Figueiredo, David Marques, and Amanda Lagreca, "Segurança pública no governo Bolsonaro: alguns apontamentos / Special Report Series Bolsonaro Administration: The Disruptive Presidency in Brazil," Last modified March 31, 2022. https://pex-network.com/special-reports/page/2/.

24. Maurício Moura and Juliano Corbellini, *A eleição disruptiva: por que Bolsonaro venceu* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2019).

25. John Van Maanen, "The Asshole," in *Policing: A View from the Street*, ed. Peter K. Manning and John Van Maanen (New York: Random House, 1978), 221–238.

26. Roberto da Matta, (1979), *Carnavais, malandros e heróis: para uma sociologia do dilema brasileiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1997). See Georg Wink's recent analysis of the *jeitinho* for a useful critique.

27. Lúcio Kowarick, *Escritos urbanos*, (São Paulo: Editora 34, 2019).

28. Alba Zaluar, *A máquina e a revolta: organizações populares e o significado da pobreza* (Rio de Janeiro: Brasiliense, 1985). For youth involved in criminal activities, the association made between formal work and slavery is indicative of the relationship they consider to be the life of a "sucker," the name given to poor individuals who opt for a life "outside of crime." Alba Zaluar, "Condomínio do diabo: as classes populares urbanas e a lógica do ferro e do fumo," in *Crime, violência e poder,* ed. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1983), 249–277.

29. (Michel Misse, "Alguns aspectos analíticos nas pesquisas da violência na América Latina," *Estudos avançados* 33, no.96 (2019): 23–38; Sérgio Carrara, "Singularidade, igualdade e transcendência: um ensaio sobre o significado social do crime," *Revista brasileira de ciências sociais*, no.16 (1992); Roberto Kant de Lima, Michel Misse, and Ana Paula Mendes Miranda, "Violência, criminalidade, segurança pública e justiça criminal no Brasil: uma bibliografia," *BIB, Rio de Janeiro* 50, no. 2 (2000): 45–123; Gabriel de Santis Feltran, "Trabalhadores e bandidos: categorias de nomeação, significados politicos," *Tematicas* 15, no. 30 (2007):11–50. Furthermore, it is relevant to note that this process also entailed devaluing certain kinds of work. Street vendors, for example, "were regarded as belonging to a fraction of the population in between unemployment, vagrancy, and survival activities, rather than workers." Daniel Hirata, "The Government of Street Vending: Formalizations of Informality and Use of Force," in *Living (Il)Legalities in Brazil: Practices, Narratives and Institutions in a Country on the Edge*, ed. Sara Brandellero, Derek Pardue, and Georg Wink (London: Routledge, 2021), 24.

30. Alba Zaluar, *Cidadãos não vão ao paraíso* (São Paulo: Escuta, 1994); Angelina Peralva, *Violência e democracia: o paradoxo brasileiro* (São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2000).

31. Luiz Antonio de Silva Machado, "Sociabilidade violenta: por uma interpretação da criminalidade contemporânea do Brasil," *Sociedade e estado* 19, no. 1 (2004): 53–84.

32. Brazil has a long history of public lynchings. In 2015, sociologist Jose de Souza Martins estimated that in six decades more than one million Brazilians had witnessed some sort of collective execution (2015).

33. Bruna Gisi, Mariana Chies Santiago Santos, and Marco César Alvarez, "O 'punitivismo' no sistema de justiça juvenil brasileiro," *Sociologias* 23, no. 58 (2021): 18–49.

34. Roberto Kant de Lima, Michel Misse, and Ana Paula Mendes Miranda, "Violência, criminalidade, segurança pública."

35. Bolsonaro tweeted this expression to publicly celebrate the spectacular police chase of a suspect that ended in his death with several shots in cold blood in June 2021.

36. Rosana Pinheiro-Machado, "No Brasil de Bolsonaro," 2019.

37. In his 2018 inauguration speech, Bolsonaro claimed that PT's management generated an "irresponsibility that led to the greatest ethical and moral crisis in the history of Brazil." https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2019/01/leia-a-integra-do-discurso-de-bolsonaro-na-cerimonia-de-posse-no-congresso.shtml.

38. Ibid.

39. Erika Robb Larkins, *The Sensation of Security,* in press.

40. This view both riffs on and opposes a conventional human rights-based understanding that violence only functions to generate more violence. Also in a more vernacular tone, it is common in Brazil to use the sentence "generosity generates generosity."

41. Susana Durão, Erika Robb Larkins, and Carolina Andrei Fischmann, "Securing the Mall: Daily Hospitality Security Practices in São Paulo," *Lua nova: revista de cultura e política*. Número especial: A segurança em mutação, no. 114 (2021): 137–174.

42. Susana Durão, Erika Robb Larkins, and Carolina Andrei Fischmann, "Securing the Mall," 2021.

43. Pitt-Rivers, Julian, (1968), *From Hospitality to Grace: A Julian Pitt-Rivers Omnibus*, ed. Giovanni da Col and Andrew Shyock (Chicago: HAU Books, 2017), 166.

44. António Candido, "O significado de *Raízes do Brasil*," in *Sérgio Buarque de Holanda: Raízes do Brasil,* ed. Pedro Meira Monteiro and Lilia Mortiz Schwarcz (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1995), 355–370.

45. Antônio Sérgio Alfredo Guimarães, *Preconceito e discriminação: queixas de ofensa e tratamento desigual dos negros no Brasil* (São Paulo: Fundação de Apoio à Universidade, 2004).

46. In the Brazilian context, the term "abordagem" is used mainly in reference to military police officers. It implies taking an aggressive, confrontational attitude towards the police-citizen encounter, and is often associated with the posturing of novice officers, who usually occupy the lowest status in the corps. But in hospitality contexts, the "social" restrains the aggression inherent in the confrontation, implying a dimension of tact and discretion. Guards identify this approach—and the delicate negotiation between addressing security problems while maintaining a level of calm and tranquility in the encounter—as one of the most important tactics used in mall

security. Erika Robb Larkins and Susana Durão, "Guarding the Urban Elite: Hospitality Security in São Paulo" (working paper, Department of Anthropology; Institute of Philosophy and Humanities, San Diego State University; State University of Campinas, San Diego; São Paulo, 2022).

47. Susana Durão and Wellynton Souza, "The (Antifascist) Police Officer as Worker; Susana Durão, Evandro Silva, and Wellynton Souza, "Policing and (Anti)Fascism in Brazil," *City & Society Covid-19*, American Anthropological Association, (2020): 1–9.

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