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Final Thesis

Do Black Lives Matter in Brazil? Analysis of racism, police violence and connections between Black Lives Matter and black activism in Brazil

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Abstract

Questa tesi prende in considerazione tre principali tematiche: il razzismo in Brasile, la violenza della polizia in Brasile, e la relazione tra il movimento sociale Black Lives Matter e l'attivismo nero in Brasile.

Su tali tematiche sono stati orientati gli obiettivi, la metodologia e la struttura della tesi.

La metodologia è stata basata sulla ricerca e sul confronto di fonti primarie e secondarie.

Dalla ricerca è anche emerso che la letteratura sulle relazioni tra Black Lives Matter e Brasile è molto ridotta.

Nel primo capitolo l'obiettivo è presentare la questione razziale nel contesto brasiliano, sottolineandone gli elementi caratteristici e dimostrando l'esistenza del razzismo in Brasile.

Nel secondo capitolo, partendo dalle nozioni di razzismo strutturale e biopotere, si evidenzia come la violenza della polizia contro i neri in Brasile sia la diretta conseguenza di una società razzista.

Nel terzo ed ultimo capitolo lo scopo è analizzare in che modo il Black Lives Matter ha influenzato azioni di moblizzazione collettiva in Brasile contro la violenza della polizia partendo da due principali tappe: l'evento "*Julho Negro*" del 2016, e le proteste del 2020. Questa analisi ha offerto lo spunto per l'approfondimento un altro elemento importante, ovvero il contributo offerto dalla tecnologia e dai social media nella lotta contro il razzismo e la brutalità della polizia. Tali strumenti, data la loro ampia accessibilità e capacità di attingere a un grande pubblico, si sono rivelati fondamentali nella denuncia di casi di abuso di potere.

In generale, da questo lavoro emerge che, ad oggi, il razzismo è una componente fortemente presente nella società e nelle istituzioni brasiliane che influenza in modo estremamente negativo la vita dei cittadini afro-discendenti. Una delle manifestazioni più gravi del pregiudizio e della discriminazione razziale, è proprio la violenza perpetuata dalla polizia contro una determinata categoria della popolazione: giovani neri abitanti delle favelas. La partecipazione dei cittadini neri all'attivismo delle favelas, sia individuale che collettiva, si rivela fondamentale nella lotta contro gli abusi di potere della polizia e nell'incremento della presa di coscienza sulla gravità di tale fenomeno.

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Introduction

"Vidas Negras Importam" (Black Lives Matter), "Parem de Nos Matar" (Stop Killing Us), "Não Consigo Respirar" (I can't breathe). These were some of the sentences and slogans used during the act of protest started in Rio de Janeiro on May 31, 2020. Protests in Rio and later, in São Paulo, were inspired by those spread throughout the U.S. by the Black Lives Matter social movement, after the brutal killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer on May 25. Mr. Floyd, spent 8 minutes and 46 seconds in agony while the police officer was choking him to death.¹ His words "I can't breathe"², which Floyd repeated several times, were never listened to.

Almost one week before Floyd's death, João Pedro Mattos, a 14-year-old kid, was killed in his house in Morro do Salgueiro during an operation conducted by the Rio de Janeiro Police. His guilt? Being black and *favelado* (dweller of the favela).

Although they occurred in different countries, these two tragic episodes have a lot in common. The death of George and João were both perpetuated by the hand of the State and the victims were both black. Protestors in US, Brazil and around the world were demanding to stop police violence against black people, phenomenon which in Brazil is frequently referred to as "genocide of the black people".³ This expression makes reference to the systemic killing of black people by police in the periphery and in the favelas, manifestation of the racism and racial hierarchy on which the State and the institutions are built upon.

As the word "genocide" suggests, the case of João Pedro Mattos is not an isolated episode. Statistics and researches reveal a frightening reality. According to ISP-RJ (Rio de Janeiro Institute of Public Safety), 741 people were killed by police up to May 2020 — meaning that almost five people are killed every day. This number is the highest since 1998. In 2019, 1814 people had been killed by the police, 78% of them were black or mixed-race; among them

¹ Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs, "8 Minutes, 46 Seconds Became a Symbol in George Floyd's Death. The Exact Time Is Less Clear," *The New York Times*, June 18, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/18/us/george-floyd-timing.html?smid=url-share>;

² Maanvi Singh, "George Floyd told officers 'I can't breathe' more than 20 times, transcript show," *The Guardian*, July 9, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jul/08/george-floyd-police-killing-transcript-i-cant-breathe>.

³ Geísa Mattos, "Flagrantes de Racismo: Imagens da Violência Policial e as Conexões entre o Ativismo no Brasil e nos Estados Unidos," *Revista de Ciências Sociais* 48, no. 2 (2017): 187-217, <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=6408168>.

43% were between the age of 14 and 30.⁴

This data suggests not only that in Brazil police kills at a disproportionate rate, but also that they target people belonging to the category of young and black people—fact that on its turn shows how police interventions are racially biased.

This dissertations covers the scopes of racism and police violence in Brazil, the Black Lives Matter movement and its relation with Brazil's instances of activism. The overall aim is to show that police violence is the expression of a society which inherited its racist component by the slavery and post-slavery system.

But is really Brazil a racist country? The attempt to answer this question it's a fundamental objective of this work, since it would be impossible to address a problem without proving its existence.

This question is relevant also because in Brazil, the racial issue takes on some peculiar connotations. In fact, the general perception is that Brazil is a country where racism does not exist. This perception derives from three main factors. The first relates to the presence of a high percentage of mixed race population — people tend to believe that were there is sexual intimacy there cannot be racism.⁵ The second is the notion of "racial democracy" a discourse embraced by the political élite of the first half of the 20th century and by intellectuals such as Gilberto Freyre, who thought of Brazil as a sort of "racial paradise" where people of different races lived in harmony with no sort of discrimination.⁶ The third factor is related to the fact that the absence of any explicit form of racism and racial discrimination—such as the segregationist laws for the US and the apartheid system for South Africa—made racism more

⁴ Matheus Rodrigues and Henrique Coelho, “ Pretos e pardos são 78% dos mortos em ações policiais no RJ em 2019: 'É o negro que sofre essa insegurança', diz mãe de Ágatha”, *GI*, June 22, 2020, <https://g1.globo.com/rj/rio-de-janeiro/noticia/2020/06/06/pretos-e-pardos-sao-78percent-dos-mortos-em-aco-es-policiais-no-rj-em-2019-e-o-negro-que-sofre-essa-inseguranca-diz-mae-de-agatha.ghtml>,

⁵ Valeria Ribeiro Corossacz, *Razzismo, meticcato, democrazia razziale: le politiche della razza in Brasile*, (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2005), 85-86.

⁶ Lilia Mortiz Schwarcz, *Nem Preto nem Branco, Muito pelo Contrário: Cor e Raça na Sociabilidade Brasileira*, (São Paulo: Claro Enigma, 2013), PDF ePub; George Reid Andrews, “Democracia Racial Brasileira 1900-1990: Um Contraponto Americano”, *Estudos Avançados* 11 no. 30, (1997): 95-115.

veiled and subtle. If the "enemy" is not visible, it is more difficult to fight against it.⁷

Here, the attempt will be to deconstruct the notion of racial democracy and show how the racial hierarchy inherited by the slavery system affects the society up to the present time by creating a system that privileges white people and disadvantages the black and mixed population — and also that makes distinctions on race and class.

A second aim is to demonstrate that police violence is a consequence of racism, starting from the notions of structural and institutional racism. Under the institutional perspective, racism is not an exclusively individual attitude, but rather, the result of institutional behaviors, where institutions confer either advantages or disadvantages according to race. This selective approach results by the attempt of those in power to preserve that power and privilege through the creation of institutional mechanisms protecting their position.

The structural perspective, in turn, suggests that institutions are influenced by the pre-existent social structure. Institutions materialize social behaviors, therefore, if institutions are racists it is because the society is racist.⁸

The third aim is to present the event *Julho Negro* (Black July) of 2016—event consisting in a series of meetings that saw the participation of six members of Black Lives Matter and Brazilian activists in Rio de Janeiro—and to take it as a point of departure to discuss the point of contact between the two scenarios.

Acts of protests of 2020 in Brazil will be also taken into account as to analyze the phenomenon of *Vidas Negras Importam*.

The intent is also to deepen the knowledge about some of the topics brought up over the meetings such as: the role of media in describing cases of police violence; the action and activism of the mothers of the victims who gathered in activist groups such as *Mães de Maio* (Mothers of May) and *Mães de Manguinhos* (Mothers of Manguinhos).

The analysis of the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement and the spread of protests across the globe revealed also the value of the use of phones and social media in the fight against police violence. Often, phone footages allow to bring the attention of the media to cases of police misconduct and sometimes lead to the incarceration of guilty police officers.

⁷ George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latinoamérica 1800-2000*, (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2007).

⁸ Silvio Luiz de Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural*, (São Paulo: Sueli Carneiro; Pólen, 2019), PDF ePub; Kwame Ture and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*, (New York: Vintage Book, 1992), PDF.

In relation to the active participation of citizens reporting episodes of abuse of power through the use of technology and media the notion of *mediativismo de favela* (favela media activism) is relevant.⁹ This expression is used by Leonardo Custódio to indicate individual or collective acts connected to the media, as efforts to arise consciousness about daily injustice and mobilize action against social inequality.

Hopefully, this work will help creating new suggestions to make the fight against police violence more effective in Brazil.

The methodology for this dissertation, consisted in dividing the research on three thematic three blocks—corresponding to the three objectives above mentioned—and then, divide the sources into primary and secondary sources, with the idea of finding academic sources that could support my thesis.

The racial issue in Brazil has been extensively debated among scholars and historians and under different perspectives. For this reason, I took into account some the authors that are considered a reference point in the field.

The research started with “Afro-Latin America. Black Lives, 1600-2000” work in which George Reid Andrews seeks to give visibility to black Latin Americans by reconstructing their heritage beginning with their arrival in the New World between 1500 and 1870.¹⁰ He underlines that the voices of Afro-Latin Americans have been silenced till present time resulting in invisibility—in particular, social and political invisibility—and lack of representation which, according to him, enhance discrimination and mistreatment, while discouraging the search for remedies. Responsible for this mistreatment and invisibility are the doctrine of “racial democracy” and the social division based on race and color inherited by the colonial caste laws. Through the testimonies of African-Americans visiting in Brazil from 1920s-30s, Andrews shows how the discourse of racial democracy was hiding a society structured on racial and class discrimination, producing a condition of deep racial inequality difficult to be fought against.

Brazilian racial relations are also analyzed by Andrews in the work “Black and Whites in São Paulo, Brazil. 1888-1988”, this time, in the context of Afro-Brazilians entering into the labour

⁹ Leonardo Da Costa Custódio, “Favela Media Activism. Political trajectories of low-income Brazilian youth,”(MA diss., University of Tampere, 2016).

¹⁰ George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America: Black Lives, 1600-2000*, (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2016).

work of São Paulo after the emancipation (1888).¹¹

Another work essential to understand racial relations in São Paulo is the pioneering research conducted by Roger Bastide and Florestan Fernandes, collected in “Branços e Negros em São Paulo: Ensaio Sociológico sobre Aspectos da Formação, Manifestações Atuais e Efeitos do Preconceito de Cor na Sociedade Paulistana” (1959). The book, which involved the collaboration of several researchers, is a contribution to the breakthrough UNESCO project (1950-1951) on the relations between blacks and whites in Brazil. The authors, under a sociological perspective and a non-ethnocentric approach, highlight the presence of prejudice and discrimination, their functions and the forms through which they are expressed, focusing on the industrial and commercial sectors. The findings suggest that prejudice is based both on class and race, but the racial component appears to be stronger—meaning that taking off class prejudice, racial prejudice persists. In addition, according to the authors, *mulatos* (mixed-race people) are generally less discriminated than black people.¹²

A more recent project concerning racial inequalities is the Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America (PERLA), formed in 2008 to provide “[...] new truths based on solid data for a region that has long been in denial about deep-seated ethnoracial inequalities, injustices, and prejudiced attitudes [...]”¹³. PERLA¹⁴ surveys and findings are gathered in the book “Pigmentocracies: ethnicity, race and color in Latin America” edited by Edward Telles. The term *pigmentocracy* refers to hierarchies and inequalities based on race, and suggests that skin color is a central indicator of social stratification.

In the attempt of measuring racial inequality, a major problem that emerged in the project is the ethnoracial classification. Defining race becomes crucial to address the racial question, especially in a country such as Brazil where the distinction between black people and white people is not clearcut and polarized. So, the questions are: who is considered black

¹¹ George Reid Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo, Brazil, 1888-1988*, (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).

¹² Roger Bastide and Florestan Fernandes, *Branços e Negros em São Paulo: Ensaio Sociológico sobre Aspectos da Formação, Manifestações Atuais e Efeitos do Preconceito de Cor na Sociedade Paulistana*, (São Paulo: Companhia Editorial, 1959), PDF.

¹³ Edward E. Telles, *Pigmentocracies: ethnicity, race and color in Latin America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 2.

¹⁴ PERLA examines racial inequalities in four countries (Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Peru), but for this dissertation only Brazil has been taken into account.

and who defines/perceives himself/herself as black in a society with a strong component of miscegenation?.

The issue of defining color and has been discussed by Valeria Ribeiro Corossacz. In “Razzismo, Meticciano, Democrazia razziale” and “Il Corpo della Nazione: Classificazione Razziale e Gestione sociale della Riproduzione in Brasile”, the author highlights that in Brazil—as opposed to the United States—color classification is blurred and ambiguous. Brazilians tend to classify themselves and others according to phenotypic features such as nose shape, hair texture, lips shape—and not according to skin color only—, and make use of a different shades of color to indicate skin color and also different terms to define race such as: *preto*, *pardo*, *moreno*, *negro*, *sarará*, *mulato*. Another peculiar element is that the attribution of color changes according to relational and situation criteria. The same color-related term, for instance, assumes different connotations depending on who uses it and in which context.

Another element that emerges is the overlap between class and color, where black is typically attributed to poor and white is attributed to rich.¹⁵

Overall, what stands out from the analysis of these sources and the comparison with critical essays and articles, is a clearly opposed position in respect to the ideas of “benign master”¹⁶ and the harmonious coexistence of races in Brazil as depicted by Gilberto Freyre in “Casa-Grande & Senzala”. Brazilian writer and activist Abdias do Nascimento, in his work “O Genocídio do Negro Brasileiro”, strongly criticizes Freyre’s position, stating that the notion of racial democracy is a myth and a fiction, hiding the reality of a country in which people are identified solely on their skin color; independently from the distinctions and terminology—black, mixed, *mulato*, *crioulo*...— they are labeled as people of color (*negros*), fact that leads to mistreatment and discrimination.¹⁷

As regards as structural racism and institutional racism two main works have been taken in consideration: “Racismo Estrutural” by Silvio de Almeida and “Black Power: Politics of

¹⁵ Valeria Ribeiro Corossacz, *Il Corpo della Nazione: Classificazione Razziale e Gestione Sociale della Riproduzione in Brasile*, (Roma: CISU, 2004); Valeria Ribeiro Corossacz, *Razzismo, Meticciano, Democrazia Razziale: Le Politiche della Razza in Brasile*, (Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino, 2005).

¹⁶ According to Freyre, in Brazil the master was benevolent to his slaves, as opposed to the situation of the United States. See Lilia Mortiz Schwarcz, *Nem Preto nem Branco, Muito pelo Contrário*.

¹⁷ Abdias do Nascimento, *O Genocídio do Negro Brasileiro: Processo de um Racismo Mascarado*, (São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 2016), Kindle edition.

Liberation in America” by Charles V. Hamilton and Kwame Ture.

Almeida’s main statement is that the racism is always structural because the society in first place is racist. The racist nature of the society exerts its influence on the institutions, where the dominant group tries to maintain its position and makes so by an unequal distribution of advantages and privileges on the basis of race. Since the dominant group is the one in control of the highest institutions in society, racism affects the realms of justice, economy and politics.¹⁸

The work “Black Power: Politics of Liberation in America” is essential when discussing racism as it is the one that used the adjective ‘institutional’ for the first time. The authors define racism as a way to subordinate a determined racial group while maintaining control over it. They also underline the difference between individual and institutional racism. While individual racism is made of explicit acts of racism and hate targeting a specific group, institutional racism is less overt and more difficult to identify. Institutional racism can be seen as equally destructive as individual racism or even more: the institutions, through their policies and decisions, are the one that normalize racism.¹⁹

Over the study of police violence in Brazil, the collection “Bala Perdida. A violência policial no Brasil e os desafios para sua superação” has been crucial, as it provided numerous essays covering the issue of police brutality under different perspectives. Two of the most discussed topics are the nature and the characteristics of police violence in Brazil, and the suggestion on how to overcome it. The most debated solution is the one of the demilitarization of the police and of the favelas.²⁰

The matter of demilitarization is widely discussed in “Desmilitarizar. Segurança pública e direitos humanos”, where the author Luiz Eduardo Soares takes into account the issue of public safety in Rio de Janeiro and in Brazil. He stresses the need of reforming the police system and change drug policies, while keeping in mind that structural racism and inequality are essential to discuss police and institutional violence.²¹

¹⁸ Silvio Luiz de Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural*, (São Paulo: Sueli Carneiro; Pólen, 2019), PDF ePub.

¹⁹ Kwame Ture and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*, (New York: Vintage Book, 1992), PDF.

²⁰ Bernardo Kucinski et al., *Bala Perdida: a violência policial no Brasil e desafios para sua superação*, (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2015), Kindle edition.

²¹ Luiz Eduardo Soares, *Desmilitarizar: Segurança Pública e direitos humanos*, (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2019), Kindle edition.

Part of the methods consisted also in studying statistics and data concerning police killing rates with a particular focus on the State and city of Rio de Janeiro, mainly in the period between 2015 and 2020. Data haven been collected from: the Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA), the Atlas of Violence, the Center of Safety Study and Citizenship (CESeC) and the Brazilian Forum of Public Safety.

For what concerns the topic of connections and relations among Black Lives Matter movement, *Vidas Negras Importam* and black activism in Brazil, the research conducted show that the literature on the field is quite limited.

The article “Flagrantes de racismo: imagens da violência policial e as conexões entre o ativismo no Brasil e nos Estados Unidos” takes into account the 2016 meeting in Rio de Janeiro, a moment of discussion and collaboration between Black Lives Matters and Brazilian black activists. The author, Geísa Mattos, also underlines the relevance of the use of video recordings and social media—for both the north-American and Brazilian context—to denounce and raise interest on cases of police violence. In fact, images of police officers caught in the act seem to have a more effective impact on the public and can be uploaded in the Internet, allowing to develop consciousness globally. The contribution of Mattos allowed to expand knowledge about groups of black activists in Brazil and platforms created to include black people and favela dwellers in the local political life. ²²

In this realm, due to the lack of academic sources, the methodology consisted in: taking into account newspaper articles—mainly from *The New York Times*, *BBC*, *Globo*, *El País*—and news sites such as *RioOnWatch* and *Portal Geledés*; monitoring social media activities of black activists on Instagram and Twitter.

A point of reference in the contemporary fight against police violence is Raull Santiago, founder of *Coletivo Papo Reto*, a group of community-based activists who use phones and social media to report police abuses in the Complexo do Alemão.

In “Midiativismo de Favela. Reflexoes sobre o processo de pesquisa” and “Favela Media Acctivism. Political trajectories of low-income Brazilian youths”, Leonardo Custódio suggests that the mainstream media—TV programs, the news and the radio—misrepresent the falveas, depicting them as dangerous places of intrinsic violence and crime. The research

²² Geísa Mattos, “Flagrantes de Racismo: Imagens da Violência Policial e as Conexões entre o Ativismo no Brasil e nos Estados Unidos.” *Revista de Ciências Sociais* 48, no. 2 (2017): 187-217. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=6408168>

conducted by Custódio between 2011 and 2014 addresses the uses of media, such as radio, newspapers, cameras, phones and the internet, by young dwellers of Rio de Janeiro's favelas to report social inequality and call for individual and collective action. He also mentions the importance of media collectives such as *Coletivo Papo Reto* (Straight Talk Collective), a group of community-based activists who use phones and social media to report police abuses in the Complexo do Alemão.

For what concerns the structure, this work is divided in three chapters.

In Chapter 1, I address the debate on the existence of racism in Brazil.

I start taking into account the period of transition from slavery to its abolition. I continue with the notion of race as linked to the theories of scientific racism, spread in Europe around the second half of 19th century and then in Brazil, where they were conveyed in the theory of *branqueamento* (whitening) right before the abolition of slavery, and in the subsequent policies of European immigration.

Then, I analyze the transition from scientific racism to racial democracy. After presenting the characteristics of the discourse of Brazil as non-racist country and perfect place to welcome people of color, I present evidence showing that, in fact, Brazil was and still is a country marked by discrimination and racial inequalities.

I conclude with the question of defining color in Brazil.

In Chapter 2, I start with the concepts of structural and institutional racism as to point out how the racist structure of the society has a negative impact on black citizens through the practices carried out by the institutions. I continue by introducing the issue of police violence in Brazil, underlining the elements which make the police system ineffective and discriminatory against black Brazilians. I stress out the military connotation of Brazilian police with its practices of repression of black youths in the favelas. Police violence in Rio de Janeiro, will be taken into account, analyzing the war on drugs and the military occupation of the favelas. Finally, the suggestions on how to reduce the phenomenon of violent police intervention will be discussed.

In the third and last chapter, I take into account the connections between Black Lives Matter and Brazilian black activism, considering both the event *Julho Negro* of 2016, and the protests occurred in 2020. The Black Lives Matter visit to Rio serves as a starting point to discussion about: the increased rate of police killings and house evictions before the 2016

Olympic Games; the role of female black activism in the fight of police violence; the role of the media in the criminalization of poverty and blackness. As last thing social media and technology are taken into consideration as to underline their relevance in encouraging collective action and reporting cases of police brutality.

1. Brazilian Racial Democracy: myth or reality?

1.1 Discussing racism in an alleged non-racist country

What does it mean to talk about racism in Brazil? How can we discuss racism in a country where the general belief is that racism does not exist? According to Brazilian philosopher Djamila Ribeiro, what characterizes Brazilian racism is the tendency of looking outside the country, neglecting what happens inside of it.¹ This statement is relevant because it suggests firstly, that racism is perceived as extrinsic to Brazilian society—racism is always attributed to the other—; and secondly, that racism, when acknowledged, is seen as a set of single individual behaviors rather than a phenomenon of systemic oppression. Despite of the denial of racism, Brazilian society is permeated by socioeconomic inequality and mechanisms of racial discrimination affecting the lives of black and colored people on different levels. This paradox—which relies on the parallelism between the rejection of racism and the presence of actual practices of race and color discrimination—is the major characteristic of Brazilian racial relations and, at the same time, the trait that makes them so controversial.²

In order to understand this paradox, it is necessary firstly, to acknowledge the impact of slavery on racial relations. Indeed, color prejudice and discrimination can be seen as a product of the hierarchical system developed over slavery, which survived after the abolition (1888) and acquired new meanings over time creating new social mechanisms to maintain the plantation social order in the new capitalistic society, in a way to privilege the white dominant class and leave the black poor mass at the margins.³

¹ Laís Alegretti, “Racismo no Brasil: Todo Mundo Sabe que Existe, mas Ninguém Acha que é Racista, diz Djamila Ribeiro,” *BBC News Brasil em Londres*, June 5, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-52922015>.

² Valeria Ribeiro Corossacz, *Razzismo, Meticcio, Democrazia Razziale: Le Politiche della Razza in Brasile* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino, 2005), 63 ; Alegretti, “Racismo no Brasil”; George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America: Black Lives, 1600-2000* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2016); Silvio Luiz de Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural* (São Paulo: Sueli Carneiro; Pólen, 2019, PDF ePub).

³ Carlos Hasenbalg, *Discriminação e desigualdades raciais no Brasil* (Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG; Rio de Janeiro: IUPERJ, 2005), 82-84; George Reid Andrews, “Democracia Racial Brasileira 1900-1990: Um Contraponto Americano”, *Estudos Avançados* 11 no. 30, (1997): 27; Maria Arminda do Nascimento Arruda, “Dilemas do Brasil moderno: a questão Racial na obra de Florestan Fernandes” in *Raça, Ciência e Sociedade* eds. Marcos Chor Maio and Ricardo Ventura Santos (Rio de Janeiro: FIOCRUZ, 1996).

Racism cannot be neglected in a country that hosts the second largest Afro-descendent population in the world—second only to Nigeria—and that was the largest recipient of African slaves of the New World. According to the estimates, between 1519 and 1867, 3,6 million Africans were brought forcefully to Brazil, accounting for one third of the nearly 11,600 African slaves brought to the Americas.⁴

Secondly, it is necessary to explore the ideological factors that contributed to depict Brazil as a non-racist country. According to Carlos Hasenbalg, the absence of segregationist laws in the aftermath emancipation promoted an image of Brazil has a place free of racial conflicts.⁵ The alleged harmonious and peaceful coexistence of races fueled the belief that Brazil was a racial paradise, a “racial democracy” where blacks and whites had equal rights and opportunities. The ideology of racial democracy, which started to develop in the first two decades of the 20th century, became the trademark of Brazilian society, both nationally and abroad. Such ideology, on its turn, was founded on the valorization of *mestiçagem* (miscegenation) and the idyllic representation of slavery.⁶

The valorization of miscegenation became fundamental in the 1930’s for the construction of the ideology of racial democracy in that racial mixture exemplified the concrete union of different races. Brazilian population was as seen the result of the harmonious encounter of three racial groups: white (of Portuguese origin), blacks (of African origin) and indigenous. This representation took vigor in the discourse of national identity through the so-called “fable of the three races” and through the idea of the “benign” slavery

⁴ Graziella Moraes Silva and Marcelo Paixão, “Mixed and Unequal. New Perspectives on Brazilian Ethnoracial Relations” in *Pigmentocracies: Ethnicity, Race, and Color in Latin America*, ed. Edward Telles (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina press, 2014), 175; Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*, 23.

⁵ Hasenbalg, *Discriminação e desigualdades raciais no Brasil*, 210.

⁶ Lilia Mortiz Schwarcz, *Nem Preto nem Branco, Muito pelo Contrário: Cor e Raça na Sociabilidade Brasileira* (São Paulo: Claro Enigma, 2013.); George Reid Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo, Brazil, 1888-1988*. (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); Michael Agier, “Racism, Culture and Black Identity in Brazil.” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 14, no. 3 (1995): 521-252 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3339326>; Djamila Ribeiro, *Pequeno Manual Antirracista* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2019) PDF.

developed by Gilberto Freyre in the 1930's.⁷ Freyre argued that Portuguese colonizers did not have prejudice towards their black slaves, fact that resulted in a proximity between the planters and the dwellers of the *senzala*. Such proximity, resulted in miscegenation, consequence of the union between the slaves masters and black slaves. As it will be discussed in the chapter, slavery in Brazil was far from being benign and masters were far from being benevolent. In particular, sexual relationships between slave owners and black slaves were most of the time the result of sexual harassment that was part, as we will see, of the “game” of power of the slave master, who used rape and other violent practices to exercise control over female slaves.⁸

The ideology of racial democracy became a political instrument to maintain social order and avoid that the marginalized groups could speak up to defend their rights and overthrow the racial hierarchy. As a matter of fact, racial democracy made racism in Brazil more subtle, but not less effective. Indeed, the strength of the ideology relies on the fact that is harder to mobilize against something that apparently does not exist, or at least, is less visible. Racial democracy, contributed to institutionalize and normalize discriminatory practices making them acceptable to society.⁹ As argued by Juliana Borges—who makes reference to philosopher and professor Marilena Chauí—racial democracy can be looked at as the “founding myth” of Brazil which managed to endure over historical transformations finding new means, ideas, languages and values to renew and express itself. In other words, according to Borges, racism and racial hierarchy are the pillars of Brazilian society.¹⁰

The aim of this chapter is to address the racial question by identifying and deconstructing the myths—in particular, the myth of racial democracy—that founded

⁷ Valeria Ribeiro Corossacz, *Il Corpo della Nazione: Classificazione Razziale e Gestione Sociale della Riproduzione in Brasile* (Roma: CISU, 2004), 17; Aiger Michael, “Racism, Culture and Black Identity in Brazil”, 249-250; Marchos Chor Maio and Ricardo Ventura Santos “Apresentação” in *Raça, Ciência e Sociedade*, 9; John Manuel Monteiro, “As “raças indígenas” no pensamento brasileiro do Império” in *Raça, Ciência e Sociedade*, 15.

⁸ Robert W. Selnes, “Senhores e subalternos no Oeste paulista.” In *História da vida privada no Brasil: Império*, ed. Luiz Felipe Alencastro (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1997); Roger Bastide and Florestan Fernandes, *Branco e Negro em São Paulo: Ensaio Sociológico sobre Aspectos da Formação, Manifestações Atuais e Efeitos do Preconceito de Cor na Sociedade Paulistana* (São Paulo: Companhia Editorial, 1959).

⁹ Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*; Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural*; Aiger Michael, “Racism, Culture and Black Identity in Brazil”.

¹⁰ Juliana Borges, *Encarceramento em Massa* (São Paulo: Sueli Carneiro; Pólen, 2019), Kindle, 39.

Brazilian racial system. In trying to do so, I will analyze the historical and ideological factors that contributed to make Brazilian racism both singular and contradictory while providing evidence that racial democracy is a sort of façade to cover up for color and race discrimination.

Another matter that cannot be neglected when discussing about racism in Brazil is the meaning attributed to the notions of race and skin color. For what concerns race, the chapter will underline how its interpretation changed in the course of time. If in the last decades of the 19th century—with the theories of scientific racism—race was conceived as a categorization of human beings based on a hierarchical classification of their biological and psychological traits, starting from the ‘30s, with the progressive decline of racial theories and the emergence of new studies on race relations, race lost its biological significance and started to be conceived, under a sociological perspective, as a group of individuals sharing cultural and linguistic similarities.¹¹

As for color, the main issue is to seek to understand what it means to be black in Brazil. The chapter will discuss how skin color passed from being one of the distinctive traits to define race—and therefore a criterium for establishing either superiority or inferiority among human groups—to becoming an indicator of class and social status. We will see that in the post-abolition period, “being black” began to lose its initial racial connotation and started to be associated with economic condition (poorness) and a physical space—first the *senzalas*, and, later the *favelas*.¹²

1.2 Racial and social hierarchy in the slavery system

The studies about racial relations of the 1950’s, in particular the studies of Florestan Fernandes, considered post-abolition racial and color prejudice as a residual of slavery’s “archaic” social relations. The slavery system, appears to be responsible for having

¹¹ Lilia Mortiz Schwarcz, *O Espetáculo das Raças: Cientistas, Instituições e Questão Racial no Brasil, 1870-1930*. (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1993) PDF ePub; Corossacz, *Il Corpo della Nazione*; Corossacz, *Razzismo, Meticcio, Democrazia Razziale*; Antonio Sérgio Alfredo Guimarães, “Cor, classes e status nos estudos de Pierson, Azevedo e Harris na Bahia: 1940-60” in *Raça, Ciência e Sociedade*; Ricardo Ventura Santos, “Da morfologia às moléculas, de raça à população: trajetórias conceituais em antropologia física no século XX” in *Raça, Ciência e Sociedade*.

¹² Luís Fernando Beneduzi, “Alteridade e estranhamento: a figura do “novo negro” na imigração italiana no Brasil.” *MÉTIS: história & cultura* 13, no. 27 (2015): 71-90; Lilia Mortiz Schwarcz, “Do Preto, do Branco e do Amarelo: sobre o Mito Nacional de um Brasil (bem) Mestiçado”. *Ciência e Cultura* 68, no. 1, (2012): 48-55.

legitimized the inferiority of African descendants following the paradigm of the castes system, which was based on the hierarchization of social groups.¹³ As documented by George Reid Andrews the *casta* (caste) system had been implanted in Latin America by the Spanish over the colonial period. The caste system divided society into three main groups—Africans, Europeans and indigenous people—each with obligations and privileges assigned according to skin color or other phenotypic markers. Europeans and their offspring were the only ones to enjoy full rights and privileges, which included better jobs, education and economic opportunities. African people and their ancestors, on the contrary, were brought to the New World as slaves with nearly no possibility to obtain freedom.¹⁴

Over time, the caste system evolved to keep up with social changes and racial mixture, and included the fourth category of the free *castas*, which grouped those who could not be assigned to any of the other three categories: *mestizos*, mulattos (*pardos* in Brazil), *zambos* (mixture of black and indigenous people) and free blacks.¹⁵ Such description finds validation in the definition provided by Lloyd Warner, according to whom the caste system is characterized by the positioning of a determined group in a social order, where privileges, duties and opportunities are assigned unequally among groups considered either inferior or superior; in addition, what defines a caste system is the impossibility for members of different groups either to marry or to ascend/descend in the caste order.¹⁶

The documentation provided by Roger Bastide and Florestan Fernandes on the one hand, and Roger Selnes on the other, allows us to connect this theoretical definition to the reality of São Paulo's plantation system making possible to notice how the social hierarchy worked.

At the end of the 18th century, Brazilian rural economy divided *brancos* (whites), *negros* (blacks) and *mestiços* (mixed-race) into perfectly distinct and stratified groups. Each of the three rural classes corresponded to an ethnic type: blacks belonged to the class of slaves; whites to the class of *sehores* (masters); and *mestiços* to the class of *foreiros*. The clear

¹³ Hasenbalg, *Discriminação e desigualdades raciais no Brasil*; Andrews, "Democracia Racial Brasileira 1900-1990"; Arruda, "Dilemas do Brasil moderno."

¹⁴ Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*, 8-10.

¹⁵ Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*, 8-10; Edward Telles, "The Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America (PERLA) in *Pigmentocracies*, 15-16

¹⁶ Guimarães, "Cor, classes e *status*", 146.

separation between the castes and their function of social distancing was particularly evident in the sharp contrast between masters and slaves' life—the eased life of the masters versus the harshness of slave's labor in the fields—which perdured up until the end of the 19th century.

As highlighted by Fernandes, the two groups represented two culturally and socially separated realities coexisting in the same social order.¹⁷ Social discrimination affected slaves' life at every level and separated them from the other members of society. For what concerns the material conditions of life, for instance, they had their own type of garments and type of food. They were housed in the *senzalas*—constructions located either right behind or next to the master's house (*casa-grande*)—where they were locked up over night, forced to sleep in a small space next to each other in a “state of promiscuity and extreme abandonment.”¹⁸ The *Senzalas* lacked of lighting and ventilation; the doors opened onto the *terreiro* (vaste piece of land) to facilitate masters' control over slaves. As for the work activities, slaves were assigned the hardest and most degrading occupation—mainly labor in the plantation fields—with the exception of few slaves who obtained a promotion and were allowed to work either inside the *casa-grande* as domestic servants or outside as qualified craftsmen.¹⁹

On a political and legal level, the domination of one group over another was established by law which, for over than three hundred years (from 1530 to 1888), regarded slaves as objects or goods to be exchanged, bought and sold. The civil laws of 1858, named *Consolidação das Leis Civis*, for instance, placed slaves in the category of ‘goods and chattels’.²⁰

By consequence, they were excluded from citizenship and political participation and were denied all the rights and guarantees enjoyed by the others members of the society. Slaves were treated as “subjects of law”—instead of objects of law—only in case they committed a crime; in such a case, the law reserved them extremely violent punishments. In particular, the *Código Criminal* (Penal Code) of 1830 was brutal in the infliction of corporal punishments to

¹⁷ Bastide and Fernandes, *Branços e Negros em São Paulo*, 79-88.

¹⁸ Bastide and Fernandes, *Branços e Negros em São Paulo*, 89.

¹⁹ Selnes, *Senhores e subalternos*; Bastide and Fernandes, *Branços e Negros em São Paulo*.

²⁰ Eunice Aparecida de Jesus Prudente, “O negro na ordem jurídica brasileira.” *Revista Da Faculdade De Direito* 83, (1988). <https://www.revistas.usp.br/rfdusp/article/view/67119>; Lilia Mortiz Schwarcz, *Retrato em branco e negro. Jornais, escravos e cidadãos em São Paulo no final do século XIX* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2020), e-book

slaves.²¹ What is to be noticed is that the laws regulating slavery, as in the case of the penal code and the civil laws, were in complete contradiction with the liberal values set by the Imperial Constitution of Dom Pedro I. The Constitution, in force from 1824 to 1889, established the equality of individuals and prohibited any form of torture, but did not cover the matter of slavery.²²

In such a context, one can deduct easily that it was nearly impossible for slaves to ascend in the social order of castes. The law was structured in a way to favor slaves owners and maintain the mechanisms of domination. Although in the last decades of the 19th century laws such as the law 28th of September of 1871 established the manners through which slaves could obtain their *alforria* (freedom), the masters opposed to the recognition of such right. As stated by Selnes, under the masters' perspective this kind of rights could undermine the foundation of the system of domination restricting the will of slaves owners.²³

Finally, in line with Lloyd Warner's definition of castes, interracial marriages were stigmatized. The intent was to preserve the alleged blood pureness of the nobles, and, at the same time, prevent individuals from ascending socially by getting married to a member of a higher caste.²⁴

The thesis supporting the restricted possibilities for social ascension is further reinforced by skin-color-related data collected in Campinas in 1829, showing that the majority of slave owners were white. In particular, none of the masters owning more than twenty slaves was classified as non-white. Only 8,6% of the owners of one to nine slaves and the 3,6% of the owners of ten to nineteen slaves were registered as non-white. Another relevant element emerging from the analysis of these data is the hypothesis of the presence of a subgroup within the group of slave owners who, for matters related to status, declared a lighter skin tone.²⁵

²¹ Prudente, "O negro na ordem jurídica brasileira."; Bastide and Fernandes, *Branços e Negros em São Paulo*.

²² Andrews, Blacks and Whites in S. Paulo, 27-28; Prudente, "O negro na ordem jurídica brasileira".

²³ Selnes, *Senhores e subalternos*, 260; Bastide and Fernandes, *Branços e Negros em São Paulo*.

²⁴ Bastide and Fernandes, *Branços e Negros em São Paulo*; Guimarães, Guimarães, "Cor, classes e status", 146.

²⁵ Selnes, *Senhores e Subalternos*, 247-248.

This brief analysis of the caste system makes it possible to notice how the slavery system was based on color discrimination, which constituted the social separation line between *brancos* and free on one side, and *negros* and slaves on the other. This parallelism highlights a second crucial characteristic of the imperial period, that is the overlap between skin color and social condition—more specifically, the overlap between the terms ‘*negro*’ and ‘slave’.

1.2.1 *Negro* as synonym for slave

Authors such as Florestan Fernandes, Lilia Mortiz Schwarcz, Eunice A. de Jesus Prudente and Luís Fernando Beneduzi agree on the fact that up until the abolition of slavery with the *Lei Aurea* (Golden Law) in 1888, the terms ‘*negro*’ and ‘slave’ were used as synonyms.²⁶ In this sense, as reported by Beneduzi, Hebe Mattos talks about an “interconnection” between the two words, which were used interchangeably in the colloquial language. This is to be interpreted not only as interconnection of words, but also as an interconnection of meanings, which represents how the ‘other’ was perceived and categorized by the society of the time. Indeed, as argued by Schwarcz, black, white and yellow are not simply colors but rather “relation”.²⁷ In the pre-abolition period, color ascribed a social place to individuals functioning both as a phenotypic trait to refer to a group and as a mark for social status. In this sense, being black or white acquired a broader meaning going beyond the simple difference in color complexion; it became a social condition and also a physical place. In this way, *negro* meant black-skinned, slave and dweller of the *senzalas*. If these attributes were connected to the *negritude* (being black), by contrast, a fair complexion and freedom were attributes of the *branquitude* (being white).²⁸

Instances of the overlap between *negro* and slave—or in general, a degraded social condition—can be found both in São Paulo newspapers and in the stories narrated by European travelers who visited Brazil in the first two decades of the 19th century.

²⁶ Lilia Mortiz Schwarcz, “Do Preto, do Branco e do Amarelo: sobre o Mito Nacional de um Brasil (bem) Mestiçado”. *Ciência e Cultura* 68, no. 1, (2012): 48-55; Beneduzi, “Alteridade e estranhamento”; Bastide and Fernandes, *Branços e Negros em São Paulo*; Prudente, “O negro na ordem jurídica brasileira”.

²⁷ Beneduzi, “Alteridade e estranhamento”, 75; Schwarcz, “Do Preto, do Branco”, 48.

²⁸ Beneduzi, “Alteridade e estranhamento”, 75.

In her analysis of São Paulo newspapers, more specifically of the police reports section between 1874 and 1886, Schwarcz highlights two interesting elements: first, if the person was black, color appeared right before their name as to indicate through color their social condition; secondly, “[...] the *negro* was always a slave”²⁹, since any individual of color walking down the streets was caught and even detained on “suspicion of being a slave” as in the following examples:

“São José dos Campos: Found arrested in the city jail the *preto* named Jair who had been arrested on suspicion of having escaped [...]” (*Correio Paulistano*, January 3rd, 1886)³⁰

“Brought to jail on suspicion of being escaped slaves, slave Manoel Archanjo [...] and *preto* José Moura on suspicion of being an escaped slave.” (*Correio Paulistano*, February 18th, 1874)³¹

In agreement with Schwarcz, Fernandes and Andrews argue that colored people, even if they were *libertos* (freed slaves), could be considered and treated as slaves also facing the risk to be incarcerated and brought back to captivity. Because of the correlation *negro/escravo* colored people “had to prove” they were free.³²

As for the accounts of European travelers, we can start looking at the narration of Saint Hilaire, who had been in Brazil between 1816 and 1819. He was in Minas Gerais when he came across a small troop. He asked to a soldier where his chief was; the soldier pointed a figure among the others. The French traveller said then: “Is that a negro?”. The soldier answered promptly “No, he is not a negro, if he was he would not be chief”. Similarly, the English Henry Koster, who had been in Brazil in 1809, commented about his surprise to see for the first time a *negro* as a soldier in the army; but, according to the bystanders he was not a *negro*, he was an “official”.³³

²⁹ Schwarcz, *Retrato em branco e negro*, 109.

³⁰ Translation and italics of the author. Original citation in Portuguese: “São José do Campo: Acha-se preso na cadeia dacha-se preso na cadeia desta cidade o preto Jair que fora preso por suspeita de ser fugido [...]” in Schwarcz, *Retrato em branco e negro*, 109.

³¹ Translation and italics of the author. Original citation in Portuguese: “Foram recolhidos a cadeia por suspeita de ser escravo fugido o escravo Manoel Archanjo [...] e o preto José Moura por suspeita de ser escravo fugido.” in Schwarcz, *Retrato em branco e negro*, 109-110.

³² Fernandes, *Branco e Negros em São Paulo*, 81-82; Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*, 8-10; Schwarcz, *Retrato em branco e negro*, 109-110,

³³ Schwarcz, “Do Preto, Do Branco”, 49.

Another similar example, mentioned by both Schwarcz and Beneduzi, is the testimony of the painter Rugendas, who traveled to Brazil in 1817. In his opinion, it would have been easy to cite numerous instances of men holding the highest positions although their appearance undoubtedly revealed their indigenous or African descent. Also, when Rugendas asked a mulatto about the dark color of a mulatto captain-major the answer was: “He was, but he is not anymore”. After asking for an explication of this unusual metamorphosis the mulatto added: “Well, sir, can a captain-major be black?”³⁴

What emerges from these accounts is that over the imperial period, not only richness, but also power and social ascension produced a natural whitening. By consequence, if being *negro* in the social imaginary equaled being subordinated and enslaved, a chief, an official or a captain-major could not be *negros*, even if they were dark skinned. Indeed, as reported by Joel Rufino dos Santos, according to Guerreiro Ramos “*negro*” is a social configuration, a “place” that can be occupied by non-blacks; in the same way, white people’s place can be occupied by a black or a mulatto.³⁵

Overall, from all the instances above presented, one can observe how *negritude* and *branquitude* are perceived as two opposite poles, one negative (black) and one positive (white). While being white was always related to good attributes (nobleness, wealth, high social status and higher level occupations), being black acquired a negative image at the point that the terms ‘*negro*’ and ‘*preto*’ were considered as insults and words with a pejorative connotation. The polarization of black and white is a characteristic of Brazilian society that survives in the present.³⁶

1.2.2 Color as a social and physical space

Ramos’ interpretation of “*negro*” as a social configuration and place that can be occupied by both blacks and whites leads us back to Beneduzi’s reading of color as social place but also as physical space. To explain this dimension we can take into account Beneduzi’s reading of European migrants—and, in particular, of Italian migrants—as “*novos negros*” (new blacks) and intertwine it with the analysis of Andrews, Fernandes and Selnes.

³⁴ Beneduzi, “Alteridade e estranhamento”, 75-76; Schwarcz, “Do Preto, Do Branco”, 49.

³⁵ Joel Rufino dos Santos, “O negro como lugar” in *Raça, Ciência, Sociedade*, 223.

³⁶ Beneduzi, “Alteridade e estranhamento”, 75-76; Bastide and Fernandes, *Branços e Negros em São Paulo*, 82; Corossacz, *Il Corpo della Nazione*; Corossacz, *Meticciano, Democrazia Razziale*.

The authors, analyze São Paulo's labor market transformations between 1880's and the beginning of the new century giving attention to how its changes involved and affected former slaves and European migrants.³⁷

As the emancipation approached, more and more slaves were escaping plantations, phenomenon that continued massively after the abolition of slavery. Having gained freedom, black and mixed-race *libertos* developed a different understanding of their status. The main concern for former slaves was to distance themselves from the elements that could create an association with the figure of slaves, namely: working in the plantations, living in the *senzalas* and being subjected to coercive labour under the will of the slave master.³⁸

As stated by Andrews, “accepting plantation work, thus, put one uncomfortably close to slaves status, especially if one were *pardo* or *preto*.”³⁹ The plantations and the *senzalas* were the physical spaces associated with the status of slave. The words reported by a *liberta* (free black woman) who wanted to leave the plantation where she used to live represent both this association and the will of former slaves to abandon the fields: “I’m a slave, if I stay here I’ll remain a slave.”⁴⁰

The massive flight of slaves from plantations—along with the refusal of local population to occupy a position once occupied by slaves—generated a significant reduction of available manpower for coffee cultivations. In order to contract the demand for work force, the Brazilian government (along with a project of *branqueamento*) implemented a plan to attract workers from Europe. Starting from the assumption that if *negro* is synonym of slave/subaltern anybody occupying this position is considered non-white, Beneduzi asserts that by living in the *senzalas* and working in the plantations, European migrants were seen as treated by the *fazendeiros* as *negros*/slaves. Both Selnes and Andrews confirm such proposition.⁴¹ Selnes, for instance, takes into account Warren Dean's book on the municipality of Rio Claro (west side of Campinas) and the 1884 travel narrations of Van Delden Laërne. In their reports

³⁷ Beneduzi, “Alteridade e estranhamento”; Bastide and Fernandes, *Branços e Negros em São Paulo*; Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo*; Selnes, “Senhores e subalternos”.

³⁸ Bastide and Fernandes, *Branços e Negros em São Paulo*. Beneduzi, “Alteridade e estranhamento”; Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo*; Selnes, “Senhores e subalternos”.

³⁹ Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo*, 56.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁴¹ Beneduzi, “Alteridade e estranhamento”, 72, 77-89; Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo*; Selnes, *Senhores e subalternos*; Bastide and Fernandes, *Branços e Negros em São Paulo*.

they both recognized that landowners treated migrant workers as slaves. In addition, Selnes underlines others elements that made slaves' and migrants' life relatable. First, the fact that, at least at the beginning, *colonos* (European immigrants) were forced to live in the *senzalas*. Second, the *fazendeiro*'s paternalistic approach, which consisted in controlling and deciding on every aspects of the workers' life. Third, the threat of or the actual sexual abuse of female workers on the part of the masters.⁴²

In line with this point of view, Andrews writes that: "Accustomed to dealing mainly with slaves, planters tended to treat immigrant employees in the same coercive manner; as the Swiss consul in Rio de Janeiro reported to his government, the objective of the Brazilian government seemed to be to substitute white slaves for black."⁴³

Indeed, before the abolition of slavery European workers were reluctant to move to Brazil as they feared that by carrying out slaves' occupations they would have been treated as such. European immigration started to boost considerably only after emancipation, when the transformation of the labor market made the opportunity of working in Brazil more attractive in terms of costs/benefits.⁴⁴ Migrants' fear of being reduced to slave was not unfounded. As a matter of fact, many consular reports from European officials in São Paulo described immigrants' working conditions on plantation as actually similar to slavery ones.

What occurred was an overlap of the two social subjects—*negros*/slaves and immigrants—as they worked in the same coffee plantations and lived in the same dwelling—*senzalas*. In this sense, it is possible to notice how the physical place becomes also a social place: in the transition from the 19th to the 20th century the immigrant was attributed the social place of slaves/*negros* as they occupied the same physical space.⁴⁵

What worsened the "new *negros*" situation was on the one hand landowners' preference for white workers, and, on the other, the indentured servitude system. These two factors contributed to produce a sort of imprisonment of the *colonos* and enhance a feeling of possession from the part of the *fazeindeiros* towards their employees.⁴⁶

⁴² Selnes, "Senhores e subalternos", 283-287.

⁴³ Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo*, 55.

⁴⁴ Beneduzi, "Alteridade e estranhamento", 78; Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo*, 57-58.

⁴⁵ Beneduzi, "Alteridade e estranhamento"; Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo*; Selnes, "Senhores e subalternos".

⁴⁶ Beneduzi, "Alteridade e estranhamento"; Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo*.

Because the Brazilian government paid for their passage and supplies, migrants contracted a high debt, which made them more dependent to the landowners; as reported by Andrews, “[...] there was little practical difference between a slave who had to pay two thousand milreis for his freedom, and an immigrant who owed his employer the same amount.”⁴⁷

The image of the migrant as a new slave is depicted by Italian anarchist Oreste Ristori, who described Italian immigrants’ working conditions as animal-like. Food deprivation and excessive work, along with corporal punishments led to moral and physical degradation, circumstance that prevented the workers to raise up against their employers. In this scenario of control and domain, where the *fazendas* are described as prisons, the church and the police were the institutions which collaborated with the *fazendeiros* to sustain a system of “structural exploitation” weighing on immigrants.⁴⁸

At this point it is necessary to precise that black people were not the only segment of the population to be enslaved; as a matter of fact, slaves could be also indigenous or white. Actually, until the beginning of the 18th century slavery manpower was still predominantly indigenous. John Manuel Monteiro adds that the contribution of indigenous people to the national economic growth—according to him, often neglected by Brazilian historians—was significant both in the colonial and imperial period, especially after the abolition of slave trade in 1850. In accordance with a report prepared by the Brazilian government for the Centennial Exhibition of Philadelphia (1876), for instance, the estimate of indigenous working in the fields was of nearly one million.⁴⁹

As for white slaves, Brazilian Romanticism literature of the 19th century presents several instances of white slaves, although their condition depended mostly on the abolitionist debate that was gaining increasing relevance on a national level. Nevertheless, if we consider the strong presence of inter-racial relations, it is not to be excluded that some of the slaves of the *fazendas* (farms) could have been phenotypically white. It is to be recalled that the principle establishing the transmission of status from a slave to her offspring was that of “*partus*

⁴⁷ Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo*, 55.

⁴⁸ Beneduzi, “Alteridade e estranhamento”, 79-89.

⁴⁹ Monteiro, “As “raças indígenas””, 17; Beneduzi, “Alteridade e estranhamento”, 76-77; Bastide and Fernandes, *Branços e Negros em São Paulo*, 9-12.

sequitur ventrem”— meaning that if the mother was a slave her children would have been enslaved as well, even if the father was of high social condition.⁵⁰

Indeed, as argued by Fernandes, among the enormous quantity of enslaved *mestiços* it was possible to count numerous slaves depicted as light-skinned mulattos or “almost-whites”. In these cases, the master was the one who could decide to free his children, circumstance that occurred very rarely. If the master was widowed and with no legitimate sons, for instance, there was the possibility that, through his will, he would concede his illegitimate children the *alforria* and even his properties (slaves included).⁵¹

1.3 The racial question

Before taking into consideration the racial question, it is to be pointed out that, although the caste system was based on color distinction and social hierarchy, up to the first half of the 19th century, the notion of race intended as biological categorization of human beings was not present in Brazil. Corossacz points out that up until the 18th century, the term “race” was used to define the lineage of aristocratic families.⁵² In addition, color was not yet considered as a biological criterium explaining the inferiority or superiority of individuals on scientific terms. In relation to African and afro-descendent slaves, for instance, Corossacz argues that they were categorized according to their “social history”, rather than color, since “[...]color per sé was not sufficient to identify a social group [...]”⁵³ By “social history”, the author intends to refer to slaves’ geographical provenance as she makes reference to the studies of João José Reis and Eduardo Silva which show that in the Bahia of the 1820’s-30’s slaves were distinguished into black slaves born in Brazil—referred to as *crioulos*—and black slaves coming from Africa—referred to as *pretos*.⁵⁴ This distinction is confirmed by the documentation about five *fazendas* in Campinas (around 1872) which provides evidence of

⁵⁰ Beneduzi, “Alteridade e estranhamento”, 77-76; Bastide and Fernandes, *Branços e Negros em São Paulo*, 82.

⁵¹ Bastide and Fernandes, *Branços e Negros em São Paulo*, 82; Selnes, “Senhores e subalternos”, 258-268.

⁵² Corossacz, *Razzismo, Meticciano, Democrazia Razziale*, 14.

⁵³ Corossacz, *Il Corpo della Nazione*, 91.

⁵⁴ Corossacz, *Il Corpo della Nazione*, 91; Corossacz, *Razzismo, Meticciano, Democrazia Razziale*, 8-10.

the preference of slave masters for *crioulos*—and, more specifically, *crioulos* from Campinas or other southeastern regions—over African slaves:

[...] there is evidence of a clear tendency among masters to strongly discriminate against Africans in the distribution of domestic and qualified labour. As for Brazilian slaves, the ones from the South-east were preferred over the ones from any other region within every age group. [...] The slaves who were not from the Southeast (and the women coming from this region but not born in Campinas) were promoted less frequently and more slowly because their qualities and moral features were less known to the master.⁵⁵

The analysis of the *fazendas* in Campinas seems to reinforce the argument provided by Corossacz, namely that skin color was not the only element used to classify Afro-descendants showing that the geographical origin was given a great importance in the choice of slaves from the part of the masters. São Paulo newspapers adverts about the sell of slaves help to understand which other elements were used to describe slaves before the beginning of the 1880's. Because slaves were treaded as if they were objects, as wrote above, the adverts were wrote to make the “piece” more appealing to the potential buyer; the sellers highlighted especially age, physical and moral features as in the examples below:

“Slave. For sale: slave aged from 20 to 30, healthy, strong, with no vice nor flaws.” (A Província de São Paulo, 28th of February, 1879)⁵⁶

“Good slaves: For sale 3 excellent slaves: a boy aged from 16 to 17, good-looking; one aged 35, extremely skilled, agile in plowing and a creole aged from 14 to 15, nice figure.” (*Correio Paulistano*)⁵⁷

1.3.1 The racial question and the racial theories

In Brazil, the discussion about race and the racial question⁵⁸ acquired relevance from the 1880's, in particular in proximity of the abolition of slavery, the proclamation of the Republic (1889) and the beginning of the great European migratory wave (1880-1920). Actually, a

⁵⁵ Selnes, “Senhores e subalternos”, 272-273.

⁵⁶ Translation of the original: “*Escravo. Vende-se um de 20 a 30 anos sadio, robusto, sem vícios, nem defeitos.*” In Schwarcz, *Retrato em branco e negro*, 95.

⁵⁷ Translation of the original: “*Escavos bons: Vennde-se 3 excellentes escravos, sendo: um muleque de 16 para 17 annos de idade, bonita figura, outro de 25 annos, habilissimo, destro de serviço de lavoura, e uma creoulla de 14 para 15 annos, bonita estampa.*” In Schwarcz, *Retrato em branco e negro*, 94.

⁵⁸ For racial question it is to be intended “the set of ideas, representations and power practices developed between the 19th and 20th century by political and cultural élites to define the nature of social relations between indigenous, Africans and Europeans’ descendants and their status as social and natural groups”. In Corossacz, *Razzismo, Meticciano, Democrazia Razziale*, 7-8.

science of the “races” existed in Brazil already in the 1860’s under the influence of the French anatomist and anthropologist Paul Broca. Nevertheless, the literature on the subject was fragmented and mostly based on the study of the origin of the human races.⁵⁹ In addition, over the 1870’s the national debate was centered mainly on the abolition of slavery and was discussed more under economic terms rather than racial ones. Slavery was perceived by the abolitionists as an element of backwardness—especially in comparison with European countries. They believed that the substitution of slaves with free paid workers would have fostered the national economic development. It was only after 1877, with the first class of physical anthropology—lectured by João Batista Lacerda at the National Museum—that the study of race in Brazil became more systemic.⁶⁰

Physical anthropology consisted in the hierarchical classification of “human types” according to the attribution of phenotypic and biological characteristics to different human groups. It was based on social darwinism which, starting from Darwin’s metaphor of the “survival of the fittest”, argued that progress was the result of the competition between human races; the superior race (white race) would have prevailed on the others (inferior races), doomed to perish. These and other theories — which emerged in Europe over the 19th century and are referred to as “racial theories”—constituted the so-called scientific racism, that is, the set of disciplines that justified scientifically the assumed superiority/inferiority of human groups.⁶¹ In this context, human beings and in particular *negros* started to be considered “objects of science”; by consequence, science became progressively the reference discipline both in the field of social relations and the racial question.⁶²

Racial theories had been favorably accepted by the Brazilian cultural elite for two main reasons. First, they validated the dominance of whites over blacks and mulattos as they explained objectively and in terms of racial superiority/inferiority social disparities and hierarchical structures inherited by the slavery system. Second, they gave support to the

⁵⁹ Giralda Seyferth, “Construindo a nação: hierarquias raciais e o papel do racismo na política de imigração e colonização” in Raça, Ciência, Sociedade; Schwarcz, *Nem Preto nem Branco*; Corossacz, *Razzismo, Meticciano, Democrazia Razziale*; Schwarcz, *O Espetáculo das Raças*; Corossacz, *Il Corpo della Nazione*; Schwarcz, *Retrato em branco e negro*.

⁶⁰ Seyferth, “Construindo a nação”; Monteiro, “As “raças” indígenas”; Corossacz, *Razzismo, Meticciano, Democrazia Razziale*; Schwarcz, *Retrato em Branco e Negro*.

⁶¹ Schwarcz, *Retrato em branco e negro*; Seyferth, “Construindo a nação”.

⁶² Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural*; Schwarcz, *Retrato em branco e negro*.

nationalistic approach that started to develop during the formation of the Republic. Indeed, race was considered the essential element for the construction of a Brazilian racial and national identity—which consisted of racial, cultural and linguistic homogeneity—and for the process of civilization of a new nation. In this context, it is possible to notice the connection between race, nation and science. Racial theories affirmed that only white races could attain civilization and achieve progress. The issue with Brazil was how to build a new civilized nation when blacks and *mestiços*—who constituted a strong component of Brazilian population—were scientifically considered inferior.⁶³

1.3.2 Miscegenation and the theory of whitening

At the end of the 19th century Brazil was looked at as a unique and extreme case of *miscigenação* (miscegenation). As reported by Schwarcz, travelers and intellectuals depicted Brazil as a “festival of colors”, a “society of crossbreds”, “a typical country of miscegenation” and a “spectacle of miscegenation”.⁶⁴ Under the viewpoint of the supporters of scientific racism, such as Arthur de Gobineau and George Vacher Lapogue, miscegenation, consequence of the colonial “promiscuity”, would have hindered national development because of the presence of the *negro* element. Indeed, Gobineau recommended to avoid racial mixture and described mixed-race population as absolutely ugly, physically and spiritually spoiled and corrupted: “It is a completely mulatto population, with vice in blood and spirit and frighteningly ugly”.⁶⁵ In a first moment, therefore, the vision of miscegenation and of the country’s racial future was extremely negative and pessimistic. In addition, intellectuals’ concerns were enhanced by quantitative data on the population which showed that black and mulatto population tended to increase. According to 1872 census, dark-skinned people accounted for the 55% of total population. In 1890, white population was predominant in the

⁶³ Seyferth, “Construindo a nação”; Schwarcz, *Retrato em branco e negro*; Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural*; Schwarcz, *Nem Preto nem Branco*; Corossacz, *Razzismo, Meticciano, Democrazia Razziale*; Schwarcz, *O Espetáculo das Raças*; Corossacz, *Il Corpo della Nazione*.

⁶⁴ Translations of the expressions in the original: “festival de cores”, “sociedade de raças cruzadas”, “um típico país miscigenado”, “espetáculo brasileiro da miscigenação.” In Schwarcz, *O Espetáculo das Raças*, 12.

⁶⁵ Translation of the original: “Trata-se de uma população totalmente mulata, viciada no sangue e no espírito e assustosamente feia”. Schwarcz, *O Espetáculo das Raças*, 13.

south-eastern region—61%—, but in the rest of the country the situation was inverted, with *mestiços* amounting to 46% of the population.⁶⁶

In order to solve this racial issue (the presence of the negro in the future civilized nation) and to turn the vision of miscegenation from negative into positive, Brazilian scientists combined social darwinism and social evolutionism—according to which races are not stationary, but evolve over time—to elaborate a new thesis named “*teoria do branqueamento*” (theory of whitening). According to this theory, racial mixture would have led to an improvement of the race under the assumption that the stronger genes of the superior white race would have prevailed over time resulting in the progressive disappearance of the black component.⁶⁷ Lacerda had a key role in the scientific legitimation of the theory of *branqueamento*. In his essay “Sur le métis au Bresil”, presented at the First Universal Races Congress of London, 1911, he argued that, through the selective process of miscegenation, the population would have whitened within three generations and blacks and *mestiços* would have extinguished. His essay was presented along with the painting “A Redenção de Can” by Modesto Brocos y Gomes entitled “The negro turning into white, in the third generation, through the effect of racial crossing”⁶⁸ which represented metaphorically the miscegenation model necessary to whiten the nation: a black grandmother, a mulatto mother, a Mediterranean father and a white child. The painting exemplified also the idea that the white man was the only legitimated mean to whiten the population—women were not allowed to engage in sexual relationships with black men; in this case miscegenation was viewed as a degeneration of the white race.⁶⁹

According to Schwarcz, Seyferth and Corossacz, one of the most peculiar characteristics of the whitening theory was its ambiguity: miscegenation was seen as something evil that needed to be eradicated, and, at the same time, as the solution for the Brazilian racial problem.

⁶⁶ Schwarcz, *O Espetáculo das Raças*, 13.

⁶⁷ Schwarcz, *O Espetáculo das Raças*, 16-17; Seyferth, “Construindo a nação”; Schwarcz, *Nem Preto nem Branco*, 31-32; Carlos Hasenbalg, “Entre o mito e os fatos: racismo e relações raciais no Brasil” in *Raça, Ciência e Sociedade* eds. Marcos Chor Maio and Ricardo Ventura Santos (Rio de Janeiro: FIOCRUZ, 1996), 235-236; Schwarcz, *Retrato em Branco e Negro*.

⁶⁸ Translation of the original: “Le nègre passant au blanc, à la troisième génération, par l’effet du croisement de races”, Schwarcz, *Nem Preto nem Branco*, 20.

⁶⁹ Corossacz, *Il Corpo della Nazione*; Corossacz, *Razzismo, Meticciano, Democrazia Razziale*; Seyferth, “Construindo a nação”.

Indeed, miscegenation was exalted and regarded positively only when in relation to the white element and to the project of whitening the population. Corossacz, underlines the theory's obsession for the *mestiços* as a transitory element: even if they were seen as degenerated and morally corrupted, they also represented a “challenge” to biological classification leading to the affirmation of the superior white element.⁷⁰

The theory of whitening expected the population to whiten not only through miscegenation, but also through immigration from Europe. In this way, between the end of the 19th and the turn of the new century, racial theories became the ideological foundation for the implementation of immigration policies that had three aims: the formation of a whitened Brazilian race and of a national identity; the increase of manpower availability in the plantations of the southern regions; and the occupation of territories in the northeastern region.⁷¹ To accomplish this project the Brazilian government implemented immigration policies to incentivize European immigration which included the payment of migrants' passage to Brazil, and a propaganda of the benefits of working in the country. Although attempts of attracting migrants were made already between 1818 and 1850⁷², it was only between 1880 and 1930 that the immigration wave increased massively. Over this period, with a peak in the decade of the 1890s, nearly four million immigrants arrived in Brazil; more than one third were Italians (1.145.472), followed by Portuguese (551.385) and Germans (112.593).⁷³

In the debate on immigration and race at the beginning of the Republic, authors such as Lacerda, Silvio Romero and Joaquim da Silva Rocha agreed on the fact that the European migrant had the role of contributing, through miscegenation, to the creation of a “Brazilian

⁷⁰ Schwarcz, *Retrato em branco e negro*, 13; Seyferth, “Construindo a nação”, 51; Corossacz, *Il Corpo della Nazione*, 95-96.

⁷¹ Seyferth, “Construindo a nação”; Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo*; Beneduzi, “Alteridade e estranhamento”.

⁷² In 1818, occurred the first attempts to colonize territories through European immigration with the settlements of Germans in the north-east, and of Swiss in the state of Rio de Janeiro. The intent was to implement a model of agriculture different from the one of monoculture. Between 1818 and 1850, nearly six thousands Germans settled in the States of Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina and Paraná. Seyferth, “Construindo a nação” 44.

⁷³ Seyferth, “Construindo a nação”; Corossacz, *Il Corpo della Nazione*, 91-93; Corossacz, *Razzismo, Meticcato, Democrazia Razziale*, 19-20; Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo*; Jair de Souza Ramos, “Dos males que vêm como o sangue: as representações raciais e a categoria do imigrante indesejável nas concepções sobre imigração da década de 20” in *Raça, Ciência e Sociedade* eds. Marcos Chor Maio and Ricardo Ventura Santos (Rio de Janeiro: FIOCRUZ, 1996), 59-62.

historical race”, a concept that was associated with the idea of the history of Brazil as a history of formation of national “type”/“race” that distanced itself from the other inferior races.⁷⁴ Immigrants were also supposed to “colonize” territories with the aim of mixing with the locals and whiten the population. Silvio Romero, for instance, suggested to distribute the *colonos* over the national territory, but to concentrate them especially in an area that he called *Brasil intermediário* (intermediary Brazil)—an area that comprehended the regions from Maranhão to Espírito Santo, and that he considered as the most affected by the racial mixture with blacks and indigenous.⁷⁵ The intent was to prevent *colonos* from isolating themselves from the locals, fact that would have led to the consolidation of “homogeneous colonies” as it happened in the German and Italian settlements of the south in the pre-Republican wave of immigration. A third element that Brazilian intellectuals considered was the capability of migrants of “assimilation”, that is, their culture should fit in the Brazilian scenario—the preference was a culture of Latin origin.⁷⁶

It is clear therefore that, despite the propaganda to incentive immigration and the need for manpower, not all migrants were welcomed. Indeed, in this period the notion of “desirable migrants” vis-à-vis “undesirable migrants” is developed.

The categorization of migrants was concretized through the implementation of selective immigration policies (1890), that restricted the entrance of Asians and Africans.⁷⁷ The exclusion of Africans and Asians had already been elaborated in the immigration debate of the 1850’s-70’s as they were considered inferior and unfit to work in a free initiative system (the debate on the abolition of slavery was already open). Although in the 1870’s the possibility of Chinese immigration was put on the table, there was the fear of an Asian racial contamination. Later on, at the beginning of the 20th century, Silva Rocha criticized the initiative of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro private companies to hire Japanese and Chinese workers to fulfill

⁷⁴ Seyferth, “Construindo a nação”; Ramos, “Males que vêm como o sangue”

⁷⁵ Seyferth, “Construindo a nação”, 50.

⁷⁶ Seyferth, “Construindo a nação”; Ramos, “Males que vêm como o sangue”.

⁷⁷ Schwarcz, *Retrato em Branco e Negro*, 184; Ramos “Males que vêm com o sangue”; Ribeiro Corossacz, *Razzismo, Meticcato, Democrazia razziale*, 19-20. Seyferth, “Construindo a nação”; Andrews, “Democracia Racial Brasileira”; Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*.

the need for labor force, but he added that Asian immigrants were accepted on the conditions that they would not settle permanently on Brazilian soil.⁷⁸

As for Africans⁷⁹ and former slaves, their insertion in the realm of paid work was excluded a priori, not only because they were seen as the evil race to be eradicated, but because they were considered as able to work only under coercion. In the years prior to emancipation, planters believed in the *ideologia da vadiagem*, “[...] a firm and unshakable belief in the innate laziness and irresponsibility of the of the black and racially mixed Brazilian masses.”⁸⁰ They were considered *vadios* (bums) and vagrants, “who would not work except under the threat of extreme force.”⁸¹

It is possible to conclude, therefore, that the only “desirable” migrants were the Europeans, because they were the only civilized and thus, the only who could fulfill the aspiration to a white nation. Actually, also European groups were categorized, not in racial terms—after all, they were all white—, but according to their work aptitude and possibility of cultural adaptation; Italians for, instance, were the most preferred because of the culture of latin origin.⁸²

In the end, the project of whitening the population via selective immigration was quite a failure: the colonies established in the states of Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina and the Paraná plane, for instance, did not blend in with the local population; also the attempt of directing migrants towards the northern-east region failed. In 1890, the black and mixed population still accounted for the 46% of the total population.⁸³

The analysis conducted so far, allows to detect some discrepancies in the Brazilian racial question. Firstly, the abolition of slavery—which enshrined freedom and equality to all individuals—coincided with the embrace of racial theories, which in fact, asserted the opposite—namely the inferiority of *negros* and indigenous people. Ribeiro Corossacz,

⁷⁸ Seyferth, “Construindo a nação”, 55 ; Ramos, “Males que vêm com o sangue”.

⁷⁹ The attempt of immigration of an African-American group in 1921 will be discussed later in this chapter when discussing the “flaws” of racial democracy.

⁸⁰ Andrews, Blacks and Whites in São Paulo, 48.

⁸¹ Idem.

⁸² Seyferth, “Construindo a nação”.

⁸³ Andrews, Afro-Latin America; Seyferth, “Construindo a nação”; Schwarcz, *O Espetáculo das Raças*,13.

Schwarcz, da Silveira Nunes, dos Santos and Silva agree that racial theories had been imported, and adapted almost arbitrarily to the context to be used as ground to validate scientifically social disparities, to preserve already present and/or create new forms of hierarchy and stratification, and to establish differentiated criteria of citizenship.⁸⁴ This new form of stratification can be seen in the exclusion of former slaves from the new labor market, circumstance that relegated them to a condition of poverty and marginalization in the peripheries of the city—as in the case of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.⁸⁵ The economic and social transformation that occurred in the passage from the 19th to the 20th—from slavery to free labor, from the caste system to the class system—produced another change. The figure of *negro* lost its association to color—with emancipation color lost its original connotation of indicating either freedom and slavery—and started to be connected to poverty. Negritude changed also its physical space—from the *senzalas* to the favelas. *Negro* became synonym of poor and no more of slave.⁸⁶

Secondly, the ambiguity of the theory of whitening created an ambivalent image of the *mestiços*, who were exalted and despised at the same time. The project of creating a new national identity included the mulattos, but only as a transitory means to build an European-like nation. As stated by dos Santos and Silva,

The ideology of whitening present in the process of miscegenation constituted in Brazil the construction of a national identity founded on white European heritage, denying any possibility of considering an alternative identity founded on the black heritage of African origin.⁸⁷

1.4. Racial democracy: a new optimistic approach to race and miscegenation

The decades of the 1920's and the 1930's marked a turning point in the racial studies, which started to see the Brazilian multi-ethnic panorama in a positive light. Scholars such as

⁸⁴ Sylvia Da Silveira Nunes, "Racismo No Brasil: Tentativas De Disfarce De Uma Violência Explícita." *Psicologia USP* 17, no. 1 (2006), 89-90; Corossacz, *Razzismo, Meticciano, Democrazia Razziale*, 17; Raquel Amorim dos Santos, and Rosângela Maria de Nazaré Barbosa e Silva. "Racismo Científico no Brasil: Um Retrato Racial do Brasil Pós-Escravatura. *Educar em Revista* 34, no. 68 (2018):253-268. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0104-4060.53577>; Schwarcz, *Nem Preto nem Branco*, 31; Schwarcz, *O Espetáculo das Raças*, 16.

⁸⁵ Beneduzi, "Alteridade e estranhamento"; Andrews, *Blacks and White in São Paulo*; Bastide and Fernandes, *Branços e Negros em São Paulo*.

⁸⁶ Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*, 8-10; Corossacz, *Razzismo, Meticciano, Democrazia Razziale*, 10; Beneduzi, "Alteridade e estranhamento", 72, 76; Bastide and Fernandes, *Branços e Negros em São Paulo*.

⁸⁷ dos Santos and Silva. "Racismo Científico no Brasil", 257.

Fernando Ortiz and Arthur Ramos, criticized scientific racism and adopted a cultural approach towards race. They took inspiration from the studies of Franz Boas, who replaced the notion of race with the one of culture.⁸⁸ The detachment from racial theories was also due to their association with the Nazi racial policies. Especially after World War II, the genocide of the Jewish people had an important impact both on the debate on racism and the relationship between Brazil and Europe.⁸⁹

The optimistic approach about race culminated in the 1930's with the cultural valorization and exaltation of the *mestiçagem* (racial mixture), which became the symbol of Brazilian national identity. At the beginning of the 1900's Brazil started to be regarded to, both nationally and abroad, as a racial paradise where blacks, whites, *mestiços* and *índios* lived harmoniously together in a society free of racial segregation. Brazil became the land of racial equality, where prejudice and discrimination were absent.⁹⁰ This image of racial idyll is referred to as “racial democracy”, expression generally attributed to Gilberto Freyre, who in his works of the 1930's talked about “social democracy” and “ethnic democracy.”⁹¹ Later on, it was the French sociologist Roger Bastide to use the term in 1944 in his description of Recife population: “[...] a population of *mestiços*, whites and blacks fraternally gathered together [...]. And this was the beautiful image of social and racial democracy that Recife offered[...].⁹²”

According to Yvonne Maggie, racial democracy is one of the myth of Brazilian society—along with the “fable of the three races” and the project of *branqueamento*.⁹³ The word “myth” refers to the fact that, as it will be explained later in this chapter, behind racial democracy racial discrimination and racial disparity did exist.

⁸⁸ Schwarcz, *Retrato em Branco e Negro*; Andrews, “Democracia Racial Brasileira”; Lourdez Martínez-Echazábal, “O culturalismo dos anos 30 no Brasil e na América Latina” in *Raça, Ciência e Sociedade* eds. Marcos Chor Maio and Ricardo Ventura Santos (Rio de Janeiro: FIOCRUZ, 1996).

⁸⁹ Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*; Corossacz, *Razzismo, Meticcato, Democrazia Razziale*.

⁹⁰ Hasenbalg, *Discriminação e desigualdades raciais no Brasil*; Schwarcz, *Nem Preto nem Branco*; Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*; Hasenbalg, “Entre o mito e os fatos”.

⁹¹ Corossacz, *Razzismo, Meticcato, Democrazia Razziale*, 68-69; Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*, 79;

⁹² Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*, 79.

⁹³ Yvonne Maggie, ““Aqueles a quem foi negada a cor do dia”: as categorias cor e raça na cultura brasileira”, in *Raça, Ciência e Sociedade*, 226.

The development of the notion of Brazil as a racial democracy can be attributed to three main elements: the absence of a legal system of racial segregation; the above-mentioned “fable of the three races”; and the representation of slavery as a “benign slavery.”

The lack of segregationist laws in the aftermath emancipation created an extremely positive image of Brazilian racial relations, especially in comparison with the realities of the Jim Crow laws in the United States and of the Apartheid in South Africa. The predominance of a racially mixed population and the possibility for inter-racial marriages enhanced the conception of racial paradise as it is thought that sexual intimacy excludes racial prejudice. Actually, the absence of an official system of segregation did not preclude racial discrimination, on the contrary, it made it more subtle and harder to detect. The ideology of racial democracy made racism a taboo with the consequence that the issue was not addressed.⁹⁴

As for the “fable of the three races”, its origin lies in the essay of the German naturalist Karl F. P. Von Martius published in the “Journal of the Brazilian Historical and Geographical Institute”, 1845. The idea is that the Brazilian people originated from the encounter and mixture of three groups: the white Portuguese, the black Africans, and the *índios*.⁹⁵ According to Roberto da Matta, this fable allowed *mestiçagem* to become part of the national identity as it unified in the nation three elements that appeared to be antagonist. The main characteristic of the myth, which became the dominant cultural ideology, is the capability of including opposite elements in a homogeneous set. In this context, miscegenation is valorized as it exemplifies the encounter of the opposites—black and white—in a *continuum* of colors.⁹⁶

The vision of Brazil as a country founded on the harmony of races and racial mixture influenced the works of Freyre, according to whom miscegenation was the result of the intimate relationships between slave masters and the slaves working in the *casa-grande*. In his vision, this had occurred because Portuguese colonizers had no prejudice towards black

⁹⁴ Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*; Aiger, “Racism, Culture and Black Identity in Brazil”, 251; Bastide and Fernandes, *Branços e Negros em São Paulo*, 164-167; Alegretti, “Racismo no Brasil: Todo Mundo Sabe que Existe”; Hasenbalg, *Discriminação e desigualdades raciais no Brasil*; Hasenbalg, “Entre o mito e os fatos”.

⁹⁵ Corossacz, *Il Corpo della Nazione*, 17; Maggie, ““Aqueles a quem foi negada a cor do dia”, 226; Aiger, “Racism, Culture and Black Identity in Brazil”, 249-250; Maio and Santos “Apresentação”, 9; Monteiro, “As “raças indígenas””, 15.

⁹⁶ Corossacz, *Il Corpo della Nazione*, 17-19.

people.⁹⁷ This perspective was developed in his work *Casa-grande & Senzala* (1933), where he interpreted Brazilian slavery as “benign” and as a “necessary evil” because of its positive impact on racial tolerance and social relations. Indeed, he described the northeastern *casa-grande* as a society where the opposites—the white benevolent master and the black submissive slave—balanced out. Schwarcz, stresses that the author created the story of Brazilian sexuality, whose result was an original and well made racial mixture.⁹⁸

Even though Freyre tried to convey an idyllic image of slavery underlying the pacific attitude of Portuguese masters, especially in comparison with north-american slavery, data on mortality rates show the contrary. As stated by Graziella M. Silva and Marcelo Paixão:

The early literature comparing slavery in Brazil to other countries has commonly identified the high rates of manumission and close personal relationships between masters and slaves as characteristic of Brazilian slavery. If such characteristics were invoked to praise Brazilians’ race relations, the very low survival rates of Brazilian slaves, especially when compared to the United States and even other Latin American countries, contradicts the allegedly beneficent character of Brazilian slavery.⁹⁹

Moreover, data reported by Selnes on Campinas’ slave population between the 1850’s and 1860’s, for instance, suggests a life expectancy at birth was between 16 and 26 years; life expectancy at age 10, was between 34 and 38 years. In addition, the ads on slaves escapes of national newspapers depict 30-years-old plantations slaves as old, with gray hair and no teeth.¹⁰⁰ These accounts, as opposite to Freyre’s interpretation, confirm the harshness of life conditions of slaves, especially of those working in the fields. It is to be recalled that slaves were treated as objects. They lived at the will of the slave masters and in case of disobedience, escape attempt or in the case they committed a crime they were subjected to extremely cruel corporal punishments.¹⁰¹

As for miscegenation, if it is true that masters engaged in sexual relationships with their slaves, it is not true, in most of the cases, that this proximity occurred because of feelings of

⁹⁷ Schwarcz, *Nem Preto, nem Branco*, 38-40; Aiger, “Racism, Culture and Black Identity in Brazil”, 251; Schwarcz, *Retrato em Branco e Negro*.

⁹⁸ Schwarcz, *Nem Preto nem Branco*, 38-40.

⁹⁹ Silva and Paixão, “Mixed and Unequal”, 176.

¹⁰⁰ Selnes, “Senhores e subalternos”, 259; Schwarcz, *Nem Preto, nem Branco*, 38.

¹⁰¹ Schwarcz, *Retrato em branco e negro*; Bastide and Fernandes, *Branco e Negros em São Paulo*; Prudente, “O negro na ordem jurídica brasileira”; Selnes, “Senhores e subalternos”.

reciprocal affection or because of the master's benevolence and tolerance.¹⁰² This proximity was rather the consequence of rapes and threats.¹⁰³

To give a concrete example of this scenario characterized by the sexual objectification of female slaves, the case of the slaves Serafim and his wife Romana reported by Selnes is relevant. In a petition presented to the president of São Paulo (1972), Serafim claimed that more than once he risked his life to protect his wife from the "libidinous" assaults of his master. Although Serafim and Romana managed to escape, they were still not safe; the master was looking for him saying that "[...] *he must kill him because he needs the crioula Romana as his concubine!*."¹⁰⁴

We see, in this case, that the slave master was willing to kill Serafim in order to have his desires satisfied by Romana.

In other circumstances, as it happens in the story of Marcelina and her master Antônio (Rio de Janeiro, 1887), slaves managed to improve their social condition by engaging in intimate relationships with their masters. Marcelina, for instance, was granted the *alforria* by Antônio, but it is unknown whether it was "[...] through pain and humiliation" or "through calculation and complaisance."¹⁰⁵ However, Marcelina probably knew that she would have received favors by accepting her master's advances; and that, if she refused, she would have been punished.

Despite being different, these two cases—the one of Romana and the one Marcelina—show that female slaves were stuck in a trap of "power and favors". The master used his position of power to threaten the slaves and obtain what he wanted under the promise of better conditions

¹⁰² It is to be recalled that even though over the imperial period interracial marriages were stigmatized—as they were a threat to the integrity of the caste order—this, did not prevent masters to have relationships outside the marriage with women slaves. Black women were used by masters to satisfy their sexual need. See Fernandes and Bastide, *Branços e Negros em São Paulo*, 86-88.

¹⁰³ Generally, masters threatened the slaves to give them corporal punishments or to sell them to other masters breaking their links with their kids and family. see Selnes, "Senhores e subalternos", 252-6, 260-264, 287.

¹⁰⁴ Italics of the original text: "[...] *o há de matar porque precisa da crioula Romana para sua manceba!*" Selnes, "Senhores e subalternos", 253.

¹⁰⁵ Translations of the original sentence: "[...] talvez pela dor e humilhação, talvez pelo cálculo e complacência." Selnes, "Senhores e subalternos", 254.

of life and promotions. It was a relation of “exchange of favors” that slaves could not escape: the more they achieved, the more they had to lose.¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, most of the times, slaves owners did not keep faith to their promises; this fact further explains why miscegenation was not the result of the benevolence of the master. As already discussed, in the majority of the cases, the master did not recognize his mixed-race children, neither did he free their slaves mothers. In some cases, when the illegitimate son was recognized—generally through the written will of the dead father—he became the new master inheriting the land and some of or all the slaves; despite this, it could happen that the *mestiço* master did not free his slave mother.¹⁰⁷

Overall, the myth of the benign slavery along with the fable of the three races and the image of Brazil as a multi-ethnic land without racial segregation, built the idea of a non-violent historical past, highlighting Brazilians’ character as calm and peaceable. To paraphrase Freyre, Brazil was never a country of extremisms where everything tended to soften and sweeten.¹⁰⁸

1.4 Dismantling racial democracy

Brazilian racial democracy became a model of harmonious racial relations also in Europe and in the United States. For what concerns the relations between Europe and Brazil for instance, Corossacz underlines a sort of exchange of roles: while at the end of the 19th Europe was the reference point in the realm of anthropology and natural sciences, between the 1930’s and 1940’s Europe will be the one to see Brazil as a model in the realm of racial relations.¹⁰⁹

Even though racial democracy reached the peak of popularity in the 1930’s, the idea of Brazil as racial paradise was already popular in the United States between the 1910’s and the 1920’s. In 1914, for instance, President Theodore Roosevelt asserted that, as opposite to the American

¹⁰⁶ Selnes, “Senhores e subalternos”, 252-6; 260-264, 287.

¹⁰⁷ Bastide and Ferandes, *Branco e Negros em São Paulo*; Selnes, “Senhores e subalternos”.

¹⁰⁸ Schwarcz, *Retrato em branco e negro*, 14-15.

¹⁰⁹ Corossacz, *Razzismo, Meticciano, Democrazia Razziale*, 64-66; Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*, 13, 27.

society, in Brazil the black man “was given the place to which his abilities entitle[d] him”¹¹⁰.

But was it really like so? The next subchapters (from 1.4.1 to 1.4.3) will present a series of instances and studies that reveal that racial democracy is an ideological discourse that do not represent the actual reality. The first case to be discussed relates the attempt of a group of African-American to create a colony in Brazil.

1.4.1 The BACS emigration project

The instances of upward mobility of some black Brazilians who managed to join the middle class on the one hand, and the efforts of the Brazilian diplomacy to incentivize immigration on the other, caught the attention of a group of African-American intellectuals, who tried in 1921 to form a colony in Brazil in the State of Mato Grosso founding a colonization company named BACS (Brazilian-American Colonization Syndicate).¹¹¹

BACS’ emigration project was pushed by the institutionalized violence of the Jim Crow laws and encouraged by the Brazilian immigration propaganda that reached African-American newspapers. In 1920, for instance, the *Baltimore Afro-American* published an initiative of Brazil’s Ministry of Agriculture that was offering to pay for accommodation and travel expenses, and grant long-term credit to Americans willing to work in Brazil.¹¹² Nevertheless, as discussed previously, Brazil’s immigration policies were addressed exclusively to white people as the aim was not only to make up for the scarcity of labor force and substitute former slaves manpower, but also to whiten the population.

In the optic of the theory of *branqueamento* the involvement of other races—blacks and Asians—was seen as a threat of racial hybridization that would have jeopardized the nation run towards civilization.

Racial democracy turned out to be an illusion as the Brazilian government mobilized to restrict African-American immigration. In 1921, Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs José Manoel de Azevedo Marques sent confidential messages to the Embassy of Brazil in Washington and to the consulates of Baltimore, Chicago, New York, St. Louis, and San

¹¹⁰ Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo*, 130.

¹¹¹ Ramos, “Dos males que vêm como o sangue; Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*; Andrews, “Democracia Racial Brasileira”; Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo*.

¹¹² Ramos, “Dos males que vêm como o sangue”, 63.

Francisco commanding that all the requests of visa from black immigrants should have been rejected.¹¹³ This unpleasant situation was directly experienced by the African-American publisher of the *Chicago Defender* Robert Abbott and his wife, who in 1923 were denied their visas by the Brazilian consul in Chicago. Once they managed to arrive in Brazil they were denied the hotel rooms they reserved in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Abbott's expectation to "[...] ferret out...the possible industrial, commercial and social opportunities for that enlightened and growing group of North American Negroes [...]"¹¹⁴ had been without any doubt disappointed. The episode was interpreted by Afro-Brazilian journalists as a normal occurrence of Brazilian society, where discrimination and exclusion occurred on a daily basis. São Paulo newspaper *Kosmos*, for instance, defined Brazilian democracy as a pure illusion.¹¹⁵

What is possible to observe between the 1910's and the 1930's is the coexistence of two opposite realities: on the one hand, the exaltation of racial democracy depicting Brazil as a society without racial discrimination; and, on the other, the ideology of *branqueamento* and the policies of selective immigration, aimed at the exclusion of the "undesirable immigrants" and at the elimination of the African heritage—both on biological and cultural terms. Of course, in practice, one reality excludes the other. Racial democracy was more a political ideology—rather than an actual representation of Brazil's social relations—to mask racial discrimination and preserve the oligarchic order. In fact, it allowed to naturalize racism starting from the assumption that Brazil's racial relations were historically non-conflictual.¹¹⁶

1.4.2 The UNESCO project and the new studies on racial discrimination

The 1950's signed the beginning of another important chapter for the advance in the studies about race relations and color, and also for the criticism of racial democracy. The new wave of studies was influenced by a set of research sponsored by the UNESCO in 1951. First of all, UNESCO contribution was fundamental as it ultimately established in the First Declaration on Race (1950) that: (1) 'race' is recognized by scientists as non-biological phenomenon ("For all practical social purposes 'race' is not so much a biological

¹¹³ Ibid., 64.

¹¹⁴ Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*, 74

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 75.

¹¹⁶ Hasenbalg, *Discriminação e desigualdades raciais no Brasil*. Andrews, "Democracia Racial Brasileira"; Hasenbalg, "Entre o mito e os fatos"; Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural*.

phenomenon as a social myth”¹¹⁷ ; (2) that miscegenation does not cause degeneration (“There is no evidence that race mixture as such produces bad results from the biological point of view”)¹¹⁸; (3) that human beings do not differ in their innate intellectual or compartmental characteristics as “[t]he scientific evidence indicates that the range of mental capacities in all ethnic groups is much the same.”¹¹⁹

From that moment on, therefore, ‘race’ have been used to indicate ethnic groups—also referred to as ‘populations’—with cultural and social differences; physical and phenotypical characteristics are the only elements that anthropologists can use for categorization. The Declaration also meant the confirmation of the pioneering studies conducted by scholars such as Franz Boas and Donald Pierson in the 1930’s who had already departed from the idea that connected mental and behavioral features to somatic and biological characteristics.¹²⁰

UNESCO’s project of research chose Brazil as a study field as it was still considered at the time the land of fraternity among races. The aim was to analyze the factors responsible for the harmonious coexistence of races in order to find manners to fight against racism and its form or racial discrimination. The study was first carried out in Salvador da Bahia—by American anthropologist Charles Wagley (1952) and Brazilian Thales de Azevedo (1953)—and then extended to São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro—carried out respectively by Roger Bastide and Florestan Fernandes (1955), and Luiz de Aguiar Costa Pinto (1953). The intention was to analyze the socio-economic changes occurring in Brazil at the time—where a strong tradition of rural economy contrasted the recent expansion of industrialization of urban centers—in the framework of racial relations.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ The UNESCO Courier: “Fallacies of racism exposed. UNESCO publishes Declaration by world’s scientists”, July-August, 1959, 4, available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000081475.nameddest=81490>

¹¹⁸ Idem

¹¹⁹ The UNESCO Courier: “Fallacies of racism exposed. UNESCO publishes Declaration by world’s scientists”, 1. See also Santos, “Da morfologia às moléculas”, 129-130.

¹²⁰ Schwarcz, *Retrato em branco e preto*; Santos “Da morfologia às moléculas”; Guimarães, “Cor, classes e status”; Antonio Sérgio Alfredo Guimarães, “Preconceito de Cor e Racismo no Brasil”, *Revista de Antropologia* 47, no. 1 (2004): 9-43. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0034-77012004000100001>.

¹²¹ The UNESCO Courier, “Fallacies of racism exposed”; Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*, 80; Corossacz Ribeiro, *Il Corpo della Nazione*, 101; Corossacz Ribeiro, *Razzismo, Meticcio, Democrazia Razziale*, 66-67; Schwarcz, *Nem Preto nem Branco*, 24, 54; Schwarcz, *Retratos em branco e negro*; Silva and Paixão, “Mixed and Unequal”.

Contrarily to the expectations, the findings revealed the existence of racial prejudice and socio-economic inequalities on the basis of skin color.

Wagley, Azevedo and Fernandes agreed on the interpretation that discrimination derived from the overlap of color and class; nevertheless, class prejudice seemed to be stronger: Afro-descendants were discriminated because they belonged to the lowest economic societal stratum and not because of skin color per se. Indeed, in the passage from the society of status (the caste system during the slavery period) to the society of class, color became a way to indicate socioeconomic conditions.¹²²

As confirmed by a popular saying, in Brazil a white poor is black and a black rich is white.¹²³ Whoever managed to break the equation *preto* equals poor and white equals rich, whitened or darkened accordingly. The idea according to which “money whitens”, was further confirmed by Wagley’s idea of “social race”. Wagley argued that race identification and categorization was influenced by socioeconomic status. In race measurements for census and demographic surveys, for instance, people tended to declare a lighter or darker color on the basis of their higher or lower economic conditions.¹²⁴

The studies of Bastide and Fernandes in the region of São Paulo were collected in the work “Branços e Negros em São Paulo” and distinguished for their innovative sociological approach. Moreover, to Fernandes is attributed the merit of having recognized the peculiarity of Brazilian racism consisting in “the prejudice of not having prejudice”¹²⁵, that is the tendency of not recognizing the existence of racism due to people’s fidelity to the ideology of racial democracy, which works as an imposition to avoid talking about racism. This attitude seems to explain the contradictory results of a survey carried out later in São Paulo (1988), in which the 97% of the interviewees denied they had prejudice and 98% of the same interviewees confirmed to know someone else that, indeed, had prejudice.^{126 127}

¹²² Corossacz, *Razzismo, Meticciano, Democrazia Razziale*, 68

¹²³ Schwarcz, *Nem Preto nem Branco*, 25; Guimarães, “Cor, classes e status”, 155.

¹²⁴ Silva and Paixão, “Mixed and Unequal”, 200-201.

¹²⁵ Bastide and Fernandes, *Branços e Negros em São Paulo*, 164. Schwarcz, *Nem Preto nem Branco*,

¹²⁶ Schwarcz, *Nem Preto nem Branco*, 24; Alegretti, “Racismo no Brasil”.

¹²⁷ Similar surveys were conducted in 1995 and 2011 showing similar results, see Schwarcz, *Nem Preto nem Branco*, 24-25.

What emerges, therefore, is an awareness of the existence of prejudice, that, however, is always attributed to the other. As Schwarcz says, Brazilians live in an island of racial democracy surrounded by racists.¹²⁸

As for the studies related to the connection of class and color prejudice, Fernandes found out that the association black/poor was so strong that *negros* were considered a priori as uneducated, alcoholics or bumps even when they were of good social extraction as shown in the following situation: “a negro of good social position wants to enter a club. The doorman approaches him: Please, enter from the back door.”¹²⁹

This example is relevant because it highlights the fact that in Brazil public places predisposed back doors and service elevators for blacks and the service staff only (cleaners, cooks, maids) as to restrict their access to social areas becoming instruments of social and racial discrimination. It is to be recalled that this type of occupations were considered “occupations for negros” because of the historical association of manual labor with slave labor.¹³⁰

The overlap between color and social condition is underlined by the fact that both *negros* and whites of low social class could be equally excluded from the access to certain public places as color was synonym of social condition. As stated by Fernandes:

“There is also the case of clubs, radio auditoriums, swimming pools and bars, whose statutes excludes negros; but it is to be noted that they are also closed for white people of the low class; [...] Prejudice should not be confused with selection. Selection is apparently made according to the line of colors, but because color is, in all these cases, synonym of low social condition.”¹³¹

Confronting the considerations of Fernandes and Pierson, it is possible to conclude that between the 30's and 50's Brazil was considered a multi-racial society of class where color was more than skin pigmentation. Color had indeed a double function: it identified both race

¹²⁸ Schwarcz, *Nem Preto nem Branco*, 24.

¹²⁹ Translation of the original: “um negro de boa posição social quer entrar numa *boite*. O porteiro aborda-o: Por favor, entre pela porta de serviço.” Bastide and Fernandes, *Branços e Negros em São Paulo*, 180.

¹³⁰ Schwarcz, *Nem Preto, Nem Branco*, 58, 64,65; Fernandes and Bastide, *Branços e Negros em São Paulo*.

¹³¹ Translation of the original: “Há ainda o caso das *boites*, dos auditórios de rádio, das piscinas e dos clubes, cujos estatutos excluem os negros; mas é preciso notar que estão igualmente fechados aos brancos da classe baixa; [...] Não se deve confundir preconceito com seleção. A seleção faz-se aparentemente conforme a linha das côres, mas porque a côr é, em todos êsses casos, sinônimo de baixa condição social.” in *Branços e Negros em São Paulo*, 180.

and a social category, this last one according to criteria such as the level of wealth and education. Thus, if in the slavery period *preto* was a synonym for slave, in the capitalist society *preto* became a synonym for poor, uneducated and low-rank employment.¹³²

Another conclusion that can be drawn is that despite of the lack of segregationists laws, a system of social exclusion (based on both class and color) was nevertheless present.

Franklin E. Frazier, for instance, who visited the State of Bahia in 1940, defined it as a “subtle system of etiquette”¹³³ that aimed at maintaining social distances. His observation was confirmed by the many instances of African-American journalists and travelers who reported to be discriminated in public places. One example can be the case of Ollie Stewart, correspondent for the newspaper *Baltimore Afro-American*, who had been refused by eleven hotels before he could find a room.¹³⁴

The work of Fernandes on color and class discrimination is significant also for having opened a debate over the 1970’s and 1980’s about his interpretation on the origin and future development of black people exclusion from post-slavery society.

According to Fernandes, color prejudice and socioeconomic stratification of the first decades of the 20th century were a residual of the slavery system in the new capitalistic order. According to his point of view, because the passage from slavery to emancipation had been abrupt, there was an asynchrony between the economic transformation and socio-cultural adaptations.¹³⁵ The critiques, advanced especially by Carlos Hasenbalg and Nelson do Vale Silva, were based on Fernandes’ optimistic conviction that the capitalistic system would have led to the progressive dissolution of color prejudice. This perspective, referred to as “assimilationist”, had an idealized conception of the competitive order as a society with

¹³² Guimarães, “Cor, classes e status”; Beneduzi, “Alteridade e estranhamento”; Arruda, “Dilemas do Brasil moderno”.

¹³³ Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*, 76-77.

¹³⁴ Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*; Andrews, *Democracia Racial Brasileira*; other examples of african-americans rejected from Brazilian hotels can be found in Bastide and Fernandes, *Branços e Negros em São Paulo*, 241-242.

¹³⁵ Hasenbalg, *Discriminação e desigualdades raciais no Brasil*, 82-83; Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo*.

democratic economic, moral and political foundations that were not compatible with the slavery structures.¹³⁶

Hasenbalg and other scholars, did not denied the contribution of the slavery past to the racial inequalities of the present, but gave a structural and political explanation to prejudice and discrimination. As opposed to Fernandes thesis, they were considered functional to capitalism: slavery racist structures were preserved so that they could maintain the privileges of the dominant class.¹³⁷ Under this perspective, color discrimination existed already in the caste system and it persisted after the emancipation assuming, thou, new meanings and new functions: it was used by the élite to maintain their privileged position, as has the possible social ascensions of blacks was seen as a threat to the asymmetrical system of privileges.¹³⁸

1.4.3 Analysis of socioeconomic inequality according to race and color

Another way to deconstruct the myth of racial democracy is looking at social inequalities based on color and race, especially in the realm of poverty, education and occupation. For this purpose, it is relevant to take into account a more recent study on racial inequalities and discrimination, namely the Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America (PERLA). It formed in 2008 to collect data on how discrimination and inequality articulate across ethnic and social boundaries. PERLA focused the research on four countries (Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Peru). The researchers collaborated with the main survey institutes of each country: *Centro Nacional de Consultoría* (National Center of Consultancy) in Colombia, *Data Opinión Publica y Mercados* in Mexico, Ipsos Peru, *Instituto Análise* (Institute of Analysis) in Brazil.¹³⁹

The study shows that racial democracy and the exaltation of *mestiçagem* as national virtue do not correspond to actual equality; as stated by Edward Telles: “Though the elites moved from centuries of explicit racial domination toward proclaiming harmonious race

¹³⁶ Hasenbalg, *Discriminação e desigualdades raciais no Brasil*, 82-83; Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo*.

¹³⁷ Andrews, “Democracia Racial Brasileira”, 27; Hasenbalg, *Discriminação e desigualdades raciais no Brasil*.

¹³⁸ Hasenbalg, *Discriminação e desigualdades raciais no Brasil*, 85-88.

¹³⁹ Telles, “The Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America (PERLA)”.

relations, social hierarchies based on race, color and language have nonetheless persisted.”¹⁴⁰

The study seems to confirm that social hierarchy and stratification in this region is based on the axis of color and race. This phenomenon was first referred to as “pigmentocracy” by Chilean anthropologist Alejandro Lipschutz in 1944, to indicate “[...] inequalities or hierarchies based on both ethnoracial categories, such as indigenous and black, and a skin color continuum.”¹⁴¹

PERLA surveys stand out for two main aspects. First, for being, at the time, the first cross-national representative surveys on race and ethnicity in Latin America. Representative surveys are important because their large samples allow to measure phenomena that can be generalized to the entire population. Second, they differ from censuses in that, while national censuses include one or two questions to measure ethnoracial composition, PERLA includes several and alternative ethnoracial items and questions.¹⁴²

In order to incorporate skin color in the study, PERLA researchers created a color palette of eleven skin tones (1 is the lightest, 11 is the darkest), which was presented in the surveys of all four countries. In the case of Brazil, hair texture (curly or kinky) was added.

PERLA Brazil survey was distributed in August 2010 to a countrywide sample of one thousand people. The main objective was analyzing the effect of racial categories and self-identification in Brazilian society.¹⁴³ The main findings are listed below.

Table 1¹⁴⁴ shows racial inequality on the basis of education (primary and secondary education) and occupation (white collar occupation vis-à-vis domestic work or work in the farm). Data are collected using the criteria of race self-identification.

¹⁴⁰ Telles, “The Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America (PERLA)”, 2.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴² Ibid., 6.

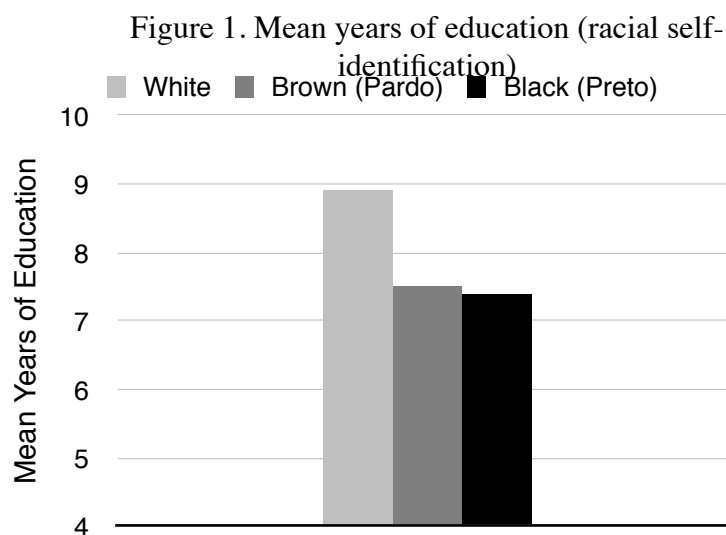
¹⁴³ Silva and Paixão, “Mixed and Unequal”, 190.

¹⁴⁴ Edward Telles and René D. Flores, “A Comparative Analysis of Ethnicity, Race, and Color in Latin America Based of PERLA Findings” in *Pigmentocracies: Ethnicity, Race, and Color in Latin America*, ed. Edward Telles (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina press, 2014), 224.

Table 1. Racial inequality by education and occupation (%) based on self-identification

	White	Pardo (brown)	Preto (blacks)
With secondary education	20	12	6
With primary education (excluding current students)	28	36	36
In white-collar occupations	31	25	22
Domestic worker, farmer or peasant	14	18	21

The findings based on racial self-identification reveal that both blacks and browns are more disadvantaged for what concerns the level of occupation and education. In particular, blacks occupying low-rank occupations are the majority (21%), in contrast with whites (14%). Blacks' rates of secondary education is the lowest (6%), almost three times less than their white counterparts. The differential in education between blacks and whites can be seen also in Figure 1¹⁴⁵, which represents the mean years of education, always based on racial self-identification.



The level of racial inequality is even more evident when data are collected according to the external attribution of skin color (in this case race is attributed according to a palette of skin colors instead of self-identification). Skin color appears to be a more reliable indicator of

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 225.

racial inequality than self-identification suggesting the relevance of physical appearance and external categorization when examining racial disparities. Table 2¹⁴⁶ shows that dark-skinned people belong to the group with the lowest percentage of university education (6%) as opposed to individuals with medium skin color (14%) and light skin color (22%). This shows that the level of secondary educations increases as the skin tone lightens. Similarly, dark people tend to occupy less prestigious job occupation (24%) as opposed to light-skinned individuals (13%).

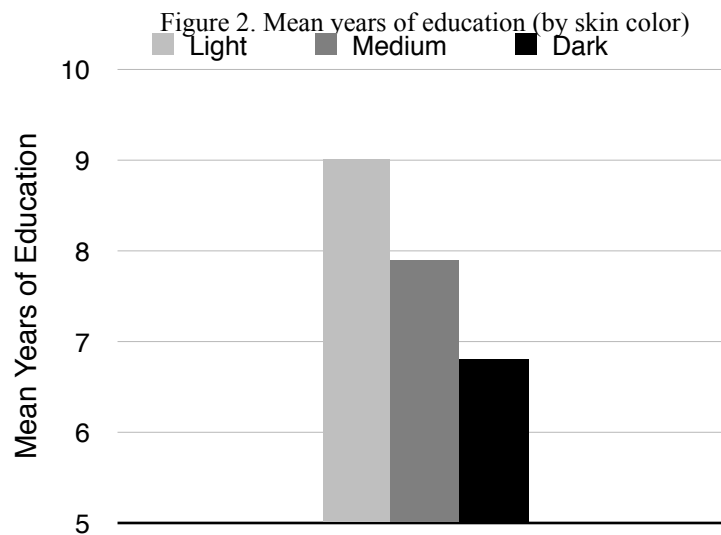
Table 2. Racial inequality by education and occupation (%) based on color

	Light (1-3)	Medium (4-5)	Dark (6+)
With university education (excluding students)	22	16	6
With primary education (excluding students)	29	31	6
In white-collar occupation	30	26	6
Domestic worker, farmer or peasant	13	16	6

As presented in figure 2, the disparity by mean years of education is considerably more evident when using skin color parameter instead of race according to self-identification. According to this chart light-skin people reach an average of 9 years of education while their dark-skin counterparts barely make up a mean of 7 years.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 227. (Figure 6.2)

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 228.



Racial disparity according to education rates is confirmed by a study conducted by Andrews, who takes as source the data collected by IGBE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) in the census of 2010. In this case, the population is classified according to the traditional census categories: whites (*brancos*), blacks and mulattos (*pretos* and *pardos* respectively), yellow (*amarelo*) for the indigenous population. According to this study, white people literacy rates are 7.1 points higher than blacks and mulattos rates (the percentage of literacy rate for whites is 92.8, while the one for blacks and mulattos is 85.7).¹⁴⁸

Two others indicators that are useful to measure racial inequality are poverty rate and sanitation accessibility (access to piped water and public sewage system).

In 2009, poverty rate measured by household earnings was twice as higher among Afro-Brazilians (34%) than among whites (17%).¹⁴⁹

As for the rate of access to sanitation by race confirms the data once again the disadvantages suffered by blacks and mixed-race individuals. The rate of blacks and mulattos accessing to piped water is 90.1%, that is 6.7 points less than whites (96.8%). As illustrated in Table 3¹⁵⁰ the differential between whites on the one hand, and blacks and mulattos on the other, is even higher in the case of access to public sewage system (16.4 points).

¹⁴⁸ George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America: Black Lives, 1600-2000*, (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2016), 59, ebook version.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

Table 3. Percentage of accessibility to sanitation according to race

	Blacks and mulattos (B&M)	Whites (W)	W – B&M
Piped water	90.1	96.8	6.7
Public sewage system	58.7	75.1	16.4

By taking into account the above-mentioned poverty rates of 2009 and compare them with the data collected by Nelson do Valle Silva in 1988, it is possible to notice that over this period of time *pretos* and *pardos* remained considerably disadvantaged as compared to whites. According to his research in 1988 poverty rate among white amounted to 14,5% , while among *pretos* the value almost doubled (30%). Another datum that emerged was that, contrary to the general belief that *pardos* occupied an intermediary position, they were as disadvantaged as blacks reaching a poverty rate of 36%.¹⁵¹

1.5 Defining who is black and who is white

Both the PERLA research and the studies conducted after the UNESCO project addressed the difficulty of classifying Brazilians according to race and color since this classification change according to self-identification and identification by the others. The main issue seems to be related to the widespread idea that in Brazil it is almost impossible to define who is black and who is white due to miscegenation.¹⁵²

The studies on this matter developed on the comparison with the United States bipolar system of racial classification, which consisted in the contraposition between blacks and whites. Mixed-race people were considered black according to the “one drop rule”: and individual with an African ancestor, either from the maternal or paternal line, was considered black.¹⁵³

The Brazilian non-bipolar system of race classification is referred to as *continuum* of colors and relations. The continuum can be represented as a line where the two opposite poles are the

¹⁵¹ Corossacz, *Il Corpo della Nazione*, 20.

¹⁵² Lilia Mortiz Schwarcz, “Do Preto, do Branco e do Amarelo”; Silva and Paixão, “Mixed and Unequal), 190; Ribeiro Corossacz, *Razzismo, Meticcio, Democrazia Razziale*, 73.

¹⁵³ Ribeiro Corossacz, *Razzismo, Meticcio, Democrazia Razziale*, 73-74.

colors black (negative) and the white (positive); between the two extremes other colors and their respective shades take place: yellow (*amarelo*)—associated to people of Asian origin—, *vermelho* (red)—attributed to indigenous people—, and the colors resulting from their mixture. The closer a color is to the white pole, the more it acquires positive connotations and vice versa: the continuum denies the opposition black vs white, but does not deny the social system assigning to white color positive values, and to black color negative ones.¹⁵⁴

Another relevant element is that Brazilians associate race and color with to physical features other than skin tone—such as nose and lips shape and hair texture—and according to class and education following the popular dictate “money whitens” as already discussed in the previous.

As for self-identification it can change according to how blackness is referred to. In a survey to count black population in Brazil which included the terms negro, preto and pardo, 6% identified as negro, while 59.5% identified as preto or pardo. When allowed to identify openly by race, the results were much different. Only a small portion of the respondents (6%) self-identified as preto or negro; only one interviewee identified as Afro-Brazilian; 11% identified as moreno and 25% as pardo.¹⁵⁵

Another factor that influences self-identification is the attempt to improve the social status by declaring in the census and the official documents a lighter color than the actual one. According to Corossacz, the association of white with higher social status and better possibilities seems to be common in Brazil. The author points out that in choosing the color of the new born for the DNV (*Declaração do Nascimento Vido*), parents try to classify the baby as white since the tendency is to “whiten” the progeny in order for them to ascend socially. Parents usually make objection to get the white color, but they never object to get the black one.¹⁵⁶ The subjectivity of color attribution and the continuum of color seem also to justify the numerous terms to refer to racial groups, which vary for instance, according to the combination of physical traits. *Pardo*, *moreno*, *mulato* and *sarará* for example, are three terms that are used to indicate individuals mixed with black and white. In particular, Sarará is used

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 78.

¹⁵⁵ Moraes Silva and Paixão, “Mixed and Unequal”, 190.

¹⁵⁶ Corossacz, *Il Corpo della Nazione*, 70.

to indicate a specific type of mixed individual, with very light skin and hair color, but with African-like hair texture.¹⁵⁷

Overall, the ambiguity of color attribution and the variety of factors that influence it, revealed that the association of physical traits to a specific group/race does not correspond to a neutral, natural and objective attitude, but rather rely on individual subjectivity and socio-cultural factors—for instance, why discriminating people with full lips and kinky hair and not people with straight hair and blue eyes?—. Physical traits become significant only in the light of an ideology that collocates a specific group in opposition to the other; only in this perspective physical traits became criteria of classification. As explained above, the notion of race as categorization of human being according to their physical traits developed in a specific historic and political context, which underwent the change of social relations among different groups.¹⁵⁸

Conclusions

The overall aim of the chapter was trying to establish whether racism does exist or not in Brazil. The difficulty in addressing this matter relies on the fact that traditionally Brazil has been depicted as a country without racial discrimination and inequality. Even the slavery past had been depicted under positive connotations.

What emerged from this chapter is that, first of all, the contribution of the slavery past to the present reality of racial inequality is undeniable. Slavery represented the basis on which Brazilian society and economy developed. Nevertheless, the effects of slavery after the emancipation wouldn't have been so damaging if it was not for the initiative of the white dominant class, which created social barriers so that blacks and poor could not ascend in the social hierarchy. In Chapter two, it will be discussed how racism becomes the foundation of the society through the State institutions.

The discussion on racism underlined also that race is a social construction and as such, it is not static but changes over time, according to the historical and social context. The peculiarity of race in Brazil, is that it is more than the attributions of phenotypical traits—e.g.

¹⁵⁷ José Luis Petrucelli and Ana Lucia Saboia, *Características étnico-raciais da população, Classificações e Identidades* (Rio de Janeiro, IGBE, 2013); personal knowledge.

¹⁵⁸ Corossacz, *Razzismo, Meticciano, Democrazia Razziale*, 74; Ribeiro Corossacz, *Il Corpo della Nazione*, 23.

skin color, hair texture, nose and shape lips—, it is a social place that is constructed on the coordinates of physical space and economic position. In this chapter we saw how the meaning of race changed also according to the "necessities" of the dominant class. In the Imperial period a *negro* was a slave or whoever worked in the fields and lived in the *senzalas*. In this case, the notion of race served to justify the coercive labor under the assumption of biological inferiority. After the emancipation period, this negative association remained but was changed to adapt to the new economic reality. Now a black was a poor, uneducated person living at the margins; the new physical space of race became the slums of the periphery. Their exclusion from the new social order occurred because of the fear of the dominant class to lose their privileges. The dominant class always found ways to exclude who is seen as "other". The analysis provided in this chapter will be useful to understand, as discussed in Chapter 2, why the victims of institutional violence are disproportionately poor, blacks, and dwellers of the favelas. Overall, the chapter showed that racism in Brazil exists and manifests itself in different ways: marginalization of the Afro-descendants, prejudice, higher rates of poverty rates than whites, and lower index of education.

2. Police violence and racism in Brazil: two sides of the same coin

The aim of this chapter is to show the connection between racism and police violence in Brazil, more specifically, to show that police violence against black people is the direct consequence of a society founded on racism. The popular saying “a white person running is an athlete, a black person running is a thief”¹ explains perfectly this correlation, which is based on the stigmatization of the black as a criminal, both in the social imaginary and from the part of the authorities. It is a reality that sees the perpetration of institutional violence against a precise group of the population: young and poor black dwellers of the favelas.

This can be seen through the data showing that black youths are killed at a disproportional rate. According to official statistics from the Ministry of Health, between 2001 and 2011, although the total number of homicides did not increase, the homicide of Afro-Brazilians rose by 67.7%, while the rate of murders of white Brazilians decreased by 53.4%. Therefore, over this period of time there was a significant shift in the ethnic group impacted by violence, with a significant incidence on young black Brazilians.²

As for the deaths subsequent to police interventions, in May 15, 2020, for instance, a police operation provoked the death of thirteen people in the Complexo do Alemão, a favela in Rio de Janeiro.³ Moreover, in April 2020, over the quarantine, while the intentional homicides reduced by 14%, the deaths caused by police interventions in Rio de Janeiro increased by 43% in comparison with the rate of the last year in the same month. The number of deaths were 177, which equals to a death every four hours.⁴

Thus, what is evident is that police violence against black people is not a matter of isolated events, but rather a phenomenon of systemic oppression. For this reason this question

¹ Translation of “Branco correndo é atleta, negro é ladrão”, Carlos Antóio Costa Ribeiro, *Cor e criminalidade; estudo e análise da justiça no Rio de Janeiro (1900-1930)*, (Rio de Janeiro: Editore UFRJ, 1995),12.

² Julio Jacobo Waiselfisz, “Homicídios e juventude no Brasil. Atualização 15 a 29 anos” in Mapa da Violência 2014 (Brasília, 2014). http://flacso.org.br/files/2020/03/Mapa2014_AtualizacaoHomicidios.pdf.

³ Simone Sobral Sampaio and Gustavo Meneghetti, “Entre a vida e a morte: Estado, racismo e a “Pandemia do extermínio” no Brasil”, *Revista Katálysis* 23, 3 (2020): 636. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1982-02592020v23n3p635>.

⁴ Júlia Barbon, “Mortes por policiais crescem 43% no RJ durante quarentena, na contramão de crimes”, *Folha de S. Paulo*, May 26, 2020, <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/autores/julia-barbon.shtml>.

is often referred to with the expressions “genocide of the young blacks”⁵ or “genocide of the black people.”⁶ These expressions make reference to Abdias do Nascimento, who used for the first time in the 1970’s the word “genocide” to refer to the mass killing of black people.⁷

More recently, due to the burst of the Covid-19, the phenomenon of deaths caused by police has been referred to as a “pandemic of extermination”⁸, suggesting that is a phenomenon that does not seem to stop.

In order to facilitate the understating of the phenomenon, it is useful to start by giving a brief definition of police violence.⁹ Police violence can be defined as Civil Police and Military Police agents’ abuse of force and authority. When the abuse of force can cause the death of citizens it can be referred to as “use of lethal force”¹⁰ or “police deadly force”¹¹. Actions of police violence are referred to as “extrajudicial acts”, that occur when police actions exceed the limits established by law in the fulfillment of the legal mandate; they include mistreatment, torture, humiliation and killing.¹² The legal mandate is what authorizes police officers to use force against other individuals (monopoly of power) in order to preserve, as

⁵ Geísa Mattos, “Flagrantes de Racismo: Imagens da Violência Policial e as Conexões entre o Ativismo no Brasil e nos Estados Unidos.” *Revista de Ciências Sociais* 48, no. 2 (2017): 187-217. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=6408168>.

⁶ Mattos, “Flagrantes de Racismo: Imagens da Violência Policial e as Conexões entre o Ativismo, o no Brasil e nos Estados Unidos”; Abdias do Nascimento, *O Genocídio do Negro Brasileiro: Processo de um Racismo Mascarado*, (São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 2016), Kindle edition.

⁷ Paulo César Ramos, “Contrariando a estatística”: a tematização dos homicídios pelos jovens negros no Brasil (Master’s thesis, Federal University of São Carlos, 2014), <https://repositorio.ufscar.br/bitstream/handle/ufscar/7102/DissPCR.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed>.

⁸ Simone Sobral Sampaio and Gustavo Meneghetti, “Entre a vida e a morte: Estado, racismo e a “Pandemia do extermínio” no Brasil”, *Revista Katálisis* 23, 3 (2020): 636. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1982-02592020v23n3p635>.

⁹ The topic of police violations will not be explained further as the legal explanation goes beyond the scope of this dissertation.

¹⁰ Arthur Trinade Maranhão Costa, “Police Brutality in Brazil: Authoritarian Legacy or Institutional Weakness?” *Latin American Perspectives* 38, no. 5 (2011): 19-32, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X10391631>

¹¹ Paul G. Chevigny, “Police Deadly Force as Social Control: Jamaica, Argentina, and Brazil.” *Criminal Law Forum* 1, no. 3 (1990): 389-425.

¹² Juliany Gonçalves Guimarães, Ana Raquel Rosas Torres and Margareth R. G. V. de Faria, “Democracia e violência policial: o caso da Polícia Militar” *Psicologia em Estudo* 10, no.2 (2005): 263-271. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S1413-73722005000200013>; Jean Wyllys, “Formas de temer, formas de reprimir: as relações entre a violência policial e suas representações nas mídias” in Bernardo Kucinski et al., *Bala Perdida: a violência policial no Brasil e desafios para sua superação*, (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2015). Kindle edition

established by the Federal Constitution, public order and security; and it is also what distinguishes state's agents from civilians. Every policeman enjoys a certain level of "discretion", that is, they can decide on which means and intensity of force to use in order to control a determined situation. The criteria that regulate the legal use of force are established by national and international laws and rules and are: legality, necessity, proportionality, moderation and convenience.¹³ In other words, police violence can be defined as acts of violence against citizens from the part of state's agents, who in the failure to comply with law, produce a violation of the individuals' civil rights and of the rule of law. These acts are seen as a consequence of the influence that the environment exerts on policemen which comprises the organizational context and the set of social beliefs and values. These, are influenced by the society and by variables such as tolerance, socio-demographic features and opinions on human rights.¹⁴

2.1 Structural and institutional racism

In order to understand the notion of structural racism it is necessary to underline that, despite their proximity, the concepts of racism, prejudice and discrimination differ from one another.

Racial prejudice is a pre-judgment in favor or against a specific racial group and might result in discrimination—a negative prejudgment is also referred to as stereotype.¹⁵

Racial discrimination, on its turn, consists in treating in a different way specific racially identified groups with the aim of privileging one group over another. The necessary requirement that makes possible racial differentiation between the privileged and the disadvantaged is power, that is the effective possibility of using force, and, in particular, the capability of one group to exercise power over another. Under this perspective, racism can be

¹³ Paulo Mesquita Neto, "Violência policial no Brasil: Abordagens Teóricas e Práticas de Controle" in *Cidadania, Justiça e Violência*, eds. Dulce Chaves Pandolfi, José Murilo de Carvalho, Leandro Piquet Carneiro, Mario Grynspan, (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 1999), 129-147; Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, "Anuário Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2020", last modified October 10, 2020, <https://forumseguranca.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/anuario-14-2020-v1-interativo.pdf>

¹⁴ Paulo Mesquita Neto, "Violência policial no Brasil"; Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, "Anuário Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2020".

¹⁵ Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural*, 22; Keith Lawrence and Terry Keleher, "Structural Racism." In: *Race and Public Policy Conference*, Berkeley, 2004, 5, PDF, <https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/Definitions-of%20Racism.pdf>.

defined as a way of domination and a systemic form of discrimination based on race. Such discrimination finds its concretization in the application of practices resulting either in disadvantages or advantages according to the racial group of belonging.¹⁶

Furthermore, discrimination can be distinguished in direct and indirect discrimination. The former, relates the overt rejection of certain individual or groups on the ground of their race. This type of discrimination requires the *intention* of discrimination, which is expressed through the imposition of disadvantageous treatments. The latter, on the contrary, is characterized by the absence of the explicit intention of discriminating. Together, practices of direct and indirect discrimination can lead to social stratification, an inter-generational process that affects negatively the lives of the discriminated group.¹⁷ Examples of such a negative impact can be racial segregation — which that is racial division of space, where racial minorities are relegated to specific marginal areas such as ghettos and the periphery—, and the access to certain buildings and public services to the exclusive use of specific individuals.¹⁸ As briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, this was the case for racial segregation in USA and apartheid in South Africa, which implemented an explicit system of racial separation based on law; in Brazil, racial separation was present but was made less obvious because of the lack of specific laws and because of the discourse of racial democracy and valorization of miscegenation.¹⁹

Because of the fact that racism materializes through acts of systemic discrimination, it is to be stressed that racism is not the sum of single acts of discrimination, but rather as a process in which the unequal distribution of privileges reaches the realm of politics, economics, justice and the everyday life.²⁰

This distinction can be found in Almeida's theoretical approach. He classifies it in three categories: individual, structural and institutional. His contribution is innovative in two ways. First, he evaluates the liberal interpretation of individual racism as simplistic and limited, in

¹⁶ Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural*, 23-24; Sampaio and Meneghetti, “Entre a vida e a morte”, 637; Waleska Miguel Batista, “A Inferiorização dos Negros a Partir do Racismo Estrutural,” *Revista Direito e Práxis* 9, no. 4 (2018): 2582. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1590/2179-8966/2018/36867>.

¹⁷ Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural*, 23.

¹⁸ *Idem*.

¹⁹ Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*; Hasenbalg, *Discriminação e desigualdades raciais no Brasil*.

²⁰ Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural*, 24.

that it tends to diminish the responsibility on individuals and in that it reduces the phenomenon to single acts of prejudice. Second, he establishes a clear separation between the structural and institutional conception, since he judges institutions and the structure of society as two specific dimensions of racism.²¹

According to the individual conception, which Almeida strongly criticizes, racism is a sort of pathology, a psychological or ethical phenomenon attributed to isolated individuals or groups. This viewpoint denies the existence of racist societies and institutions and reduces the discourse of racism to inconsistent arguments such as “racism is wrong”, “I am not racism because I have black friends”, “how one can be still racist in the 21st century?” and so on. The individual conception can be inserted in the context of a democratic idea of the State that sees all individuals as free as equals. In the democratic state there is no space to talk about racism, as it is stigmatized a priori as something that cannot belong to democracy.²²

The institutional conception, on the contrary, overcomes the individualist approach and considers racism as the result of the functioning of institutions, which behave in a way that confers advantages and disadvantages according to race.

This conception of racism, underlines the role that institutions play in the regulation of social relations and social conflicts. Social conflicts originate from the attempt of one racial group to impose their hegemony by taking control of power, that is taking control of the institutions. As a result, there is an overlap between social conflicts and the functioning of institutions: social racial conflicts are reflected in the institutions, where the dominant racial group uses institutional mechanisms to impose their political and economic interests, as well as rules and norms of conduct that make their dominion appear as natural and normal. Therefore, the institutional conception sees racism as connected with a political project and specific socioeconomic conditions.²³

In discussing institutional racism, it is fundamental to mention the contribution of Charles V. Hamilton and Kwame Ture since their work “Black Power: Politics of Liberation in America” was the first to use the adjective “institutional” to refer to racism. These authors define racism as “[...] the predication of decisions and policies on considerations of race for

²¹ Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural*, 24-25; Batista, “A Inferiorização dos Negros”, 2583; Sampaio and Meneghetti, “Entre a vida e a morte”, 636-37.

²² Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 74; Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural*,

²³ Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural*; Batista, “A Inferiorização dos Negros.”

the purpose of subordinating a racial group while maintaining control over that group.”²⁴

According to Hamilton and Ture, individual racism is an overt form of racism since it consists of explicit and detectable acts of racism—such as causing death or destroying a property—that can be recorded and broadcast on television, for instance. Institutional racism, on the other hand, is equally “destructive of human life”, but is more covert and less identifiable: it “[...] originates in the operation of established and respected forces in the society, and thus receives far less public condemnation than [individual racism].”²⁵

Institutional racism is based on anti-black attitudes and practices, and on the assumption that blacks should be subordinated to whites because whites are presumably better than blacks. Hamilton and Ture strike that individual and institutional racism are linked to each other. The fact that individuals—in order to appear respectable—acquit themselves from individual blame by condemning acts of racism, does not make them less responsible. In fact, they continue to support institutions that perpetuate racist policies. If individual racism does not make the society racist, institutional racism does.²⁶

The conclusion that one can draw from the institutional approach is that a racist is both the one who practices racist acts and the one who does nothing to change racism mechanisms; having black friends—which is the most common argument used by those who does not want to be identified as racist—for instance, does not make one less racist.²⁷ To quote de Almeida “Social change is not made only with denunciations or moral repudiation of racism: it depends, first of all, on taking positions and on the adoption of anti-racist practices.”²⁸

Overall, From this analysis it is possible to notice that even if Almeida has a slightly different consideration of individual racism, he agrees with Hamilton and Ture on the idea that institutions play a major role in the consolidation of the supremacy of one precise group—in this case, in the consolidation of white supremacy. White people benefit of conditions created by the society, which imposed, through institutions, norms and standards discriminatory of the

²⁴ Kwame Ture and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*, (New York: Vintage Book, 1992), 20, PDF

²⁵ Idem.

²⁶ Ture and Hamilton, *Black Power*, 21.

²⁷ Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural*; Ture and Hamilton, *Black Power*; also personal considerations.

²⁸ Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural*, 23.

black population; such norms and standards are used by the institutions to preserve social order.²⁹

Another element present both in *Racismo Estrutural* and Black Power is the centrality of society. Indeed, the structural conception of racism highlights that institutions are racist because the society is racist. Institutions appear to be the materialization of a pre-existent social structure that has racism as intrinsic characteristic.³⁰ In this way, using de Almeida's words, racism is always structural in that race is an element that integrates the political and economic organization of the society.³¹ Racism, therefore, can be considered as a natural expression of the society.

Daily episodes of racist practices—both in the form of explicit violence or “micro-aggressions” such as racial jokes and popular expressions/saying with racist references—become normal through the attitude of the institutions.³² An instance of the normalization of racism can be seen in the association of black color with crime that is spread through the media, the mainstream culture and the judicial system. Black, poor and *favelado* became the characteristics associated to criminals, thugs, thieves, bums and drug traffickers creating a social dichotomy between the white “*cidadão do bem*” (good citizen) and blacks.³³

In sum, under the structural perspective, racism is an occurrence of the structure of the society, that is the normal way according to which political, economic and judicial relations constitute themselves. Both individual behaviors and institutional processes are derived by the society, where racism is the rule and not the exception.³⁴

A further explanation of structural racism can be found in the notions of “State racism” and biopower which explain on their turn why modern States' society is racist. This topic will be discussed in the next subchapter.

²⁹ Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural*; Hamilton and Ture, *Black Power*.

³⁰ Sampaio and Meneghetti, “Entre a vida e a morte”; Batista, “A Inferiorização dos Negros”; Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural*.

³¹ Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural*, 16.

³² Lilia Mortiz Schwarcz, *Nem Preto nem Branco, Muito pelo Contrário: Cor e Raça na Sociabilidade Brasileira* (São Paulo: Claro Enigma, 2013), 23, 88, PDF ePub; Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural*.

³³ Teles, “A produção do inimigo”, 81; Maria Lucia Karam, “Violência, militarização, guerra às drogas” in Bernardo Kucinski et al., *Bala Perdida: a violência policial no Brasil e desafios para sua superação*, (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2015). Kindle edition; Soares, *Desmilitarizar*; Jean Wyllys, “Formas de temer, formas de reprimir”; Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural*.

³⁴ Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural*, 34; Sampaio and Meneghetti, “Entre a vida e a morte”, 637;

2.2 Biopower and necropolitics

The interpretation that describes racism as the foundation of the modern society and the States institutions, can be connected to Foucault's definitions of "State racism" and biopower. Under the perspective of "State racism" modern States—that started to form from the 19th century—inscribe racism as the fundamental mechanism of power. By consequence, the State cannot function without being involved at a certain moment with racism. The notions of race and racism are instrumental to the State in that, by breaking the biological continuum of human race, they establish a hierarchy which becomes the criteria to establish who lives and who dies.³⁵ Foucault describes racism as follows:

What in fact is racism? It is primarily a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power's control: the break between what must live and what must die. The appearance within the biological continuum of the human race of races, the distinction among races, the hierarchy of races, the fact that certain races are described as good and that others, in contrast, are described as inferior: all this is a way of fragmenting the field of the biological that power controls.³⁶

The exercise of power over life and death, is referred to by Foucault as biopower. In the logic of biopower, racism works as technology of power that, not only allows the State to decide on individuals' life according to race, but also that allows a positive perception in relation to the death of the other. The death of the other guarantees the safety of the individual, and, at the same time strengthens the group they belong to—the death of the "bad race" (seen as inferior, degenerated or abnormal will make the "good race" healthier and purer.³⁷ In this way, the enemy to be erased is not a political adversary, but rather a threat, either external or internal, to and for the population. The killing of a specific segment of the population becomes then normal and justified by racism:

"In a normalizing society, race or racism is the precondition that makes killing acceptable. When you have a normalizing society, you have a power which is, at least superficially, in the first instance or in the first line a biopower, and racism is the indispensable precondition that allows someone to be killed, that allows others to be killed. Once the State functions in the biopower mode, racism alone can justify the murderous function of the State."³⁸

³⁵ Foucault, "*Society Must be Defended*", 254; Membe, *Necropolitics*; dos Santos, *A Raça como Tecnologia de Governo*.

³⁶ Foucault, "*Society Must be Defended*", 254-255.

³⁷ Foucault, "*Society Must be Defended*", 255-256; Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural*, 73-74; dos Santos, *A Raça como Tecnologia de Governo*; Sampaio and Meneghetti, "Entre a vida e a morte"; Mbembe, *Necropolitics*.

³⁸ Foucault, "*Society Must be Defended*", 256.

It is possible to say, therefore, that racism is the essential condition that allows the State to exercise power (technology of power), more precisely it is the precondition to exercise the right to kill. In other words, if a State wants to exercise sovereignty (which includes the exclusive right to use of force) it must become racist. It is to be underlined that the notion of killing is not limited to the idea of taking someone's life a way, but instead, is related also to any other form of indirect murder such as exposing someone to death or increasing their risk of death, political death, rejection, exclusion and so on.³⁹

Foucault's approach of biopower is further developed in Achille Mbembe's notion of "necropolitics", which is defined as "contemporary forms of subjugating life to the power of death"⁴⁰; an example of necropolitics can be the state of exception as in the case of Nazism. Necropolitics is based on the overlap between war and politics, where the war against a fictionalized enemy justifies the killing of the "other".⁴¹

The structural perspective of racism and its interconnection with the notion of biopower and necropolitics is relevant in the comprehension of police violence in Brazil for three main reasons.

First, it shows that police violence and, in particular police killings of black people, cannot be interpreted as isolated episodes deriving from the misbehavior of single police officers. It excludes therefore, the "theory of the bad apple"⁴² according to which the responsibility of acts of police violence is attributed to few bad cops, whose negative actions reverberate on the other agents affecting their reputation.

In this context, the notion of structural racism matches with the structural interpretation of the origin of police violence according to which this phenomenon is influenced by social,

³⁹ Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural*, 73-74; Foucault, "*Society Must be Defended*", 256; Sampaio and Meneghetti, "Entre a vida e a morte."

⁴⁰ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 98.

⁴¹ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*.

⁴² Arthur Trindade Maranhão Costa, "Police Brutality in Brazil. Authoritarian Legacy or Institutional Weakness?," *Latin American Perspectives* 38, no. 5 (2011):20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X10391631>; Viviane Cubas, Ariadne Natal, and Federico Caselo Branco, "Violência policial: abordagem da literatura" in Bernardo Kucinski et al., *Bala Perdida: a violência policial no Brasil e desafios para sua superação*, (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2015), 2015. Kindle edition

political, economic and cultural factors and also by the socioeconomic characteristics of the society—which include economic, social and political disparities.⁴³

Second, it excludes another interpretation namely the one which attributes the origin of police violence to the period of dictatorship in Brazil with the creation of the Military Police (PM). Even if over the dictatorship the State was considered to be above everything and, therefore, legitimized to use force and torture and resort to all the necessary means to oppress its opponents, Soares observes that the dictatorship did not invent torture nor the extrajudicial acts nor the idea of the war against an inner enemy.⁴⁴ These practices date back to the Imperial period when the *capitães-do-mato* hunted and killed the slaves who tried to escape.

Thus, Soares' view point is in line with the notion of biopower: as stressed by Mbembe slavery can be interpreted as one of the first instances of biopolitical experimentation.⁴⁵

In addition, as discussed in Chapter 1, the oppressive action of police was evident in the transition period between Empire and Republic. Free blacks (*libertos*) were arrested and enslaved against just for the fact of being black. Also, European immigrants working in the *fazendas*, who were treated as slaves, were subjected to the control of police so that they could not rebel. The aim was to practice control over the lower strata of the society so that they could not rise up against their oppressors; in this way, social hierarchical order could be preserved.⁴⁶ It is in this logic of preservation of the order that the idea of the war against the enemy is created. The creation of the enemy results in the contraposition between the people and the “otherness”, fact that justifies the use of violence against a specific group—in this

⁴³ Neto, “Violência policial no Brasil”. 135. According to the author, the other theories on the origin of police violence are the functional and processual explanations.

⁴⁴ Juliany Gonçalves Guimarães, Ana Raquel Rosas Torres and Margareth R. G. V. de Faria, “Democracia e violência policial: o caso da Polícia Militar” *Psicologia em Estudo* 10, no.2 (2005): 263-271. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S1413-73722005000200013>; Luiz Eduardo Soares, “Por que tem sido tão difícil mudar as polícias?” in Bernardo Kucinski et al., *Bala Perdida: a violência policial no Brasil e desafios para sua superação*, (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2015). Kindle edition

⁴⁵ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 81.

⁴⁶ Luís Fernando Beneduzi, “Alteridade e estranhamento: a figura do “novo negro” na imigração italiana no Brasil,” *MÉTIS: história & cultura* 13, no. 27 (2015): 71-90; Edson Teles, “A produção do inimigo e a inexistência do Brasil violento e de exceção” in Esther Solano Gallego, et al., *O ódio como política: a reinvenção das direitas no Brasil*, (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2018). Kindle edition; Lilia Mortiz Schwarcz, *Retrato em branco e negro, Jornais, escravos e cidadãos em São Paulo no final do século XIX*, (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2020). E-book; Costa, “Police Brutality in Brazil”.

case the marginalized.⁴⁷

What can be concluded is that the military dictatorship, with the organization of the police apparatus, intensified a violence that was already a tradition in Brazil. What changed is the type of enemy. In the period pre- and post-emancipation it was the *negro*; in the authoritarian regime it was the political opponent to the regime; now is the criminal, usually considered to be a black living in the periphery or the favelas. What changed also, is the use of police violence—from instrument of political control to instrument to reduce criminality.⁴⁸

Third, it explains why police kills blacks at a disproportionate rate. As stated by Mbembe, “in the economy of biopower, the function of racism is to regulate the distribution of death and to make possible the state’s murderous functions.”⁴⁹ Today, State violence is addressed, as written above, towards the new enemy through the criminalization of poorness and blackness.

2.3 Mass incarceration and war on drugs

The correlation between necropolitics, biopower and structural racism can be seen in the violence perpetuated today in Brazil against black people, producing what is defined as a genocide. In the Brazilian context, the war is a war on drugs, and the enemy is the black young man, usually poor and *favelado*. The rhetoric on the war on drugs, which produces the criminalization of negritude and poorness, articulates on two complementary levels: mass incarceration on the one hand, and police violence and militarization of the favelas on the other.⁵⁰ As stated by Almeida,

⁴⁷ Michel Foucault, “*Society Must be Defended.*” *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, eds. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey, (New York: Picador, 2003). Sampaio and Meneghetti, “Entre a vida e a morte”; Teles, “A produção do inimigo”; Íbis Pereira “Os lírios não nascem da lei” in Bernardo Kucinski et al., *Bala Perdida: a violência policial no Brasil e desafios para sua superação*, (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2015). Kindle edition; Vera Malaguti Batista, “Estado de Polícia” in Bernardo Kucinski et al., *Bala Perdida*.

⁴⁸ Neto, “Violência political no Brasil”; Soares, “Por que tem sido tão difícil mudar as polícias?”

⁴⁹ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 78.

⁵⁰ Aires, “Corpos marcados para morrer”; Juliana Borges, *Encarceramento em Massa*, (São Paulo: Sueli Carneiro; Pólen, 2019), Kindle edition; Franco, “UPP - a redução da favela em três letras”; dos Santos, *A Raça como Tecnologia de Governo*; Soares, *Desmilitarizar*; Teles, “A produção do inimigo”; Soares, “Por que tem sido tão difícil mudar as polícias?”; Karam, “Violencia, militarização, guerra as drogas.”

The imaginary that surrounds the black criminal represented in the soap operas and in the media could not be sustained without a selective justice system, without the criminalization of poverty, and without the so-called “war on drugs”, which, in reality, is a war against the poor and, in particular, against black populations. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the justice system is one of the most effective mechanisms in the creation and reproduction of race and of its multiple meanings.⁵¹

The objective of mass incarceration system to strike black population is even clearer if considered that, according to the statistics of 2016 collected by the National Survey of Penitentiary Information, Brazil has the third prison population of the world⁵²—after the United States and China—and that nearly 60% of the prison population is black, esteeming that two every three prisoners in Brazil are black. The majority of the prisoners is young, poor, male and uneducated⁵³. Among them, 26% are detained with charges for drug trafficking, while only 13,6% and 5,1% are detained for crimes against persons and crimes against firearms-control legislation, respectively; 44% of the prisoners are accused of are suspect for crimes against the patrimony. The focus of incarceration therefore, is on drugs and patrimony.⁵⁴

For what concerns drug trafficking, according to Santos and Soares, there is the tendency of sentencing blacks as traffickers and absolve whites for personal use. According to a research carried out in São Paulo in 2017 on the basis of four thousand sentences, blacks are condemned in a higher percentage than whites (71% of blacks against 67% of whites); while 7.7% of whites obtain the conversion from trafficking to personal use, the percentage for blacks is 5.3%. In proportion, blacks are also put to trail for a lower quantity of drugs: 85g of marijuana, 10.1g of crack and 27g of cocaine for whites against 65g, 9.2g and 22g respectively for blacks.⁵⁵

The result is that if the suspect is black he is immediately considered a trafficker, while if he is white and of middle or high class extraction he is always a user; in the latter case the user is

⁵¹ Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural*, 44.

⁵² Juliana Borges, *Encarceramento em Massa*, 14.

⁵³ Juliana Borges, *Encarceramento em Massa*, 15; Andrade, *A Raça como Tecnologia de Governo*. 24-25; Soares, *Desmilitarizar*, 31.

⁵⁴ Soares, *Desmilitarizar*, 31-32.

⁵⁵ Santos, *A Raça como Tecnologia de Governo*, 28.

seen as a victim as the use of drug is connected to a dimension of addiction and, therefore, disease.⁵⁶

This unequal treatment based on race and class is reflection of both a social imaginary that criminalizes color and marginalization, and of racist law and institutions. Indeed, the problem seems to rely on the reform on the law on drugs (Law 11.343/2006) which confers a great margin of interpretation to the authorities (policemen, prosecutor or judge) to define who is trafficker and who is user. Article 28, comma 2, establishes that to decide on personal use the judge will pay attention to the place and the circumstances where the fact occurred, to the social and personal circumstances as also to the criminal record.⁵⁷ In addition, the Brazilian law does not define the precise quantity that is considered trafficking and the quantity that is defined for personal use. Overall, the legislation gives wide discretion both to the judges and the police agents, who, on the lack of objective guidelines can act according to their subjectivity, giving space to prejudice.⁵⁸

The main target of police arrests are usually black kids, who are not involved in violent crimes or possessions or weapons, but are generally caught in possession of small quantities of drugs or for crimes such as thefts. Generally, their low economic conditions, encourage them to search alternative strategies of survival.⁵⁹

2.3.1 Criminalization of blackness and the psychosis of fear

As mentioned above mass incarceration and the war on drugs are institutional mechanisms that are implemented thank to the criminalization of the negritude (comprises blackness and poorness), along with the creation of a feeling of widespread fear. In this subchapter we will see how these two elements are connected to each other.

The criminalization of blackness and poorness, which reflects structural racism, is internalized by the population. The association blackness, poorness and criminality is consequence not only of cultural factors inherited by the slavery past, but also of the perception, in societies with high socioeconomic disparities, that life-threatening crimes occur more frequently in

⁵⁶ Soares, *Desmilitarizar*, 34; Santos, *A Raça como Tecnologia de Governo*. 27.

⁵⁷ Andreade, *A Raça como Tecnologia de Governo*. 27; Soares, *Desmilitarizar*.

⁵⁸ Andreade, *A Raça como Tecnologia de Governo*. 27; Soares, *Desmilitarizar*.

⁵⁹ Soares, “Por que tem sido tão difícil mudar as polícias?”

poor areas. In this case, the discourse on public authority is focused on increasing police interventions and violent acts to discourage criminality.⁶⁰

The political propaganda against crime, based on the necessity to increase security, generates on the public a feeling of lack of safety that leads to the general support of police violence. This support is evident from the popular saying “a good criminal is a dead criminal”⁶¹, which, according to a research realized by the Ministry of Justice in 2009, receives the consensus of 44% of Brazilians.⁶² In this way, extrajudicial executions and the dehumanization become natural and ordinary in the war against the enemy. The agreement on police violent attitudes and killings is also partly due to a feeling of revenge from the part of the public which is stimulated by the public security rhetoric “it could have been you”.⁶³

Nevertheless, support in police violence does not mean trust in the police and judicial system. According to a survey reported by Fernanda Mena, 70% of the country population does not trust the police institution, and 63% of the population is unsatisfied with the way it operates.⁶⁴ The lack of confidence creates the tendency of not reporting crime and acting in self-revenge.

The feeling of insecurity, combined with the sensation that police will not be able to control crime, increases people’s anxiety, that reverberates violence in the demand of police actions that are against the standards of humanity. Such a strong anxiety, is referred to as “psychosis of fear” defined as “[...] a curious state of mind in which lack of confidence in the power of the government to keep order is combined with vocal support of police violence”.⁶⁵ To summarize the controversial relation with the population towards the police, on one side, and the stigmatization of poverty on the other, we can use Chevigny’s words:

⁶⁰ Paul G. Chevigny, “Police Deadly Force as Social Control: Jamaica, Argentina, and Brazil.” *Criminal Law Forum* 1, no. 3 (1990): 389-425.

⁶¹ Translation of “bandido bom é bandido morto”; João Alexandre Peschanki and Renato Moraes, “As lógicas do extermínio”, in Bala Perida, 1201-1216; Andrade, *A Raça como Tecnologia de Governo*, 21

⁶² Fernanda Mena, “Um modelo violento e ineficaz de polícia”, in Bernardo Kucinski et al., *Bala Perdida: a violência policial no Brasil e desafios para sua superação*, (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2015), 335, Kindle edition.

⁶³ Santos, *A Raça como Tecnologia de Governo*, 23-24.

⁶⁴ Mena, “Um modelo violento e ineficaz de polícia”, 229.

⁶⁵ Chevigny, “Police Deadly Force as Social Control”, 422; see also Teles, “A produção do inimigo”, 77-78 and Santos, *A Raça como Tecnologia de Governo*.

The stigmatization of the poor is incorporated by the population in general, creating a reaction of support for arbitrary actions, at the same time that the recognition of the ineffectiveness of police procedures to guarantee the security of the community provokes reactions of revolt, of which lynchings are dramatic examples.⁶⁶

What emerged so far, is that state racism in Brazil is manifested through the war on drugs, that articulates in the expansion of the penal system, and police violence, supported by the population, the media and by the polity. To further prove the incidence of police violence and, in particular, its harshness on black young people it is necessary to compare the killings committed by the agents of the states and the overall rate of homicides, while keeping always attention to the data on color.

According to the statistics elaborated by the *Anuário Brasileiro de Segurança Pública* (Brazilian Yearbook of Public Security) in 2019 the cases of intentional violent homicides were 47,773, with a rate of 22.7 every 100 thousand habitants; in comparison with 2018, it was registered a decrease of 17,7%. Despite this decrease, the deaths for police intervention grew in comparison to the previous year, covering the 13.3% of the total intentional homicides, accounting for 6,357 cases. As for the victims of lethal violence, 74.4 % were blacks, while white victims were 25.3%; 51.6% of them were not older than 29 years. Among the victims for police interventions 79.1% were blacks, 99,2% were men, 74.3% did not go beyond the 29 years of age.⁶⁷

These data confirm the hypothesis that young blacks are killed disproportionately, both in the case of intentional homicides and police intervention. What also is shown is that the rate of deaths caused by police interventions does not decrease even when the overall index of homicides does.

In 2019, the country reached the highest number of deaths caused by police interventions since 2013, year were the cases occurred in the same circumstance were 2,212. Despite this increment could be due partially to an improvement in the quality of the information collected, it is to be stressed that in some areas the numbers are actually over the average. It is the case of the States of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo with 1810 and 867 cases of deaths for

⁶⁶ Chevigny, “Police Deadly Force as Social Control”, 422.

⁶⁷ Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, “Anuário Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2020,” accessed 15 January, 2020, 12-13, <https://forumseguranca.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/anuario-14-2020-v1-interativo.pdf>,

civil and military police interventions, respectively. The two States together cover the 42% of the 2019 total deaths by the hands of police agents in the country.⁶⁸

2.4 Militarization of the favelas and the Pacifying Police Units.

A concrete example of war on drugs and militarization of the favelas are the UPPs (Pacifying Police Units). UPPs had been implemented in the Rio de Janeiro favelas between 2008 and 2013. According to the media and the governmental authorities, they are part of a project to control the areas controlled by criminal groups, to improve sanitation and facilitate the access to education public services, transports and commerce.⁶⁹ The promise was that police units would have acted in the respect of and proximity to the local population offering their service, acting in compliance with the values of the Constitution and of human rights.⁷⁰ The term “pacification” itself suggested the idea of reducing criminality in a way that would have not affected the inhabitants. The propaganda slogans such as “Eu Apoio a Paz”⁷¹ (I support peace) had been effective in conveying a positive image of the project which achieved a large popular consent. Nevertheless, the promise of a peaceful collaboration with the citizens was never respected. This can be seen on many levels.

The entrance of the police units in the favelas occurs through the military occupation of the territory, which sees the deployment of machine guns, military tanks, grenade launcher etc. The police units are usually special troops such as the BOPE/PMERJ (Battalion of Special Operation of the Rio the Janeiro Military Police), BP Choque (Police Shock Battalion) and CORE (Civilian Police Special Resources police).⁷² The militarization and the war-like approach—as opposed to the idea of pacification—is made even clearer by the nation flag that

⁶⁸ Ibid., 87-88.

⁶⁹ Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, Relatório Final. “Os Donos do Morro”: Uma análise exploratória da impact das Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora (UPPs) no Rio de Janeiro, 2012, https://www.forumseguranca.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Relatorio-final_CAF.pdf; Soares, *Desmilitarizar*; Franco; “UPP - a redução da favela em três letras.”; Batista, “Estado de Polícia”; Karam, “Violência, militarização, guerra às drogas.”

⁷⁰ Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, “Os Donos do Morro”; Soares, *Desmilitarizar*; Franco, “UPP - a redução da favela em três letras”; Lea Rekow, “Rio De Janeiro’s Olympic Legacy: Public Security for Whom?”, *Journal of Human Security* 12, no 1:(2016), 74, DOI: 10.12924/johs2016.12010074.

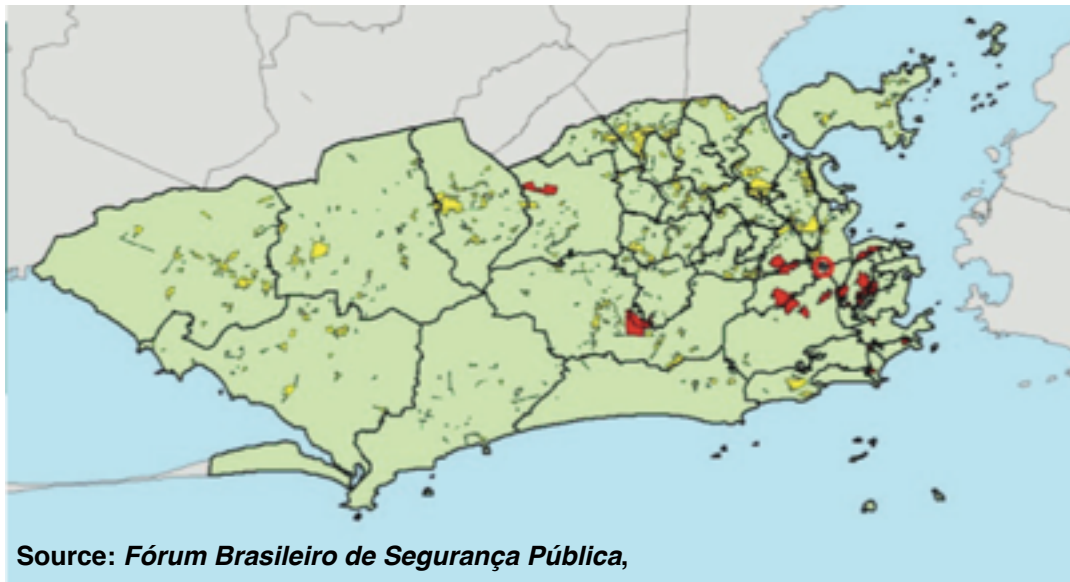
⁷¹ Franco, “UPP - a redução da favela em três letras”, 59.

⁷² Karam, “Violência, militarização, guerra às drogas.”; Franco, “UPP - a redução da favela em três letras”; Rekow, “Rio De Janeiro’s Olympic Legacy”.

is planted by the troops at their arrival. Favelas are seen as the territory of the enemy that has to be conquered and occupied. The use of weapons occurs not only during the phase of occupation, but over all the permanence of the troops. In this scenario of militarization, the favelas turn into a police State—as opposed to the rule of law—where the inhabitants are subordinated to the power of those who are in charge and whose lives are controlled.⁷³

According to the *Forum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública*, the first UPP was implemented in 2008 in the Morro Santa Marta, in the neighborhood of Botafogo.⁷⁴ The 2010 IGBE census counted nearly one thousand favelas in Rio de Janeiro, nevertheless, the ones controlled by the UPPs were thirty-eight up to 2014.⁷⁵ As shown by the UPPs maps, the choice of the communities was very selective. Map 1⁷⁶ shows that the first 17 UPPs were installed in three main preferential areas: the southern area (“Zona Sul”), truistic and high/middle-class area; the city centre, characterized by an intense commercial and service activity; and a specific area of the northern zone (*Area Norte*) named Tijuca. The favela are represented in yellow; the red areas correspond to the UPPs circumscriptions; the red circle represents the surroundings of Maracanã.

Map 1. Localization of the first 17 UPPs favelas.



Source: Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública,

⁷³ Batista, “Estado de Polícia”; Karam, “Violência, militarização, guerra às drogas.”; Franco, “UPP - a redução da favela em três letras”.

⁷⁴ Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, “Os Donos do Morro”, 17.

⁷⁵ Franco, “UPP- A Redução da favela em três letras”, 52.

⁷⁶ Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, “Os Donos do Morro”, 27.

Maps 2⁷⁷ and 3 show from closer distance the UPPs location in tristic areas and around the olympic venues.

Map 2. Localization of the UPPs, in relation to Olympic avenues, tourist sites and main transportation routes



Source: Lea Rekow, “Rio De Janeiro’s Olympic Legacy: Public Security for Whom?”

In particular, Map 3⁷⁸ shows the safety areas have been installed in the areas of the mega-events: the 2014 World Football Cup, in the neighborhood of Maracanã, and the 2016 Olympic games held in Maracanã, Barra da Tijuca and Deodoro.⁷⁹

Map 3. Safety areas in relation to UPPs



Source: Marielle Franco, “UPP-a redução das favelas em três letras”

Therefore, the choice of the UPPs seems to be oriented according to the logic of financial capitalism rather than the priority of public security and criminality rates, with a consequent

⁷⁷ Rekow, “Rio de Janeiro’s Olympic Legacy”, 75.

⁷⁸ Franco, “UPP- a redução das favelas em três letras”, 83.

⁷⁹ Franco, “UPP- a redução das favelas em três letras, 82-83. Soares, *Demilitarization*, 184-185.

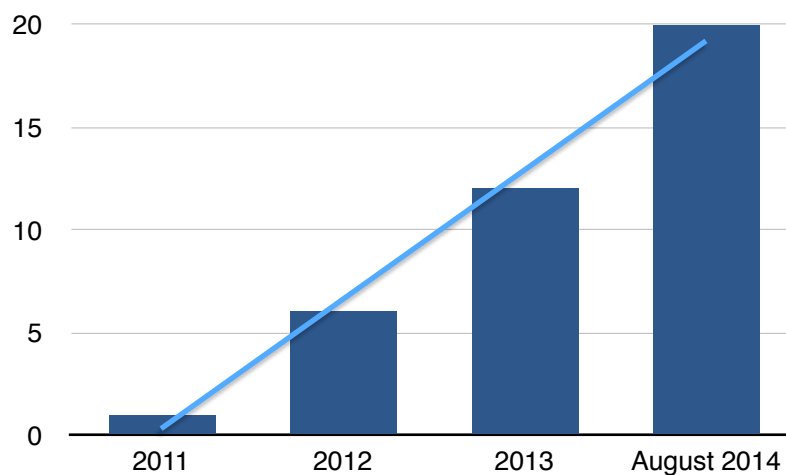
increase of social and economic disparity between the rich and the poor.⁸⁰ Indeed, according to data collected in 2012, the economic impact of the installation of the UPPs was positive for the house speculators. While between april 2006 and december 2008 the value of a flat with two rooms in Botafogo was of 24,95%, between 2008 and 2011 the value increased reaching 105, 32%, reaching a mean of R\$ 676 thousands; the same positive effects were registered in the areas close to the community of the southern zone.⁸¹

2.4.1 Disappearance and killings of civilians after the implementation of the UPPs

The same positive effect was not granted, contrarily to the promises, to the inhabitants of the favelas. An investigation conducted by the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo* in 2013 revealed that there are reports for mistreatments, aggressions and abuse of force against Military and Civil policemen in 76% of the UPPs (25 out of 33).⁸²

The reports reflects a reality of increase both of in the death rate and disappear rate of civilians in the UPPs. Figure 3⁸³ shows the index of civilians' death in UPPs, between 2011 and August 2014.

Figure 3. Index of civilians' death in UPPs, between 2011 and August 2014



Source: Marielle Franco, "UPP-a redução das favelas em três letras"

⁸⁰ Soares, *Demilitarization*, 184-185; Batista, "Estado de Polícia", 1774.

⁸¹ Franco, "UPP- a redução das favelas em três letras", 84.

⁸² Marco Antônio Martins, "Em 76% das UPPs no Rio há denúncia contra algum policial", *Folha de S. Paulo*, <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2013/09/1335523-em-76-das-upps-no-rio-ha-denuncia-contra-algum-policial.shtml>

⁸³ Franco, "UPP- a redução das favelas em três letras", 102.

As for the rates of disappearance of civilians in the UPPs, *Folha de S. Paulo*'s investigation, based on the analysis of data of eighteen favelas, shows that the disappearance rate increased by 56% between 2008 and 2011: an year before the inauguration of the UPPs the cases of disappearance were 85, while an year later the cases were 133.⁸⁴ The percentage further increases (reaching the 72,2%) if we add in the comparison the year of the inauguration, where the cases of disappearance were 77.⁸⁵

The research conducted by Marielle Franco, with basis on the analysis of the Institute of Public Safety, showed that while in 2007 the registered cases of disappearance were 4, 633, in 2012 the number increased to 5,934, with an increase rate of 23,7%. Summing the cases occurred over the period of six years, the total amounts to 32,073.⁸⁶

An emblematic case of disappearance in the UPPs is the one of Amarildo Gomes da Silva, who disappeared from the favela of Rochina the 14th of July, 2013 after he was conducted to the UPP base by a patrol car to be questioned.⁸⁷ The mainstream newspapers immediately pointed at him as a drug trafficker and attributed the accident to a dispute among criminals. It is to be underlined that, in any case, the questioning and the investigation should be conducted by the Civil Police, and not by the Military Police.⁸⁸ Thank to the initiatives of the group *Mães de Maio* (Mothers of May) and the *Rede de Comunidades e Movimentos contra a Violência* (Net of Communities and Movements against Violence) the case was spread through the social media, especially Facebook, and later acquired importance on a national level generating protests with the slogans “Where is Amarildo?”, “Hey, police, where is Amarildo?”, and the campaign “We are all Amarildo”.⁸⁹

The investigation was then passed to the police commissioner Orlando Zaccone, who denied the involvement of Amarildo with drug trafficking.

⁸⁴ Martins, “Em 76% das UPPs no Rio há denúncia contra algum policial”.

⁸⁵ Franco, “UPP- a redução das favelas em três letras”, 108.

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, 107.

⁸⁷ Julia Carneiro, “Amarildo: The disappearance that has rocked Rio”, *BBC Brasil*, September 18, 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-24143780>; Laura Capriglione, “Os mecanismos midiáticos que livram a caras dos crimes das polícias militares no Brasil” in in Bernardo Kucinski et al., *Bala Perdida: a violência policial no Brasil e desafios para sua superação*, (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2015), 1126-1128, Kindle edition.

⁸⁸ Franco, “A Redução das Favelas em três Letras”; Capriglione, “Os mecanismos midiáticos”.

⁸⁹ Capriglione, “Os mecanismos midiáticos”; Carneiro, “Amarildo: The disappearance that has rocked Rio.”

Finally, the Special Action Group Against Organized Crime (GAECO) declared that the Military Police gave an “invented version” of the facts and reported 24 agents of the Rochina UPP; the Public Ministry of Rio de Janeiro demanded the expulsion of four policemen and the commander of the unit.⁹⁰

Along with the cases of mistreatment and disappearance, the war on drugs turns into a war against people, with the massive killing of inhabitants of the favelas, showing the violence of police intervention, which targets for the great majority colored people.

In the first five months of 2020, nearly 741 people were killed in Rio de Janeiro by the hand of the police with a mean of nearly five people killed every day. It is a record in the numbers of police violence over the last twenty-two years (Figure 4.). It is to be underlined that in 2019, 78% of the people killed for police violence were *pretos* and *pardos*.⁹¹

Data collected in the *Anuario Brasileiro de Segurança Pública*, with basis on the comparison among federal states in the first semesters of 2019 and 2020, show that Rio de Janeiro is leading state in the killings for police intervention (775), followed by the state of Bahia (521), and the state of São Paulo (514).⁹²

Figure 4 shows the number of deaths caused by police interventions in Rio de Janeiro over twenty-two years (between 1998 and 2020) calculated on the first five months of each year (from January to May). The two highest rates are the one registered 2019 in 2019 and 2020. According to security specialist and sociologist Sílvia Ramos, the number started to increase from 2018 in correspondence with the intensification of military intervention and a security policy based on conflict.⁹³ In these operations similar to war, the intelligence and the investigations are neglected in favor of practices of repression.

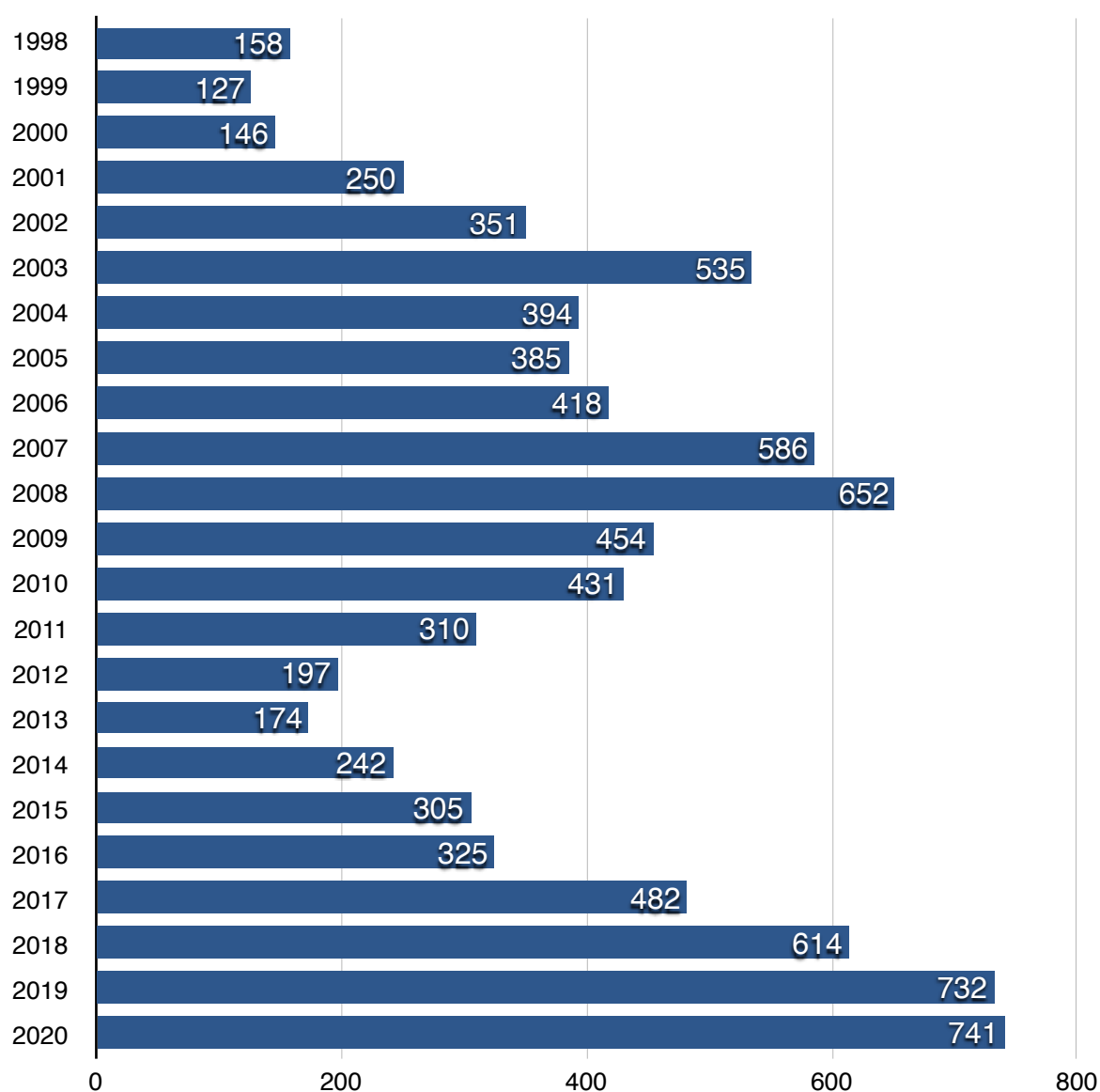
⁹⁰ Franco, Franco, “UPP- a redução das favelas em três letras.”

⁹¹ Matheus Rodrigues, “RJ Tem Maior Número de Mortes por Policiais em 22 Anos; e o 2º Menor Índice de Homicídios já Registrado pelo ISP.” *GI Rio*, June 22, 2020, <https://g1.globo.com/rj/rio-de-janeiro/noticia/2020/06/22/rj-tem-maior-numero-de-mortes-por-policiais-em-22-anos-e-o-2o-menor-indice-de-homicidios-ja-registrado-pelo-isp.ghtml>

⁹² Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, “Anuário Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2020”, 24, accessed January 5, 2020, <https://forumseguranca.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/anuario-14-2020-v1-interativo.pdf>.

⁹³ Rodrigues, “RJ Tem Maior Número de Mortes por Policiais em 22 Anos”,

Figure 4. Number of deaths caused by police by year, 1998-2020.



Source: G1, on the basis of Institute of Public Safety Rio de Janeiro

Silvia Ramos refers to this tragic phenomenon as a “liberalization of executions”.⁹⁴ Police chief Antônio Rcardo Nunes, director of the General Department of Homicide and Personal Protection (DGHPP) responds that, despite the negative effects on residents who find themselves in areas of conflict, the importance of the presence of the State in this area is necessary, as police is fighting against criminal organizations and people carrying terrorists weapons.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Silvia Ramos, Bruna Sotero, Marcos Vinicius Araújo and Pedro Paulo Silva, “Políciais: o centro das narrativas sobre violência e segurança” in Silvia Ramos et. al, *Racismo Motor da Violência*, (Rio de Janeiro : Anabela Paiva, Centro de Estudo de Segurança e Cidadania (CESeC), 2020), 27; Rodrigues, “RJ tem maior número de mortes por policiais em 22 anos”.

⁹⁵ Rodreigues, “RJ tem maior número de mortes por policiais em 22 anos.”

Despite the narrative of the necessity to fight against criminals and drug traffickers, the data show that all the population of the favelas, including kids and children, is vulnerable to police use of lethal force. From June 2019 to May 2020, the State of Rio de Janeiro positioned itself in the first place for the deaths of children and teens in monitored police actions, registering a number of 19 deaths. By contrast, both the States of Pernambuco and Ceará registered zero deaths of kids; in the State of Bahia and the of São Paulo the number of deaths was 2 and 6, respectively.⁹⁶

Two of the most recent cases of police violence that created a sense of indignation both on a national and international levels are the cases of the fourteen-year-old João Pedro Mattos, and of the eight-year-old Ágatha Félix, two innocent black kids living two UPPs favelas (Complexo do Salgueiro and Complexo do Alemão, respectively.)⁹⁷

The brutality of police interventions is revealed also through the “*chacinas*”, term used to refer police interventions where three or more people are killed in the same occasion. Even in this case the *Rede de Observatórios da Segurança* (Network of Safety Observatories) showed that between June 2019 and May 2020, Rio de Janeiro was the State with highest number of *chachinas* (51) when compared with the States of Bahia (24), São Paulo (12), Ceará (10), and Pernambuco (4). Complexively the mean is of two *chacinas* per week, trend that did not decrease even when the rate of homicide lowered.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Ramos, Sotero, Araújo and Silva, “Políciais: o centro das narrativas sobre violência e segurança”, 26.

⁹⁷ Matheur Rodrigues and Henrique Coelho, “Pretos e pardos são 78% dos mortos em ações policiais no Rio de Janeiro 2019: ‘É o negro que sofre essa insegurança’, diz mãe de Ágatha”, *GI Rio*, June 6, 2020, <https://g1.globo.com/rj/rio-de-janeiro/noticia/2020/06/06/pretos-e-pardos-sao-78percent-dos-mortos-em-acoes-policiais-no-rj-em-2019-e-o-negro-que-sofre-essa-inseguranca-diz-mae-de-agatha.ghtml>; Rodreigues, “RJ tem maior número de mortes por policiais em 22 anos.”; César Barreira, Ricardo Moura and Ana Leticia Lins, “Homicídios aumentam; vítimas ainda são as mesmas” in Sílvia Ramos et. al, *Racismo Motor da Violência*, (Rio de Janeiro : Anabela Paiva, Centro de Estudo de Segurança e Cidadania (CESeC), 2020), 35; Ramos, Sotero, Araújo and Silva, “Políciais: o centro das narrativas sobre violência e segurança”, 27.

⁹⁸ Barreira, Moura and Lins, “Homicídios aumentam; vítimas ainda são as mesmas” ,34.

2.4.2 Criminality rates after the implementation of the UPPs

If from the data just analyzed is quite clear that the UPPs troops, or policemen in general, are quite brutal towards favelas' inhabitants, now it is to be understood whether their intervention produced a reduction in the rate of drug trafficking, being the war on drugs the core matter.

According to the *Forum Brasileiro of Segurança Pública*, thefts and drug-related crimes increased significantly. The data consider the period of time between 2006 and 2013, and thirteen favelas: Andaraí, Batam, Borel, Chapéu-Mangueira/Babilônia, Cidade de Deus, Santa Marta, Formiga, Macacos, Pavão/Pavãozinho/Cantagalo, Providência, Salgueiro, Tabajaras and Turano. The mean cases of theft calculated on the basis of month and community increased of 1.9 points, passing from 3.48 before the UPPs to 5,38 after the UPP. A greater increase relates the crimes relative to drugs, which increased of 3.92, passing from 1.9 in the pre-UPPs period to 5.83 in the post-UPPs period.⁹⁹

Overall, according to Franco, Soares and Rekow, the UPPs project did not fulfill the promise of 'pacification'.¹⁰⁰ On the contrary, the fact that public safety depicts the favelas as the only space responsible for drug crimes and illicit possession of weapons led to the legitimization of violent actions in the name of the war on drugs. Nevertheless, there is no guarantee or proof that the intervention of the UPPs leads to a decrease of the drug crimes. In addition, the favelas are not the only places affected by this type of issue. According to the 2000 IBGE census, less than 1% of the inhabitants of the favelas are involved in local trafficking, which corresponds to 1300 individuals over 132 thousands dwellers.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, "Os Donos do Morro", 28-30. It is specified that this comparison is biased by the fact that some communities are larger than others, so that places with larger populations will naturally tend to have more impact on this overall average. On the other hand, since the introduction of each UPP happens at a different time, this further complicates the interpretation, as the population totals are not equivalent before and after the intervention.

¹⁰⁰ Soares, *Desmilitarizar*; Franco, "UPP-a redução da favela em três letras"; Rekow, Rekow, "Rio De Janeiro's Olympic Legacy"; Lea Rekow, "Pacification & Mega-events in Rio de Janeiro, Urbanization, Public Security & Accumulation by Dispossession," *Journal of Human Security* 12, no. 1(2016): 4-34, DOI: 10.12924/johs2016.12010004.

¹⁰¹ Franco, "UPP-a redução da favela em três letras", 60-61, 73-74.

2.5 Demilitarization and the solutions to Police violence

At this point the question is: which changes can be implemented to reduce police violence in Brazil? What emerged from the analysis conducted so far suggests that the starting point should be the recognition of police violence as a phenomenon that generates from racism, facts that implies the urgency of changing the social perception on the matter. Indeed, it would be useless to think of reforming the police system and the institutions when the public and the media support or even encourage the excessive and non-necessary use of force against young blacks. As police commissioner Orlando Zaccane asserts, “How can we reform the police if the idea that criminals can be killed is shared also by prosecutors, journalists and by the society as a whole?”¹⁰²

What is needed as first thing, therefore, is a change of the narrative that associates crime with negritude—being black and marginalized—, association that has been internalized both through the debate on public security and the media. As suggested by Jean Wyllys, a change of narrative could be implemented through policies of regulation and “democratization” of the media, aimed both at decreasing the diffusion of discriminatory and prejudicial messages, and at reconfiguring the biased social imaginary.¹⁰³

Thus, a primary necessity is to act on the culture of violence: in order to adjust public safety organs to a democratic reality, it is essential for the society to figure out whether they prefer a police respectful of the citizens, or a police that favors the dominant classes while using torture and genocide against popular classes.¹⁰⁴

As for the reform of the police system, one of the focal point in the debate of the improvement of public security is the “demilitarization” of the Military Police, that consists in dissociating the police from the military characteristics inherited by the dictatorship, mainly through the union of the two police organs (Civil Police and Military Police) in a single apparatus; and the change of its rigid and hierarchical disciplinary regime.¹⁰⁵

Indeed, according to some authors, the continuity of authoritarian practices, along with the conservation of the military model, allowed to adjust the excessive use of force into the

¹⁰² Mena, “Um modelo violento e ineficaz de polícia”,334.

¹⁰³ Wyllys, “Formas de temer, formas de reprimir”, 1027-1034.

¹⁰⁴ Guimarães, Torres, Faria, “Democracia e violência policial”, 270.

¹⁰⁵ Mena, “Um modelo violento e ineficaz de polícia”.

democratic system. Under this perspective, the fact that disciplinary regulations—which include interdependency, loyalty, a code of silence, complicity, auto-preservation, and discretionary power—are given more relevance than behavioral standards of conduct towards citizens results in the tolerance and normalization of the abuse of force.¹⁰⁶ What is suggested is both a change in the police culture and the strengthening of institutional mechanisms of police control.

For what concerns the change of police culture, an improvement of police officers training is crucial, and it should be focused on a non-racially biased approach and on the respect of human rights. A study conducted in 2003 in Goiás (Brazil), which saw the participation of two hundred and two military policemen students, showed the relevance of having human rights classes in police institutions along with the teaching of democratic values, underlying the importance of tolerance towards minorities while carrying out police activities. The study is relevant also for showing that, despite the great majority of participants did not agree on extrajudicial acts committed by the police, there was still a high number of interviewees who did.¹⁰⁷

As for the institutional mechanisms of control, Arthur Costa suggests: the limitation of independence during police inquiry—too much independence favors corruption and the resort to torture to obtain information—; the implementation of internal standards of conduct both in the regulation of police training and evaluation, and on how to act during police activity; and the change of public security policies, which should not be centered on the use of force as main strategy to combat against violence and criminality (as in the case of UPPs).¹⁰⁸

The reform of public security policies is in line with another interpretation present in the debate on demilitarization. Such interpretation is based on the argument that the solution to police violence cannot rely solely on the exclusion of the military characteristic from the police organizations. What is needed is a detachment from the “the ideologic militarization of public security”¹⁰⁹ which implies the end to the war on drugs and the military occupation of

¹⁰⁶ Cubas, Natal, and Branco, “Violência policial: abordagem da literatura”, 1999-2007; Costa, “Police Brutality in Brazil. Authoritarian Legacy or Institutional Weakness?”; Mena, “Um modelo violento e ineficaz de polícia”; Guimarães, Torres, Faria, “Democracia e violência policial.”

¹⁰⁷Guimarães, Torres and Faria; “Democracia e violência policial”, 270.

¹⁰⁸ Costa, “Police Brutality in Brazil”.

¹⁰⁹ Karam; “Violencia, militarização, guerra as drogas”, 658-672.

the favelas. This approach underlines the necessity of breaking the belief that an increase of the use of force can reduce criminality, belief that legitimize the criminalization of the *favelados* and supports police violence.

This thread of thought, advanced also the proposal of ending prohibitionism along with the end of the war on drugs. According to some authors such as Luiz Eudardo Soares, Maria Lucia Karam and Suely Aires the legalization and the regulation of the use of drugs would weaken the trafficking, with a consequent criminality reduction. In addition, as explained by Jean Wyllys, the profit generated from drugs taxation could be invested in drug-abuse-prevention educational programs for the youth.¹¹⁰

What emerges from the overall framework is that these approaches—the one focused on the media; the one focused on political and institutional reforms; and the one more cultural and ideological—are not mutually exclusive, on the contrary, they could all be implemented. As proposed by Soares, what is required is

“[...] the re-foundation of police institutions, drug legalization and a true revolution in the relations between the state armed power (though, not only) and the most vulnerable social classes. Such a radical democratizing turn, would considerably contribute to the fight against Brazilian structural racism. If the great majority of the society keeps on authorizing the extrajudicial executions of the “Other”, that is, of the young black poor, promoting a real genocide in the peripheries, and continue to reject human rights in the name of the fight against crime, we will gather more crime and less police efficiency, more violence, less legitimacy of the institutions, less trust in Justice and in Politics [...]”¹¹¹

What is possible to conclude is that the increase of the repressive action of the state’s armed forces is not a solution to urban criminality. The attention should be shifted, along with the proposal already discussed, to social and economic inequalities, as they are at the basis of the criminalization of the poor producing political and civil inequality. Public policies for the inclusion of the lower classes could be policies of housing, education, health and employment and income distribution.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Wyllys, “Formas de temer, formas de reprimir”, 1038; Soares, “Por que tem sido tão difícil mudar as polícias?”; Soares, *Desmilitarizar*; Suely Aires, “Corpos marcados para morrer”.

¹¹¹ Soares, *Desmilitarizar*, 20-21.

¹¹² Pereira, “Os lírios não nascem da lei”; Wyllys, “Formas de temer, formas de reprimir”; Guimarães, Torres and Faria, “Democracia e violência policial: o caso da policia militar”.

A last point that should be included is the fight against police violence is the organization in popular movements. The engagement in social and political life is relevant since it acts in two ways: it awakens public opinion—and puts pressure on public organs—and it helps to overcome the trauma and pain caused by police violence. This aspect, will be discussed further in Chapter 3.¹¹³

¹¹³ Franco, “UPP- a redução da favela em três letras”, 112-119; Soares, “Por que tem sido tão difícil mudar as polícias?”, 371-372.

3. Black Lives Matter in Brazil and the use of technology and social media to fight against police violence

This chapter focuses on two main objectives. The first is to show how the Black Lives Matter movement influenced collective action in Brazil. The second is to analyze how the technology and the social media can be helpful in incentive mobilization and fight against police violence. The connection with the Black Lives Matter movement and Brazilian activists will be analyzed according to two main events: the visit of the American movement in Rio de Janeiro in 2016; and the protests that sparked globally from the end of May 2020, after the killing of George Floyd. In Brazil, the protests against police violence took the name of *Vidas Negras Importam*, translation of the statement “Black Lives Matter.” *Vidas Negras Importam* became also an hashtag which spread on social media not only as a way to organize protests but also as a way of taking position against racial inequality and police brutality in Brazil.

The way in which the Black Lives Matter became an international phenomenon constituted a starting point to reflect on how technology, such as the use of the Internet and the use of the smartphone, can be necessary tools for encouraging social change and denouncing acts of police misconduct. The increased accessibility to these tool and social media led to another reflection, that is how technology can be used also by the poor strata of Brazilian society, such as the dwellers of the favelas, creating an effect of self-empowerment and bottom-up initiative. Thus, the chapter will also discuss about a particular type of social media activism, that is favela media activism. Favela media activism is crucial for the involvement of the community in civic engagement and for the opposition against police abuse of force, being the favelas the main target area of the phenomenon. Denouncing these abuses, nevertheless, is often dangerous as the police tends to threaten and retaliate against those who report or record police violent intervention. This topic will be also covered in the chapter, showing which solutions have been found by local activists in partnership with international NGOs.

3.1 Black Lives Matter visits Rio for the first time

The first connection between the Black Lives Matter (BLM) and Brazil consists in the participation of the Boston delegation of the American movement in a four-day event held in Rio de Janeiro which started on July 20, 2016 and was given the name of “*Julho Negro*” (Black July).¹ The BLM delegation included the participation of Elizabeth Martin, Daunasia Yancey, Pamela Selders, Brittini Gray, Reverend Doctor John L. Selders and Reverend Waltrina N. Middleton. It was Martin who organized the trip Rio. She experienced in first person the loss of a relative due to police violence: in 2007, her nephew, who was living in Rio at the time, was killed by a police officer the day of his 30th birthday, fact that led her to investigate on his nephew’s death and to create the Boston non-profit organization Brazil Police Watch.²

The visit of the BLM movement delegates, who had been invited by members of local activist groups such as *Coletivo Papo Reto* (Straight Talk Collective), *Mães de Maio*, Rio de Janeiro Youth Forum, *Mães of Manguinhos* and Amnesty International Brazil among others, occurred in a sensitive moment for the issue of police violence both in Brazil and in the United States. While Brazil was experiencing a sharp increase in deaths caused by police interventions in the preparation for the Olympic Games, the United States assisted to the fatal shooting of two more black men by the hand of the police—Philando Castile and Alton Sterling.³

The Brazilian and American realities revealed the urgency of opening a cross-national debate on anti-blackness and police violence, with the aim, in particular, to bring international attention to the tragedy of police violence in Rio and in Brazil. This side of the story, as occurred in the case of the Olympic games, is often neglected by the mainstream media which tend to portrait the black favela dwellers as criminals and never the Military Police. For this

¹ Geísa Mattos, “Flagrantes de Racismo: Imagens da Violência Policial e as Conexões entre o Ativismo no Brasil e nos Estados Unidos,” *Revista de Ciências Sociais* 48, no. 2 (2017): 187-217. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=6408168>; Phillip Martin, “Black Lives Matter In Brazil: Boston Delegates Protest In Rio Ahead Of Olympics”, *GBH News*, July 25, 2016. <https://www.wgbh.org/news/2016/07/25/news/black-lives-matter-brazil-boston-delegates-protest-rio-ahead-olympics>.

² Mariah Barber, “Movimento ‘Black Lives Matter’ Visita o Rio.” *RioOnWatch*, July 23, 2016. <https://riononwatch.org.br/?p=21056#prettyPhoto>.”; Martin, “Black Lives Matter In Brazil.”

³ Mattos, “Flagrantes de Racismo”; Barber, “Movimento ‘Black Lives Matter’ Visita o Rio.”; Melanie Garunay, “President Obama on the Fatal Shooting of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile”, The White House President Barack Obama (blog), accessed March 20, 2021. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2016/07/07/president-obama-fatal-shootings-alton-sterling-and-philando-castile>.

reason, Elizabeth Martin stated that she wanted “[...] the world to know about the horror that is police killing citizens as part of Olympic preparation.”⁴ Indeed, over the period between the announcement in 2009 of the Rio Olympics and mid-2016, the military police killed nearly 2,500 people in the city of Rio de Janeiro, many of which were extrajudicial executions. These data reflect how the security situation in the favelas spiraled out of control with the rate of lethal police force increased by 80% in the first half of 2016.⁵ To underline the disproportion rate of killings, especially when compared to the United States scenario, BLM delegate Daunasia Yancey commented that the amount of police murders they had in a year, Brazil experienced in a week.⁶

In Brazil, the exacerbation of police killings prior the Games, seemed to be the result on the one hand of agents’ impunity—who also covered their misconduct by planting weapons and drugs on the corps—; and on the other, of a “shoot first, ask later” / “go into the favelas to kill” approach, which resulted in summary executions that involved unarmed people and children.⁷ As reported by Atila Roque, Executive Director at Amnesty International Brazil, this scenario of police violence and violation of human rights in Rio is the repetition of what occurred for the 2014 World Cup: “Brazil seems to have learned very little from the great mistakes it made over the years when it comes to public security. The policy of ‘shoot first ask questions later has placed Rio de Janeiro as one of the deadliest cities on earth.”⁸ Indeed, during the World Cup, the homicide rate in the city’s periphery increased of 40% with nearly

⁴ Barber, “Movimento ‘Black Lives Matter’ Visita o Rio.”

⁵ Lea Rekow, “Rio De Janeiro’s Olympic Legacy: Public Security for Whom?,” *Journal of Human Security* 12, no. 1 (2016): 78. DOI: 10.12924/johs2016.12010074; Adam Talbot and Thomas F. Carter, “Human rights abuses at the Rio 2016 Olympics: activism and the media.” *Leisure Studies* 37, no. 1 (2018): 79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2017.1318162>.

⁶ Martin, “Black Lives Matter In Brazil.”

⁷ Amnesty International, “Brazil: ‘Trigger happy’ military police kill hundreds as Rio prepares for Olympic countdown”, last modified August 3, 2015. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/08/brazil-trigger-happy-military-police-kill-hundreds-as-rio-prepares-for-olympic-countdown/>; Rekow, “Rio De Janeiro’s Olympic Legacy”; Talbot and Carter, “Human rights abuses at the Rio 2016 Olympics.”

⁸ Amnesty International, “Brazil on fast-track course to repeat epic World Cup failures during Olympics”, accessed March 15, 2021. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/06/brazil-on-fast-track-course-to-repeat-epic-world-cup-failures-during-olympics/>.

580 people killed because of police interventions, who was given the task to secure the cities where the events took place.⁹

Along with police violence, another issue that was brought to the table in the debate between Black Lives Matter delegation and Brazilian activists was that of evictions. Despite the two phenomena did not represent a new occurrence, they did increment over the pre-Olympic period. The intervention of the Military Police in forced housing displacement conducted in relation to mega-events affected nearly 70,000 individuals, with the process of evictions escalating with policies introduced in 2015.¹⁰

One of the communities that suffered the most from the evictions in the run-up to the Games was Vila Autódromo, whose number of family residents was reduced from 600 to only 20. Although the mayor Eduardo Paes asserted that Vila Autódromo was the only place that suffered evictions as consequence of the mega-event, nearly 77, 206 people were evicted from 2009 to 2015 in the city.¹¹ An emblematic case that occurred in the community in 2015 is the one of Dona Mariza, who went out in the morning to go to the diction and when she came she found her house razed to the ground by a bulldozer. Her medication and the money she money were nowhere to be found; her belongings and furniture were destroyed. The City Hall arranged another housing for her only after five months.¹²

The visit of the Black Lives Matter in Brazil was not only an occasion to get the attention of the public eye on the matter of police brutality in Brazil, but also a moment of commonness, fraternity and mutual exchange. As they arrived, the American activists could spend time with the mothers of the victims who shared their stories of pain and grief, feelings to which the BLM delegates could connect. One of these mothers was Débora Maria da Silva, founder of an advocacy group called *Mães de Maio* (Mothers of May) representing the mothers who have lost their children to police violence.¹³ Her son was killed by the São

⁹ Amnesty International, “Brazil on fast-track course”; Mattos, “Flagrantes de Racismo.”

¹⁰ Lea Rekow, “Pacification & Mega-events in Rio de Janeiro: Urbanization. Public Security & Accumulation by Dispossession,” *Journal of Human Security* 12, no. 1 (2016): 4-34. DOI: 10.12924/johs2016.12010004.

¹¹ Talbot and Carter, “Human rights abuses at the Rio 2016 Olympics.”

¹² Sam Salvesen, “Dona Mariza Left Homeless After Eviction in Vila Autódromo Next Door to #Rio2016 Olympics,” *RioOnWatch*, December 3, 2015, <https://www.rioonwatch.org/?p=25558>; Talbot and Carter, “Human rights abuses at the Rio 2016 Olympics.”

¹³ Latino USA, “Black Lives Matter,” August 19, 2016, podcast, [6:08], <https://www.npr.org/2016/08/19/490651555/brazilian-black-lives-matter?t=1616958594520>).

Paulo police in May 2006, during a “urban war” where the police tried to contain a riot attributed to the First Capital Command (PPC). In the event, 493 people were killed and, according to the data collected by the ONG *Justiça Global* and the International Human Rights Clinic (IHRC), only 6% of them had criminal records, while 122 cases fall in the framework of summary execution by the police.¹⁴ Deborah said her son was killed just because he was in the middle of the street as he worked as a street sweeper. That day he was supposed to be on a sick leave, but he went to work anyway. The founder of Mothers of May, knew about the death of his son by radio. Although she was devastated by the pain she decided to collect her strengths and look for the other mothers whose children had been killed, in order to ask for justice and investigate on the deaths of their beloved. Despite the authorities and the institution did not listen to her claims she went on helping the mothers and the relatives who demanded answers for the deaths and disappearance of their sons and husbands. Débora, claims that the Brazilian State keeps on producing other Mothers of May.¹⁵

The Black Lives Matter delegates expressed their sympathy to the local activists and family of the victims by marching with them through the city of Rio de Janeiro. The march stopped in front of the Rio de Janeiro State Public Ministry building in solidarity of Rafael Braga, who was sentenced in April 2015 to eleven years of prison under the accusation of drug trafficking—according to RioOnWatch, “the officers are believed to have forced him to confess and fabricated his possession of cocaine and marijuana to verify their claim.”¹⁶ Over the demonstration, BLM delegates together with 200 Brazilian activists were holding banners saying “Without justice there will be no peace”—which recalls the slogan “No Justice No Peace” of the African-american protests —and “Racism is useful to incarcerate, judge, torture and kill.”¹⁷ The march also included a ceremony at the Candelária Cathedral, site of the 1993 massacre which saw the death of eight children adolescents sleeping in the church

¹⁴ Renata Gonçalves, “De antigas e novas loucas: Madres e Mães de Maio contra a violência de Estado,” *Lutas Socias*, no. 29 (2012): 130-143.

¹⁵ Laura Capriglione, “Os mecanismos midiáticos que livram a cara dos crimes das polícias militares no Brasil” in Bernardo Kucinski et al., *Bala Perdida: a violência policial no Brasil e desafios para sua superação*, (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2015). Kindle edition ;Gonçalves, “De antigas e novas loucas”; Latino USA, “Black Lives Matter.”

¹⁶ Brian McNamara, “Protesters Demand Freedom for Rafael Braga, Symbol of Brazil’s Criminalization of Poverty”, *RioOnWatch*, May 11, 2017, <https://www.rioonwatch.org/?p=36353>.

¹⁷ Barber, “Movimento ‘Black Lives Matter’ Visita o Rio.”

steps by the hand of a death squad and off-duty policemen.¹⁸ Among the protesters there was also another group of activist mothers from a favela of the North Zone named *Mães de Manguinho* (Mothers of Manguinho), who similarly to the Mothers of May lost their children due to police actions.¹⁹ BLM activist Reverend Waltrina, who lost her cousin in a shooting in her native town in South Carolina, said about her experience in Rio:

To be invited to join the other mothers and walk through the favelas where their children were killed and hold their pictures up touched me. When we concluded the march and calling out their names and presented the names for them to include my cousin's name and others that we know that died was very moving and emotional for me. We can take a story from the favelas and we can also find the same story in our community.²⁰

Despite the differences between the American and the Brazilian context, the two sides learnt a lot from each other. Brazilian activist Carlo Gonçalves for instance, said that one of the first things that he learned from the Black Lives Matter delegates was that white people can actually be of help. He argued that sometimes Brazilian black movements found themselves arguing about who can speak up first in representation of the movement, losing sight of the real enemy and of the real issue.²¹

On its part, the Black Lives Matter movement should learn two main things from the Brazilian experience in general: firstly, the love and pride for blackness—which according to reverend Waltrina is a stunning characteristics of the favela inhabitants for which many black Americans are still struggling for—²²; and, secondly, the demand for State policies that are directly addressed to the black community. Jaime Alves, professor at the College of Staten Island, stressed that the Black Lives Matter should look at the achievements of the Brazilian Movimento Negro (Black Movement), which, starting from the late 1970's, demanded social policies to reduce social injustice and racial inequality.²³ The suggestion of professor Alves

¹⁸ Thales Carneiro, “Black Lives Matter protest Rio police violence ahead of Olympics”, *Routers*, July 23, 2016. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-olympics-rio-race-idUSKCN1030XU>.

¹⁹ Kim Brunhuber, “Can Black Lives Matter work in Brazil, where 'repression means death'?” *CBC*, Aug 14, 2016. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/brazil-police-shootings-black-lives-matter-1.3720216>.

²⁰ Latino USA, “Black Lives Matter”.

²¹ Brunhuber, “Can Black Lives Matter work in Brazil.”

²² Latino USA, “Black Lives Matter”.

²³ Latino Media Collective, “July 29th 2016: Black Lives Matter In Brazil”, podcast, 53:37, <https://soundcloud.com/latinomediacolletive/july-29th-2016-black-lives-matter-in-brazil>.

for the Black Lives Matter movement is to focus on the request of implementation of affirmative actions, that is compensation policies implemented by the State to favor the social and economic integration to reduce racial inequalities. An example of Brazil affirmative actions are the university quotas, introduced to increase the attendance of black and brown students in the university. In 2001, for instance the State University of Rio de Janeiro reserved 40% of places of access to cantonal entrance exams (vestibular) to black and brown students.²⁴

To sum up, the main points that emerged from the Rio meeting with the BLM are the following. Firstly, the importance of collaborating in order to make the issue of police violence and racism more visible both on a national and international level. The American and the Brazilian realities should join forces; as stated by Daunasia Yancey “the most important thing that we can do is build together and mobilize our people to spread the word”.²⁵ Secondly, white people can actually help. As discussed in Chapter 2, the fight against racism is a matter of an every-day anti-racist attitude and is applicable to anybody. In addition, having access to environments where blacks are generally discriminated, white people could open discussions on the matter getting also more attention from the public.

Thirdly, the social and political engagement of the mothers and relatives of the victims in the form of activism such as the case of the Mothers of May and Mothers of Manguinho, is relevant as it acts on several levels: it can be seen as form to recover from the trauma of police violence; it involves other mothers and victims giving a voice to the unheard and a name to the forgotten; it can produce a wider mobilization through the forms of protests and campaigns as we saw for the case of Rafael Braga and Amarildo, arising consciousness on structural racism and exerting pressure on the institutions.²⁶

Lastly, both the Black Lives Matter and the Brazilian activists agreed on the relevance of the role played by the mainstream media either in the criminalization of blackness and poverty, or

²⁴ Andrews, *Afro-Latin America 1800-2000*, (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2007), 89-90; Ribeiro Corossacz, *Razzismo, Meticciano, Democrazia Razziale: Le Politiche della Razza in Brasile*, (Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino, 2005), 103-104.

²⁵ Thales Carneiro, “Black Lives Matter protest Rio police violence ahead of Olympics”

²⁶ Luiz Eduardo Soares, “Por que tem sido tão difícil mudar as polícias?” in Bernardo Kucinski et al., *Bala Perdida: a violência policial no Brasil e desafios para sua superação*, (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2015). Kindle edition.

in neglecting the phenomenon of police violence.²⁷ The issue is that the media, partially indicative of the public opinion, appears to be biased not only in terms of content but also in relation to what is reported and what is not.²⁸

The criminalization of the poor and of the blacks is also due to an overrepresentation of the urban criminality which is further enhanced by the Internet and the social media, where cruel images of violence are available to the public with no type of filter. This unfiltered cruelty produces in the audience a feeling of insecurity and anxiety that can result in the support of police violence as a solution to criminality.²⁹

Nevertheless, the new technologies and the social media can play a positive role in the fight against racism and police violence, for their capability of reaching a wider public, including the marginalized and breaking barriers, both physical and cultural. This can be the case of social movements and activists using social media to promote collective action and organize protest as it happened for the Black Lives Matter social movement.

3.2 Black Lives Matter's escalation through social media

Black Lives Matter is a social movement that was founded in 2013 by three black women activists, Patrisse Cullors-Brignac, Alcia Garza and Opal Tometi, after the acquittal of policeman George Zimmerman, who fatally shot the 17-year-old African-American Trayvon Martin in February 2012, Florida.³⁰

Black Lives Matter defines itself also as a global organization based in the US, UK and Canada which fights against police violence on black people with the mission “[...] to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black

²⁷ Barber, “Movimento ‘Black Lives Matter’ Visita o Rio.”

²⁸ Talbot and Carter, “Human rights abuses at the Rio 2016 Olympics.”

²⁹ Jean Wyllys, “Formas de temer, formas de reprimir: as relações entre a violência policial e suas representações nas mídias” in Bernardo Kucinski et al., *Bala Perdida: a violência policial no Brasil e desafios para sua superação*, (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2015). Kindle edition

³⁰ Nikita Carney, “All Lives Matter, but so Does Race: Black Lives Matter and the Evolving Role of Social Media,” *Humanity & Society* 40, no. 2 (2016): 180-199. DOI: 10.1177/0160597616643868; Goubin Yang, “Narrative Agency in Hashtag Activism: The Case of #BlackLivesMatter,” *Media and Communication* 4, no.4 (2016): 13-17; Munmun De Choudhury, Shagun Jhaver, Benjamin Sugar and Ingmar Weber, “Social Media Participation in an Activist Movement for Racial Equality,” Proc International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media, (2016): 92-101.

communities by the state and vigilantes.”³¹ The movement underlines its collective action and the importance of going beyond the national sphere in order to include all black communities and oppose to the systemic oppression of black lives.³²

The social movement is referred to both as “Black Lives Matter” and #BlackLivesMatter. Indeed, the name of the movement appeared firstly as a statement in a Facebook post published by Alicia Garza in July 2013, and later in the form of the hashtag added by Patrisse Cullors.³³ The use of the hashtag at the beginning of the name underlines the peculiarity of this movement that is the inclusion of social media as a new component of activism which encourages people’s participation and engagement on a larger scale.³⁴

This can be seen from the fact that already in 2013, the use of the hashtag BlackLivesMatter, which became popular especially on the social media platform of Twitter, functioned as a way to help organize and coordinate demonstrations against racial discrimination and police violence in the United States.³⁵

Following the 2014 police killing of two unarmed African-Americans, Michael Brown in Ferguson and Eric Garner in New York City, the Black Lives Matter increased massively its influence both nationally and globally. In particular, the popularity of the movement escalated after the non-indictment of Brown’s killer, officer Wilson. The hashtag BlackLivesMatter started to be associated with #Ferguson becoming the second most used hashtag accounting for the 22.16% of hashtags tweets in the year after Mike Brown’s assassination.³⁶

³¹ Black Lives Matter, last accessed March 20, 2021, <https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>

³² Idem

³³ Carney, “All Lives Matter”; Yang, “Narrative Agency in Hashtag Activism”; Black Lives Matter, <https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>

³⁴ Carney, “All Lives Matter”.

³⁵ Prudence Cumberbatch and Nicole Trujillo-Pagán, “Hashtag Activism and Why #BlackLivesMatter In (and To) the Classroom,” *Radical Teacher*, no. 106, (2016): 70-86.

³⁶ Ray Rashawn, Melissa Brown, Neil Fraistat and Edward Summers, “Ferguson and the death of Michael Brown on Twitter: #BlackLivesMatter, #TCOT, and the evolution of collective identities,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 11 (2017): 1797-1813. DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2017.1335422; Yang, “Narrative Agency in Hashtag Activism.”

3.3 Black Lives Matter 2020 protests reach Brazil

The year 2020 can be considered as the year that made the Black Lives Matter movement's protests a phenomenon of global scale. The event that triggered the beginning of a series of demonstrations taking place around the world was the death of the African-American George Floyd, on May 25, 2020. Floyd's death was caused by the abuse of force of the Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, who suffocated the man by keeping his foot on Floyd's neck for nearly eight minutes and fifteen seconds.³⁷ Protests started the night of the 25th in the streets of Minneapolis and continued in other cities across the United States in the subsequent days; later on manifestations begun to spread across the globe with people asking to stop police brutality while holding banners saying "Black Lives Matter" and "I can't breathe", in reference to the sentence that Floyd desperately repeated several time while Chauvin was suffocating him to death.³⁸

In Brazil, the protests emerged with the name "Vidas Negras Importam" translation of "Black Lives Matter". The first manifestation, organized through the social media, occurred on May 31, 2020, in Front of the Guanabara Palace, seat of the state government of Rio de Janeiro. The organizers of the protests asked the participants to follow the health safety guidance of social distancing and wearing masks due to the pandemic of Covid-19.³⁹ The second manifestation took place on June 7 in Rio de Janeiro, this time along the Avenida Presidente Vargas starting from the monument to Zumbi dos Palmares. One of the banners saying "Black mothers can't stand crying anymore" with photos and posters of the victims of police violence remind of the protests of June 2016 of the Mothers of May and Mothers of

³⁷ Evan Hill, Ainara Tiefenthäler, Christiaan Triebert, Drew Jordan, Haley Willis and Robin Stein, "How George Floyd Was Killed in Police Custody", *The New York Times*, May 31, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/george-floyd-investigation.html>

³⁸ Derrick Bryson Taylor, "George Floyd Protests: A Timeline", *The New York Times*, March 28, 2021 <https://www.nytimes.com/article/george-floyd-protests-timeline.html>; CNN World, "Protests across the globe after George Floyd's death," June 13, 2020. <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/06/06/world/gallery/intl-george-floyd-protests/index.html>.

³⁹ Brasil de Fato, "Vidas negras importam: protestos crescem nos EUA e Rio tem manifestação neste domingo", May 31, 2020. <https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2020/05/31/protestos-por-george-floyd-crescem-nos-eua-rio-tera-manifestacao-neste-domingo-31>; André Pessoa and Rafael Quintão, "Protesto 'Vidas negras importam' no RJ tem confusão e bombas após encerramento", *Globo News*, May 31, 2020. <https://g1.globo.com/rj/rio-de-janeiro/noticia/2020/05/31/rio-tem-protesto-vidas-negras-importam-em-frente-a-sede-do-governo.ghhtml>

Manguinho.⁴⁰

The protests were incentivized by the recent killing of João Pedro Mattos which occurred few days before the death of George Floyd on May 18. João Pedro, fourteen years old, was shot in operation of the Civil and Military Police while he was in his house in the Complexo do Salgueiro, a favela area in Rio de Janeiro. He was hit on his back by one of the 64 shots that had been fired, although the family claimed to have counted more than 70 marks of shot on the walls of the house.⁴¹ In the protests the banners said “Justiça por João Pedro”, which became also an hashtag shared on Twitter and Instagram, both in Brazil and in the United States.

João’s case is not an isolated episode, the month of May was marked by police extrajudicial actions involving young black men in the favelas such as the 21-year-old Iago César dos Reis Gonzaga and the 18-year-old João Vítor da Rocha.⁴²

The killings of black men by the hand of police officers in Brazil and in the United States seem to follow a similar violent type of approach. On June 21 a 19-year-old was suffocated during a police approach. The images provided by a record made by a local depict the young black kid lying on the floor while the police officers were pressing his knees against his throat—image that recalled the one of Floyd’s death.⁴³

The protests in the United States and in Brazil have in common is the anger and the pain caused by the loss of a friend, a son, a parent due to institutional racism and police violence. For this reason, despite the geographical distance, they shared the same statement “Black Lives Matter” / “Vidas Negras Importam” as a need to reaffirm that black lives should be granted the human dignity they have been deprived of in several manners over decades.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Vinícius Lisboa, “Protesto Vidas Negras Importam leva manifestantes ao centro do Rio”, Agência Brasil, June 6, 2020. <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/geral/noticia/2020-06/protesto-vidas-negras-importam-leva-manifestantes-ao-centro-do-rio>

⁴¹ Brasil de Fato, “Vidas negras importam”; Pessôa and Quintão, “Protesto 'Vidas negras importam' no RJ tem confusão e bombas após encerramento.”

⁴² Breiller Pires, “Entre a vida e a morte sob tortura, violência policial se estende por todo o Brasil, blindada pela impunidade,” *El País*, June 30, 2020, <https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2020-06-30/entre-a-vida-e-a-morte-sob-tortura-violencia-policial-se-estende-por-todo-o-brasil-blindada-pela-impunidade.html>

⁴³ Artur Stabile and Maria Teresa Cruz, “PM sufoca homem negro até ele desmaiar e lembra ação que matou George Floyd nos EUA”, *El País*, June 22, 2020, <https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2020-06-22/pm-sufoca-homem-negro-ate-ele-desmaiar-e-lembra-acao-que-matou-george-floyd-nos-eua.html>

⁴⁴ Personal considerations.

According to Carvalho and Sargentini, this sentence represents an invitation to reflect on the denial of the humanization of black people since the discourse of social equality shared by all individuals for the simple fact of being human does not include black people; as a matter of fact, they are target of a process of dehumanization expressed through daily instances of violence.⁴⁵

The statement Black Lives Matter, as occurred in the case of Ferguson (2014), became also a way to connect people, this time around the world, that generated an impulse for a joint action against police violence. The hashtags #BlackLivesMatter and #VidasNegrasImportam created a real trend in the social media, and was used in solidarity of the victims (often accompanied by a picture with a complete black background), to refer either to the protests or to any action, thought or symbol that could connect to the idea of racial equality, racial discrimination or police brutality. In the paragraphs below, I will discuss how social media and a particular form of activism (hashtag activism) can function as a way to organize collective action as occurred in Brazil for the protests Vidas Negras Importam.

3.4 *Vidas Negras Importam*: an instance of hashtag activism

#VidasNegrasImportam can be considered an instance of hashtag activism, which occurs when a great number of posts appear on social media under a common hash tagged word, sentence or statement with a political and social claim.⁴⁶ In this sense, hashtags function as frames of collective action creating a structure that helps the users to focus on a specific line of dialogue that detaches from other cultural or political discourses.⁴⁷

Using the same hashtag is a form of agency and becomes a way to build a new collective identity, as the users identify themselves in a set of common ideals, values and objectives.⁴⁸

The case of #VidasNegrasImportam it includes the values of racial equality and the respect for black lives; as for the objectives, they include the fight against police violence and racial

⁴⁵ Ingrid Cunha de Carvalho and Vanice Sargentini, “Vidas importam e a falsa simetria: o discurso em movimentos sociais.” *Revista Humanidades e Inovação* 7, no. 24 (2020): 187-197.

⁴⁶ Guobin Yang, “Narrative Agency in Hashtag Activism: The Case of #BlackLivesMatter,” *Media and Communication* 4, no.4 (2016): 13-17.

⁴⁷ Rashawn, Brown, Fraistat and Summers, “Ferguson and the death of Michael Brown on Twitter.”

⁴⁸ Yang, “Narrative Agency in Hashtag Activism”; Rashawn, Brown, Fraistat and Summers, “Ferguson and the death of Michael Brown on Twitter”; Cumberbatch and Trujillo-Pagán, “Hashtag Activism and Why #BlackLivesMatter.”

discrimination.

The fact that the hashtag and the slogan Black Lives Matter was present in Brazil as in other several country is consequence of its migration through the cyberspace which emerges, in our current context and way of life where digital media is present in people's daily five, as a place where interaction among people, exchange of information and social action is facilitated.⁴⁹

According to Manuel Castells, the cyberspace provide an autonomous space for the users to freely express themselves. Being the mass media controlled by the Government and media enterprises, the autonomy of communication is build on the Internet and the social media which offer the possibility to deliberate on and coordinate actions in an unobstructed way.⁵⁰

Thus, cyberspace and media activism can be seen as a way to bring in new forms of organization and social articulation. In the cyberculture, social media became an arena where the Black Lives Matter movement promoted its message allowing the interaction of the average citizen.

At this point it is possible to make some observations.

Black Lives Matter in the United States is a social movement, other than a statement used in protests and as an hashtag in the social media. *Vidas Negras Importam* in Brazil, is used as a statement and a symbol in the protests, and as a hashtag in the social media, therefore it can be considered a phenomenon of hashtag activism but not a social movement, since it lacks of a central organization and coordination. Indeed, according to Della Porta and Diani, what characterizes a social movement is the contemporary presence of three elements: conflictual collective action, dense informal network (organizational status), and sharing of collective identity.⁵¹ A conflictual collective action is present when actors are identified as opponents in the engagement of political or cultural conflicts in trying to pursue collective interests or control the same stakes.⁵²

⁴⁹ de Carvalho and Sargentini, "Vidas importam e a falsa simetria."

⁵⁰ Quézia Alcântara and Tiago Mainieri, "Os movimentos sociais em redes digitais - do Outono Brasileiro à Marcha da Família com Deus," 10º Encontro Nacional de História da Mídia (Porto Alegre, 2015).

⁵¹ Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social movements: an introduction*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 20-21.

⁵² Alain Touraine, "An introduction to the study of social movements", *Social Research* 52, no. 4 (1985): 749-787.

Dense informal networks consists in the exchanges of resources between individuals and organized actors that keep their autonomy and independence while seeking to achieve a common goal. In this sense, social movements are characterized by an organizational status and an organizational change, therefore they are considered more in terms of a system rather than single actors. It follows that no single actor can represent an entire movement.⁵³

Lastly, social movements are not to be confused with a set of protests or events on a specific issues, or campaigns as in the case of *Vidas Negras Importam*. The notion of social movement is strictly connected to the idea of collective identity, which is based on the extension of individual moral and emotions to a broader community.⁵⁴ The sense of common goal and commitment to a cause, allow activists and organizations to perceive themselves as connected to other actors enabling collective mobilization. By consequence, the intention of achieving specific goals broadens to a wider and more inclusive process of change or resistance to change.⁵⁵

The fact that *Vidas Negras Importam* is not a social movement, as opposed to Black Lives Matter, can be seen in the homonymous website which says “*Vidas Negras Importam*, manners of supporting the #BlackLivesMatter movement and what non-black people can do to spread and respect the movement”.⁵⁶ The website also contains petitions and other initiatives to seek justice for the victims of police violence and institutional racism. Thus, the phenomenon can be considered as a series of initiatives, encouraged through the use of the Internet and social media, to raise consciousness and encourage collective action to give value to black lives.

Another aspect that can be noticed is that the hashtags #BlackLivesMatter and #VidasNegrasImportam increase their incidence after and during a moment of crisis and conflict, as in the case of episodes of police violence against black people. By hashtagging keywords and key sentences individuals contribute to the joint production of a narrative.⁵⁷

⁵³ Della Porta and Diani, *Social movements: an introduction*; Touraine, “An introduction to the study of social movements.”

⁵⁴ Francesca Polletta and James M. Jasper, “Collective Identity and Social Movements”, *Annual Review of Sociology* 27, (2001): 283-305.

⁵⁵ Della Porta and Diani, *Social movements: an introduction*.

⁵⁶ Vidas Negras Importam, last accessed April 3, 2021. <https://blmbr.carrd.co/#>.

⁵⁷ Yang, “Narrative Agency in Hashtag Activism.”

The production of a narrative is peculiar of hashtag activism and is crucial to catch the attention of the public eye. Indeed, according to Raul Santiago videos as images alone are not enough to enhance the interest around the debate on racism; the creation of an effective narrative through words and writing is needed for the society, since it has not yet realized how racist and violent the State is towards black people.⁵⁸

Overall, it is possible to say that Black Lives Matter either as a social movement or in the form of hashtag activism did not start protests against racism and police brutality in Brazil, but helped in making the Brazilian scenario known internationally and in increasing the participation in actions against the oppression of black people in the country.

3.5 *Jornadas de Junho*: how Facebook and Twitter organized collective mobilization

The phenomenon of *Vidas Negras Importam* is not the first example of the use of social media to organize protests and mobilization in Brazil. Already in 2013, Facebook and Twitter had been adopted to promote and coordinate social action. In that year, over the month of June, a series of protests—which took the name of *Jornadas de Junho* (Days of June)—mobilized nearly 1.4 million people in over 335 cities in Brazil.⁵⁹ The demonstrations were initially motivated by a rise in public transports fares of 8% (0.20 R\$), but were actually related to the dissatisfaction for the Government’s expenses for the forthcoming World Cup and Olympic games in presence of a deep economic inequality and insufficient public services such as health and education. Protests expressed also the indignation for State corruption and human rights abuses, connected, as discussed above to police violence and evictions.⁶⁰

Right for the purpose of reporting on the violation of human rights the Popular Committee for the World Cup and Olympics was founded with the aim of producing detailed documentation on the abuses related to the mega-events. Activists demanding the respect of human rights

⁵⁸ Geísa Mattos, “Flagrantes de Racismo: Imagens da Violência Policial e as Conexões entre o Ativismo no Brasil e nos Estados Unidos.” *Revista de Ciências Sociais* 48, no. 2 (2017): 187-217. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=6408168>.

⁵⁹ Gustavo Cardoso and Branco Di Fátima, “Movimento em rede e protestos no Brasil: Qual gigante acordou?,” *Dossiê Mídia, Intelectuais e Política* 16, no. 2 (2013): 143-176.

⁶⁰ David Nemer, “Online Favela: The Use of Social Media by the Marginalized in Brazil.” *Information Technology for Development* 22, no.3 (2015): 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02681102.2015.1011598>.

were often collaborating with international human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.⁶¹

After police brutal interventions on June 13, Twitter interactions exploded and the social network platform and, along with Facebook, became the main instrument to organize the protestors that took the streets of São Paulo on June 17 who gathered to show solidarity to those who had been caught and brutally beaten by the Military Police two days Earlier.

That day, nearly 200 thousand people participated to the event thank to social media.⁶²

The contribution of social media was evident from the banners, which used slogan inspired by Facebook posts and comments. One of the most recurrent, for instance was “it’s not just for 20 cents”, which was actually the name of one of the most popular Facebook groups that organized the protest.⁶³ The data collected by the Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistics (IBOPE) confirmed that the participation through social media was crucial: 62% of people who took part in rallies did so thanks to Facebook events.⁶⁴

Overall, it is possible to notice that the relationship between the young and the Internet created a new position of power and control creating the possibility to participate in organizations with no central coordination.⁶⁵ In this context, the social media act as platforms of political construction where dissenting voices gain attention as they are not mediated by the traditional means of communication; they act as spaces where it is showed what usually is not seen. In Leonardo Sakamoto’s words:

These communication technologies are not just tools for describing, but for constructing reality. When one acts through one of these networks, one is not simply reporting, but also inventing, articulating, changing. This, little by little, also changes the way of doing politics and the forms of social participation.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Talbot and Carter, “Human rights abuses at the Rio 2016 Olympics.”

⁶² Leonardo Sakamoto, “Em São Paulo, o Facebook e o Twitter foram às ruas” in David Harvey et al., *Cidades rebeldes: Passe livre e as manifestações que tomaram as ruas do Brasil*. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2015. Kindle edition.

⁶³ Nemer, “Online Favela: The Use of Social Media”; Sakamoto, “Em São Paulo, o Facebook e o Twitter foram às ruas.”

⁶⁴ Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistics - IBOPE, “89% dos manifestantes não se sentem representados por partidos”, <https://www.ibopeinteligencia.com/noticias-e-pesquisas/89-dos-manifestantes-nao-se-sentem-representados-por-partidos/>

⁶⁵ Dan Mercea, “Probing the implications of Facebook use for the organizational form of social movement organizations,” *Information, Communication & Society* 16, no. 8 (2013): 1306-1327, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2013.770050>.

⁶⁶ Sakamoto, “Em São Paulo, o Facebook e o Twitter foram às ruas,” 113.

Although the social media made possible the engagement of a great number of demonstrators, not all the segments of the society had been involved in the protests. In fact, most of the protesters were university students and middle-class people, therefore, were educated people with access to digitization. Devid Nemer's research on three favelas in the city of Vitória —the favelas of Gurigica, Itararé and São Benedito—highlight this aspect, showing that, especially in the initial phase, favela residents did not take part in the rallies of June 2013.⁶⁷

One reason could be the limited access of lower classes to technology and the Internet. A study conducted by Marcelo Cortes Neri 2012, revealed that only 25% of lower-class Brazilians, as in the case of favelas inhabitants, were connected to the Internet and the majority of them resorted to technology centers (CTCs) such as Telecenters. Moreover, the Brazilian Internet Steering Committee reported that CTCs provided Internet access to 63% of the marginalized population.⁶⁸

Another reason could be the fear of police violent acts. As stated by an interviewee:

“I heard about the protests in Rio and São Paulo on TV, but heard nothing about the one that happened here . . . Even if I had, why would I go there? To get beat up by the cops? We already get enough of that here in the community.”⁶⁹

Nevertheless, due to the success of the protest of June 17, the demonstrations started to gain the attention and coverage from less exclusive channels of communication, such as local TVs and newspapers, allowing the news of a new protest on June 20 to reach favela dwellers. They became interested in the event and organized their own group of Facebook and prepared a list of demands. As reported by one of the administrators of group:

We cant' be afraid go getting beat up... That's already happening. If we don't do anything then things won't change and my people from the favela will still have no access to education and health care...I don't want this life...We already have 107 people in the Facebook group and they all said they are going to the next protest.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Nemer, “Online Favela: The Use of Social Media”

⁶⁸ Marcelo Cortes Neri, *Mapa da Inclusão Digital*, (Rio de Janeiro: FGV, CPS, 2012). https://www.cps.fgv.br/cps/bd/mid2012/MID_FT_FGV_CPS_Neri_TextoPrincipal_Fim_GRAFICA_fim.pdf

⁶⁹ Nemer, “Online Favela: The Use of Social Media,” 10.

⁷⁰ Idem.

3.6 Video recording: an accessible and effective manner to denounce police violence

Despite the fact that in poor areas the access to the online world might be more limited than in other urban areas, the use of technology and Internet platforms still represent a fundamental way for the inhabitants of the favelas to empower themselves and report instances of injustice. Especially over the last six years, the further diffusion of the use of mobile phones and social networks enhanced the possibility for the poor to denounce cases of police abuse.

An emblematic example is that of Eduardo Felipe Santos Victor, the unarmed 17-year-old kid killed by the police in the area of Providencia, Rio de Janeiro. After the young was killed, a resident recorded the scene, which showed one of the officers placing a gun in Eduardo's hand and firing in the air, probably to make it appear as they acted in self-defense. The video rapidly spread on social media and within twelve hours it reached the national and international press.⁷¹

Recording police actions has become more and more a way to expose instances of police brutality and, as stated by Robert Muggah, American expert in public safety living in Rio de Janeiro, the increasing chance that police abuses might be filmed by any citizens represents an important factor in the interaction between the communities and the police, especially because it can impact the way in which the police acts.⁷² Indeed, as reported both by WITNESS—international organization which supports the use of videos and technology to defend human rights—and Geísa Mattos, video footages can be the most important form to break the pattern of impunity and to hold police officers accountable for their actions as they provide undeniable evidence of what Mattos refers to as “*flagrantes de racismo*”, namely episodes in

⁷¹ Talbot and Carter, “Human rights abuses at the Rio 2016 Olympics”; James Hider, “Brazil police ‘plant gun on boy they shot’”, *The New York Times*, October 02, 2015, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/brazil-police-plant-gun-on-boy-they-shot-c5r290nnt2z>; BBC News, “Brazil police accused of planting gun on shot teenager”, September 30, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-34405302>.

⁷² Jefferson Puff, “Como Grupo de Jovens Virou Referência Internacional na Denúncia de Abusos Policiais.” *BBC News Brasil*. October 30, 2015, https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/noticias/2015/10/151028_coletivo_papo_reto_alemao_jp

which police officers are caught in the act of using violence against black people.⁷³

Actually, videos can be the only way to achieve justice and truth, especially if we consider two factors.

First, there is only a 0.8% chance for a crime involving police to be investigated⁷⁴ as the Public Ministry (PM) tends to archive this type of occurrences. A research conducted on three hundred cases of deaths for police intervention, showed that the PM had archived 99% of these cases over three years.⁷⁵

Second, although being actual extrajudicial executions, most of the killings subsequent to police interventions are declared as “deaths by resistance” (referred to in Brazil as *autos de resistência*), that is deaths caused by police officers who allegedly acted either in self-defense or to overcome the resistance of crime suspects.^{76 77}

What can be understood, therefore, is that the presence of a video can change the narrative that depicts the use of lethal force against black people as lawful behaviors undertaken in response to a threat, while in most of the cases the victims are unarmed. This is actually what happened in the above-mentioned case of Eduardo Victor. Thank to the video recorded by the resident, five agents had been arrested for his death as their version of acting after an attack and in self-defense did not match the images shown in the footage. On the contrary, the video shows the complete indifference from the part of the agents, who stood

⁷³ Geísa Mattos, “Flagrantes de Racismo: Imagens da Violência Policial e as Conexões entre o Ativismo no Brasil e nos Estados Unidos.” *Revista de Ciências Sociais* 48, no. 2 (2017): 187-217, <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=6408168>; Priscila Néri, “Dispatch from Brazil: If killed by police, guilty by default...unless there’s video?” *WITNESS* (blog), last accessed April 20, 2021, <https://blog.witness.org/2015/09/dispatch-from-brazil-if-killed-by-police-guilty-by-default-unless-theres-video/>.

⁷⁴ Néri, “Dispatch from Brazil: If killed by police, guilty by default.”

⁷⁵ Fernanda Mena, “Um modelo violento e ineficaz de polícia” in Bernardo Kucinski et al., *Bala Perdida: a violência policial no Brasil e desafios para sua superação*, (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2015), 331, Kindle edition.

⁷⁶ Michel Misse, “‘Autos de resistência’: uma análise dos homicídios cometidos pro policiais na cidade do Rio de Janeiro (2001-2011),” Núcleo de Estudos da Cidadania, Conflito e Violência Urbana, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 2011, 4 ; Luiz Eduardo Soares, *Desmilitarizar: Segurança Pública e direitos humanos*, (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2019), 42-42. Kindle edition

⁷⁷ According to Article 23 of the Brazilian Penal Code there is no crime when the agent acts: I. in state of necessity; II. in self-defense; III. in strict compliance with legal duty or in the regular exercise of law.

next to the kid's body without a hint of care or respect.⁷⁸

Similarly, in February 2015 sergeant Ricardo Vagner Gomes was sentenced to twenty-seven years and six months of prison for the homicide of the fifteen-year-old Alan de Sousa in the favela of Palmerinha, in the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro. Alan and two more friends were talking and kidding on their bikes when a group of military policemen approached and shot in their direction. Alan was filming their friends with his cell phone when he was shot to death by the police; the phone kept recording the scene while he was falling on the ground. The case became known in the press as “the kid who recorded his own death”.⁷⁹ One of his friend, the nineteen-year-old Chauan Jambre Cesário, was also hit in the chest by a gunshot. The police officers declared they acted in self-defense and presented two firearms that, according to them, belonged to Alan and Chauan, who was detained for resistance and arm possession. Thank to the video footage, which went viral on the Internet, Chauan was released and the attempt of the Military Police to cover for action was unmasked.⁸⁰

Mauro Donato, journalist and member of the independent media website *Diário do Centro do Mundo* (Diary of the Center of the World), commented the episode as follows:

If the video did not exist, most likely the case would have turned into statistics and the average, prejudiced public opinion would have kept the boys under the doubt. Blacks in the street, at night in the favela? Surely they weren't doing no good, right? Actually, they were. They were completely innocents boys doing what boys do: having fun.⁸¹

3.7 Nós por Nós: how an application made police violence denunciations safer

Although capturing scenes of police brutality and uploading them online have become the most common and effective ways to incriminate guilty policemen and to expose institutional violence against black people, the process of recording and documenting is not

⁷⁸ James Hider, “Brazil police ‘plant gun on boy they shot’”; BBC News, “Brazil police accused of planting gun on shot teenager; BBC News, “Eduardo Victor Killing: Police held for ‘planting gun,’” October 3, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-latin-america-34432583>

⁷⁹ Mattos, “Flagrantes de Racismo”, 205-206; Extra Globo, “Sargento é condenado a 27 anos de prisão por assassinato de jovem que filmou a própria morte,” December 1, 2017, <https://extra.globo.com/casos-de-policia/sargento-condenado-27-anos-de-prisao-por-assassinato-de-jovem-que-filmou-propria-morte-22138292.html>

⁸⁰ Mattos, “Flagrantes de Racismo”, 205-206; Extra Globo, “Sargento é condenado a 27 anos de prisão”

⁸¹ Portal Geledés, “O menino que filmou sua própria morte e desmontou uma farsa da PM do Rio”, February 27, 2015, <https://www.geledes.org.br/o-menino-que-filmou-sua-propria-morte-e-desmontou-uma-farsa-da-pm-do-rio/>.

free of obstacles. These obstacles are represented by some of the policemen themselves, who threaten and even retaliate against those who either report or record their actions.

The woman who recorded the homicide of Eduardo Victor, for instance, has been reportedly threatened by the Military Police.⁸²

More recently, a man beaten and tortured by police officers in Jacaná (São Paulo) on June 14, 2020 revealed that when he arrived at the police station, after the release of a video filming the scene resulted in the arrest of eight police officers, he was threatened by some agents. As reported by the newspaper *El País* the man affirmed “They [the police officers] made several threats. I work with dignity, I never had to rob anyone, but now I am afraid to leave my house.”⁸³

The threats are advanced not only to individual citizens but also to favela collectives such as *Coletivo Papo Reto* (Straight-talk Collective). Lana de Souza, one of the members of *Papo Reto*, stated that they received threats from the police both directly and in their Facebook page; their filmmaker has already been brought to the police station, also, police tried to check their phones but Lana says “We know our rights”.⁸⁴

To face this security-related issue, in March 2016 the *Fórum de Juventudes do Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro Youth Forum) launched *Nós por Nós* (Us for Us), an application for smartphones designed specifically for favela residents which allows them to denounce safely—without the possibility of tracing back the users—cases of police violence and rights abuse by producing video, photo and text contents directly in the app. The app also provides the users with informations about their rights and about how to access a support network.⁸⁵

Nós por Nós was created with the help of Amnesty International, the Brazilian Institute of Social and Economic Analysis (IBASE), *Projeto Moleque* (Project Kid), the Network of

⁸² Jody van Mastrigt and Stephanie Reist, “Youth Forum Launches ‘Nós por Nós’ Application to Denounce Police Violence, *RioOnWatch*, March 24, 2016, <https://www.rioonwatch.org/?p=27670>

⁸³ Breiller Pires, “Entre a vida e a morte sob tortura, violência policial se estende por todo o Brasil, blindada pela impunidade”, *El País*, June 30, 2020. <https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2020-06-30/entre-a-vida-e-a-morte-sob-tortura-violencia-policial-se-estende-por-todo-o-brasil-blindada-pela-impunidade.html>

⁸⁴ Puff, “Como Grupo de Jovens Virou Referência Internacional.”

⁸⁵ Mastrigt and Reist, “Youth Forum Launches ‘Nós por Nós’ Application”; Felipe Payão, “Nós por nós: um aplicativo que entra no combate à violência”, *Tecmundo*, February 15, 2020, <https://www.tecmundo.com.br/apps/98580-nos-aplicativo-entra-combate-violencia.htm>; Nós por nós, Facebook page, last accessed March 20, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/appfjrj/?ref=page_internal

Communities Against Violence, and the support of WITNESS organization. WITNESS, which has been training activists to record human rights violations since the 1990s, suggested that users should record directly via the app not only for their security, but also to ensure the video is saved in the cloud in the eventuality the police seizes or destroys the phone.⁸⁶

3.8 Favela media activism

The participation of favela dwellers in acts of activism and civic participation through the use of technological devices, apps, Internet, and social media can be ascribed in a wider phenomenon that is defined *mediativismo de favela* (favela media activism), a form of media activism peculiar of the favelas of Rio de Janeiro that has been object of research and study by Leonandro Custódio. The author, who is also the one who coined this expression, defines favela media activism as a form of favela inhabitants engagement in acts of citizenships aimed at creating consciousness about social inequality and human rights violations, and mobilizing against racism and discrimination. In the author's favela media activism

[...] refers to individual and collective actions in, through and about media. These actions represent the enactment of citizenship in favelas. As part of their everyday struggles for human rights, favela residents with media and journalism to raise awareness about the consequences of social inequality, to mobilize actions against discrimination and injustices, and to generate public debates for changes in politics and society.⁸⁷

Favela media activism combines traditional media (radio and newspapers) and new media (Internet, social media, smartphones and applications) to challenge the mainstream media negative representations, contest politics and denounce racial disparity while encouraging the participation and the action of the dwellers. The author identifies three types of favela media activism: community media, media collectives, and networks of mutual support and joint actions.⁸⁸

Community media are community-led traditional forms of media channels. An example is *O Cidadão*, a journal that was born initially as a project of the NGO Center of Studies and Solidary Actions of Maré (CEASM) in the Complexo da Maré, a favela complex which

⁸⁶ Mastrigt and Reist, "Youth Forum Launches 'Nós por Nós' Application"; Payão, "Nós por nós.

⁸⁷ Leonardo Custódio, "Favela Media Activism. Political trajectories of low-income Brazilian youth", (MA diss., University of Tampere, 2016), 9.

⁸⁸ Leandro Custódio, "Types of favela media activism", LSE (blog), April 20, 2020, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/favelasatlse/2014/09/18/types-of-favela-media-activism/>.

counts seventeen favelas located in the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro.⁸⁹ *O Cidadão* represents a point of reference on a community, national and international level with almost twenty-two years of existence and sixty-eight printed editions—from 1999 to 2016.⁹⁰ Today the publications are online, available on the website jornalcidadeao.net. Being a community newspaper, it involves the collaboration of reporters of Maré, although it attracts university students and researchers from the outside. *O Cidadão* characterizes for covering topics that defends its favelas' dwellers. In particular, since 2006, there has been a shift of focus towards political engagement and pedagogical commitment in the defense of human rights; up to that moment, the newspaper dealt more with themes of local and cultural identity.⁹¹ Observing the initial page of the website, it is possible to notice that the article are focused on activism, fight against racism and police violence, and events that relate the community.

Media collectives, the second form of favela media activism, can be defined as a group of activists that interact with the favela dwellers and use digital and online means on the base of common sociopolitical interests.⁹² An example is *Coletivo Papo Reto* (Straight Talk Collective), which was founded at the end of 2013 by eight activists sharing the same ideological and sociopolitical background. The members all came from the field of activism, audiovisual or human rights; they combined their expertise to act in a way that could be help the community. The name derives from Rio slang “mandar um papo reto”, which means speaking straightforwardly, going directly to the point.⁹³

They use cell phones, cameras, smartphone applications (such as whatsapp) and Internet platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, blogs) to counter and report police violence and other abuses occurring the *Complexo do Alemão*, a complex of sixteen favelas in the northern area of Rio de Janeiro.⁹⁴ Papo Reto's activity relies on the involvement of the

⁸⁹ Custódio, “Favela Media Activism”; Custódio, “Types of favela media activism.”

⁹⁰ O Cidadão, last accessed March 23, 2021, <https://jornalcidadeao.net/>.

⁹¹ Renata Souza, “O Cidadão entre a comunicação comunitária e os direitos humanos”, 9º Encontro Nacional de História da Mídia, (Ouro Preto, 2013), <http://www.ufrgs.br/alcar/encontros-nacionais-1/9o-encontro-2013/artigos/gt-historia-da-midia-alternativa/o-cidadeao-entre-a-comunicacao-comunitaria-e-os-direitos-humanos>

⁹² Custódio, “Favela Media Activism”; Custódio, “Types of favela media activism”.

⁹³ Puff, “Como Grupo de Jovens Virou Referência Internacional”; Custódio, “Favela Media Activism.”

⁹⁴ WITNESS, “Coletivo Papo Reto: combating police violence in Brazil”, September 2017, <https://www.witness.org/coletivo-papo-reto-combating-police-violence-in-brazil/>; Puff, “Como Grupo de Jovens Virou Referência Internacional”; Custódio, “Favela Media Activism.”

community—residents send them videos they recorded and pictures they took with their cell phones—and is inserted in the favelas’ dynamics through a scheme of exchange of messages and alerts via WhatsApp which helps to map out what is happening in the community, where they can film and which areas are more dangerous—and, therefore, should be avoided.⁹⁵

The first case where the intervention of the collective had been extremely decisive was that of Eduardo de Jesus, the 10-year-old boy who killed in 2015 by a policeman who mistook his phone for a gun. Papo Reto arrived on the scene right after the murder and started filming and taking photographs so that the police could not alter the crime scene, a tactic they use commonly to cover up extrajudicial killings. Their involvement allowed to start a forensic analysis of the scene, which Raul Santiago—member of the collective—said to be the first forensic analysis related to a killing in the favela he had ever seen in 28 years.⁹⁶

The Collective attracted the interest of the international media, young people from other Rio communities and even the UN, especially for their commitment in exposing police abuses and for reporting tense situations in the favela such as protests and police operations.⁹⁷ In 2014, they started their partnership with WITNESS, with WITNESS’ Latin America team offering protection and security services. This occurred after discovering that the communities on the front line of police brutality in Brazil were taking advantage of the potential of social media and video recording to speak out despite the personal risk.⁹⁸ Thank to the collaboration with WITNESS’ representatives in Brazil Piscila Neri and Victor Ribeiro, Papo Reto managed to bring together a team of partners which includes advocates, public defenders and lawyers with the objective to open a critical discussion on the use of visual material to provide juridical evidence against the abuses, while guaranteeing the safety and the minimization of danger to those involved.⁹⁹

The last type of favela media activism consists in activists from different favelas forming networks of mutual support and joint action; favela media activists go to other cities to engage in debates, cultural interventions and protests. The advertising of political events

⁹⁵ Puff, “Como Grupo de Jovens Virou Referência Internacional”.

⁹⁶ WITNESS, “Coletivo Papo Reto.”

⁹⁷ Puff, “Como Grupo de Jovens Virou Referência Internacional.”

⁹⁸ WITNESS, “Coletivo Papo Reto.”

⁹⁹ Puff, “Como Grupo de Jovens Virou Referência Internacional”; WITNESS, “Coletivo Papo Reto.”

online, the shares and likes of posts on social media contribute to build ties of cooperation. Generally, interactions among different favelas cover specific issues.¹⁰⁰

What can be understood, is that instances of favela media activism allow the dwellers of the favelas to use communication channels to address their needs and give voice to their demands. Although research in technology for the purpose of development is generally approached under a top-down and ethnocentric approach, favela media activism proved that it can be a bottom-top initiative that starts directly from the favela inhabitants leading to the empowerment of marginalized people on the basis of their own agency and choice.¹⁰¹

Overall, the chapter showed the relevance of social media and technology both in the realm of reporting police violence and in the encouragement of collective mobilization. In this last case, we saw how social media made possible to turn the Black Lives Matter movement protests into a global phenomenon. In Brazil, the influence of Black Lives Matter is important because it gave visibility to the issue of police violence against blacks in this country—issue that is often ignored by the media or is narrated always according to the viewpoint of the institutions and not of the victims. Nevertheless, telling the truth is still possible thank to phone video recordings, which are fundamental in showing how cases of abuse of force really occurred. Finally, the contribution of the Black Lives Matter was crucial not only in the realm of protests, but also for creating a connection between the American and the Brazilian reality. The meetings of 2016 in Rio made Brazilian and American activists realize that the fight against racism and police violence is global a not confined to the single countries. The visibility that the Black Lives Matter acquired can be used to give voice to those realities were the issue is neglected.

¹⁰⁰ Custódio, “Types of favela media activism”

¹⁰¹ Nemer, “Online Favela: The Use of Social Media”

Conclusions

This thesis proved the correlation between police violence against black people in Brazil and racism. To arrive to this conclusion it was necessary to demonstrate, as a first thing, the existence of racism in Brazil.

Chapter 1 showed that, despite the ideology of racial democracy, which spread the image of Brazil as a racial paradise where people of all races were treated equally, discrimination on the basis of race and color did exist and persists in present times. It was possible to arrive to this conclusion through the analysis of historical events and of the rates of social and economic inequality.

Racial discrimination was evident already in the Imperial period when the slavery system was based on a color hierarchy. Black people, who were always associated to the figure of slave, were denied all rights, including political participation.

Even after the emancipation, although they acquired legally full citizenship, they were considered as inferior and left at the margins of the society. This was consequence of the diffusion of the racial theories, which aimed at proving scientifically the inferiority of the black race, and the theory of whitening, which aimed at the progressive elimination of the black people and their culture via miscegenation and the immigration of white workers from Europe.

The other major events that proved the fallacy of racial democracy were: the refusal of the Brazilian government to accept in 1921 the project of a group of African-Americans to create a colony in the State of Mato Grosso; and the project UNESCO, which opened over the 1950's, a series of research on racial relations that proved the existence of racial prejudice and discrimination in Brazil.

The existence of racism is shown also by recent studies on socioeconomic inequality such as the PERLA studies (2008), which demonstrated that blacks and mulattos in Brazil are discriminated on the axis of race and color. Disadvantages are suffered in the realm of education, job occupations and access to sanitation.

Chapter 2 proved that the disproportionate rate of killings of blacks from the hand of State agents is a direct consequence of racism. This was possible by using the notions of structural racism, biopower and necropolitics. This approach showed that institutions reproduce race practices because the society itself is racist, fact that the derives from the

formation of the modern State, which imposed its sovereignty through the use of force against a specific group of the population. A racist State always creates an imaginary enemy to legitimate its violent actions. Today, the enemy is the black dweller of the favela, who is always depicted by the media and by the institutions as the only responsible for criminality. The violent nature of the State against black people was shown through the militarization of the favela. The Pacifying Police Unites, instead of bringing peace and reduce criminality as they were supposed to, provoked an increase in the rate of deaths caused by police interventions as well as an enhancement of drugs-related crimes.

The criminalization of poverty and blackness emerged as a discourse that the Brazilian State created in order to generate a sense of fear in the public, so that the militarization of the favelas and the police abuse of force against black people is tolerated if not incentivized. Another conclusion that was drawn is the necessity of reforming the police apparatus and reforming the laws on drugs since they appear racially biased. Police officers need a better training which should include classes on the importance of respecting human rights independently from race.

Chapter 3 presented the connections between the Black Lives Matter movement and activism in Brazil. The collaboration with the American social movement resulted fundamental in increasing the attention given to the matter of police violence in Brazil, both nationally and internationally. In particular, the visit of Black Lives Matter to Rio in 2016 highlighted the importance of civic engagement of the families of police violence victims through acts of activism; and the role that the mainstream media play in the creation of a narrative that does not correspond to the actual facts.

The chapter showed also that technology, in particular social media and the use of phones, are determinant in the fight against police violence as they represent the most accessible and easiest way to report episodes of police abuse of force. In addition, video footages proved to be extremely effective in this realm as they provide for undeniable evidence of police misconduct, which can include both the excessive use of force or the tampering of the crime scene. Video recordings, therefore, appeared to be also a solution to impunity.

The accessibility of technology is relevant also because it can be used also by the poorest strata of the society. Dwellers of the favelas, for instance, can participate actively in the fight against police violence and social injustice through forms of “favela media activism.”

Finally, Chapter 3 showed how collective action can be encouraged through the use of social media (Twitter and Facebook) which allow to create connections on a global scale. This was the case of the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020, which sparked all over the world. In Brazil, they took the name of *Vidas Negras Importam*.

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