

Making black lives don't matter via organizational strategies to avoid the racial debate: The military police in Brazil

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Abstract

The #BlackLivesMatter movement has raised awareness of the killing of black people by law enforcement agents in the United States specifically and racism in general in different parts of the world. Academics in Management and Organizations have discussed various dimensions of racial inequalities and differences in organizations. However, little discussion has taken place regarding the actual practices deployed by organizations to avoid the racial debate. Based on our experience of doing research into the police in Latin America and engaging in the public debate to stop police killing and the killing of police officers, we discuss here the strategies deployed by the military police forces in Brazil to make black lives don't matter by avoiding discussing the police's role in Brazilian racism. We argue that these strategies make the police to fail to recognize their role in the killing of black people in the country. Despite the Brazilian military police being an extreme case, we suggest organizations maintain more open or more overt strategies that make black lives don't matter and call academics to research and denounce these strategies.

KEYWORDS

accountability, #BlackLivesMatter, inequality, police, racism

1 | INTRODUCTION

"Todo Camburão tem um Pouco de Navio Negroiro"

(Every Police Van has something of a slave ship)

–O Rappa

In early December 2020, Emily Victoria Moreira dos Santos, 4 years old, and Rebeca Beatriz Rodrigues Santos, 7 years old, were shot dead while playing in front of their houses in Duque de Caxias, near Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. The two little black girls were killed by a stray bullet. The family accused the Rio de Janeiro Military Police of killing them; however, the police denied the accusation (Phillips, 2020). In 2020 alone, 22 children were hit by stray bullets in Rio de Janeiro, eight of whom were killed. Most of these children were black. The stray bullets usually result from confrontations between drug dealers and police officers in the poor areas of Rio de Janeiro. Despite this horrific record, the Rio de Janeiro Police systematically deny accusations of targeting poor areas and black people in their actions.

#BlackLivesMatter is a global organization in the US, UK, and Canada, whose mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence perpetrated on Black communities by the state and vigilantes (Matter, 2018). The organization was founded in 2013 in response to the acquittal of the neighborhood self-appointed watchman who shot dead Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old teenager, due to the color of his skin (Bell et al., 2020). #BlackLivesMatter, three simple words, signify a multifarious and powerful set of truths about the continuing fight of the Black community against the structural interests that affect them (Mir & Zanoni, 2020). The #BlacksLiveMatter movement has not only raised awareness to the killing of black people by law enforcement agents in the United States (Menifield, 2017), it is also influencing changes in police organizations (Dunham & Petersen, 2017).

Recently, the #BlackLivesMatter movement gained momentum after the brutal killing of George Floyd by police officers in the United States early in 2020, generating global demonstrations against racist and discriminatory practices by police forces around the world. High-profile sports events such as the NBA finals were interrupted and public figures such as Lewis Hamilton demonstrated against the killing of black people by the police and in favor of a less unequal world. Unfortunately, George Floyd is not an exception in US history. Discriminatory practices and violence have a long history in the United States, and Black Americans have long protested against systemic inequity, police brutality, and marginalization in the country (Nkomo, 2020).

While the situation is appalling in the United States where 1004 people were killed by the police forces in 2019 alone, this is not exclusively a US concern as we can see from the brutal killings of Emily and Rebeca. However, Anglo-Saxon journals in the field of management and organizations (MOS) tend not to focus on non-English speaking knowledge and contexts (Alcadipani et al., 2012; Boussebaa & Tienari, 2019). Moreover, if we are to focus on how #blacklivesmatter can inspire debates toward changing racial and gender inequalities in diverse fields, such as MOS academia and institutions (Bell et al., 2020) as well as antiracist activism in the world of sports (Agyemang et al., 2020), it is still necessary to discuss persistent organizational practices that make black lives don't matter nowadays. On that topic, researchers have been discussing racial profiling by the police and the criminal justice (Bridges & Steen, 1998; Kim & Kiesel, 2018), the role of police violence in structural racism (Boyd, 2018) and racist practices within police organizations (Fassin, 2013; Rubinstein, 1973). Nevertheless, more discussions are necessary regarding the means through which the police try to avoid discussing racial issues, while maintaining practices that make black lives not matter.

We share the aim of this journal in this special issue of naming and dismantling the everyday and normalized ways in which racism takes shape through organizations and work (Ozkazanc-Pan & Pullen, 2020). Thus, in this piece, we aim to discuss strategies deployed by police forces in Brazil to make black lives don't matter by avoiding discussing the role of the police in Brazilian racism. Brazil has one of the highest rates of violence against black people in the world. Data from the Brazilian Forum on Public Safety (Bueno, 2020) indicate that Black Brazilians are 56.7% of the Brazilian

population, but 74.4% of the victims of lethal violence, and 66.7% of the prison population. From 2008 to 2018, the homicide rates against blacks increased by 11.5% while the number of homicides against whites decreased by 12.4%. In 2019, 65.1% of the police officers killed in the line of duty and 79.1% of the people killed by the police in the country were black. The police killed 6375 people in Brazil in 2019 (Bueno & Lima, 2020), meaning the number of people killed by the police in Brazil is more than six times higher than it is in the U.S. Most of these people are black (Ramos & Nunes, 2020). Police violence in Brazil is colored and the “bullets don't miss the black target” of killing black people. As the #blacklivesmatter movement points out, police organizations are an important factor in sustaining violence against black people, and the situation of the police in Brazil is an extreme case (Eisenhardt, 1989).

All the authors of this piece have been involved not only in police research in Brazil but also in engaging with police and the general public with the aim of reducing police brutality and reducing the number of police officer victims of violence. Thus, we base our discussion for this piece on our own experience (van Maanen, 1988) without following a clear technical methodological construct. This explains the intuitive and provocative nature of this opinion piece and the different style of writing. In order to do this (like Ahonen et al., 2020; Silva, 2020), we follow recent calls in our field to resist “scientific” norms—that are restrictive, inhibit the development of knowledge, excising much of what is human from our learning, teaching and researching—by “writing differently” (Gilmore et al., 2019, p. 3). One of the authors is a black Brazilian who personally experiences racial discrimination, and the other white Brazilian authors are aware of their privilege (Bento & Carone, 2002) of living in a racist and unequal country and world.

2 | THE CREATION OF THE POLICE IN BRAZIL: THE MYTH OF BRAZILIAN “RACIAL DEMOCRACY” AND THE VIOLENT REPRESSION OF THE BLACK POPULATION

On November 19, 2020, João Alberto de Freitas, a Brazilian black man, was beaten to death by Carrefour grocery store security guards. It was the day before the Brazilian Black Consciousness day. The act was video recorded by a passerby and broadcasted via most Brazilian media outlets generating public outrage and street protests. One of the killers of João Alberto de Freitas was a military policeman who was doing a side hustle at the grocery store as a security guard. Hours after João Alberto de Freitas was murdered, the Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro claimed “racial tensions are alien to our history,” during his first address at the recent G20 2020 summit virtually hosted in Saudi Arabia (Chade, 2020). At the same time, when asked about the killing of Joao Alberto de Freitas at a press conference, the Brazilian vice-president General Mourão denied the existence of racism in Brazil (AlKhaleej, 2020). Part of the Brazilian national identity has been built on the idea that country native Indians, European colonizers, and enslaved Africans have always lived-in harmony, and Brazil is a “racial democracy” (Freyre, 1946). This mythical view of race is shared by many Brazilians who claim that the country is a nonprejudiced society (Guimarães, 2004).

Brazil's success as a nation depended on its ability to become white (Guimarães, 2004). In order for that to happen, black people had to be eliminated over time, not merely through death, but also through racial mixing: whitewashing as a state policy stimulated massive European, and Japanese immigrations for the sole purpose of moving every new generation of Brazilian people closer to whiteness and further from blackness (Guimarães, 2004). As a result, Brazil became a mostly mixed nation, where racial identity became fluid and negotiable. This is easily noticeable in Brazilian everyday life crystalized in some popular sayings such as “to have one foot in the kitchen,” an expression alluding to slavery, denoting one has black ancestry while “looking mostly white.” Negotiating one's race has been a long-standing social ascension/recognition strategy with effects that outlasted the early 19th century. The 1980's census made racial self-declaration into an open question, getting over 100 different answers for the respondents' races/colors. As a result, the criterion for racial identification became self-declaration. This is an important and particular aspect of how race operates in Brazil as opposed to how it operates in the US, where the one-drop rule defined racism for so long (Americo, 2015; Jordan, 2014).

Despite the “racial democracy myth,” for 350 years the Brazilian economy has been based on enslaved traffic and some speculate that 4 million enslaved Africans were brought to Brazil during from XVI to XIX centuries. Brazil

had a sluggish transition from this slave-based economy. First came a law forbidding the slave trade in 1850. Then, new legislation was introduced making all children born from enslaved' free persons from 1871 onward. The final abolition of slavery occurred in 1888 (Franklin, 2017; Schwarcz, 1993). With the slavery crisis in the Brazilian economy in the late XIX century, the country was in turmoil, that is, there was the fear of enslaved insurrections, the transition from slavery to free labor, the State's and elite's desire to control black and indigenous people, and the adhesion of intellectuals to the theories of scientific racism. Such theories played an important role in the perpetuation of social control of these populations (Augusto & Ortega, 2011). They produced scientific discourses of racialized social control that even defended the creation of two Brazilian penal codes: one for whites and another for blacks and it was assumed that racial differences led to behavioral and moral differences, assuming blacks were inferior and degenerate by nature and had to be civilized (Freitas, 2020).

Within this context, the "professionalization" of the police forces occurred in the country. According to Holloway (1997), the law that instituted the first militarized repressive force in Brazil dates back to 1831, with the mission of containing republican, abolitionist movements, and enslaved people on the run. In 1868, this police force was reorganized, in an attempt at professionalization, and named the Permanent Police Force. Years later, the Permanent Police Corps created the Military Police (Bretas & Rosemberg, 2013; Holloway, 1997).

Slavery left a profound wound in the country's history. The black population has been historically marginalized in Brazil (Silva, 2020), and black women in particular have been victims of all sorts of exploitation since colonial times and leading to a persistent reality in contemporary Brazil where many black women do domestic work (J. C. Teixeira, 2020). From the outset, the Brazilian police have dealt with runaway enslaved people (Bretas & Rosemberg, 2013) and control of the Brazilian black population through generalized and uncontrolled use of violent means, among other attributions (Holloway, 1997; de Lima & de Lima, 2018). Important and distinctive traces of how police treated the enslaved and black population in the XIX persist as the police act mainly via the logic of violent repression and control of the poor (Freitas, 2020). This police that emerged with the aim of controlling and repressing the black population by violent means (Holloway, 1997) has seen little change to its social mandate (Freitas, 2020).

Nowadays, Brazilian police forces are mainly organized at the state level. Each state has a military police force in charge of crime prevention, mainly via patrolling and riot control (the Military Police) and an investigative police force in charge of investigating crimes (the Investigative Police). The military police forces tend to be three times larger than the investigative ones, and most cases of police killings and physical abuse against the black population occur in these forces. Despite the historical and contemporary relations between polices in Brazil and violence against the black population in the country, police forces struggle to discuss their role in sustaining Brazilian racial disparities, exclusions, and violence. In the remaining of this paper, we will discuss these strategies.

3 | STRATEGIES TO DENY RACIAL DEBATES IN THE MILITARY POLICE

From our experiences researching and being involved in the public debate on public safety, crime, police, and violence in Brazil, Brazilian police forces, more often the states Military Polices, deploy racial denialist strategies to avoid the urgent debate on the role played by the police in sustaining and reinforcing Brazilian racial violence and inequalities.

3.1 | Considering racial debate taboo in the police

One of the authors of this paper questioned a police officer on his opinion on the possibility of said author speaking to the police commander in order to propose a serious discussion on race and racism within the police force. The officer straightforwardly replied "Don't waste your time. They don't want to discuss this." In addition, a former high-rank police officer who defended the need for the police to debate race said to one of the authors, "I tried to bring

discussions about race to the police several times. No one wants to listen. This is a taboo." On another occasion, the same officer said "they don't want to discuss this, simple as that!" Talking to another police officer about the topic, one of the authors of this piece was told "they are race blind here!" Race is a taboo topic within the police, keeping silent about race, blackness and whiteness the strategy when it comes to peer-to-peer, as well as internal conversations in the force.

Police officers have a shared notion of working in benefit of "good citizens," thought to be those who do not commit crimes. Even the São Paulo Military Police claims on its website that community policing is aimed at the "good citizen" ("Polícia Comunitária," 2020). In other words, in its official discursive practice, the largest military police force in Brazil creates two types of citizens, something that is not supported by the Brazilian Constitution, namely first- and second-class Brazilians. On the streets, the idea of the "good citizens" is translated into the white well-off people who the police must protect. The "good citizen" is also constructed in opposition to the "bad citizen" who in police practice is the black young male of the favelas. In such contexts, race is signaled through the subtext. Black young men are suspicious because of the way they dress, talk, walk, stare, or avoid eye contact in specific situations (Sinhoretto et al., 2014). Officers might go as far as recognizing poverty makes one more susceptible to police intervention, but the bias motivating action is never blackness. This strict denialism is also activated quite often when the listener is not another police officer. A military police's elite squad commander once stated police stops must differ according to the neighborhood. In his words:

"It's another reality. Different people walk around there. The way the police officer stops people must differ. If he [police officer] stops a person [in the slums] the same way he stops a person here in Jardins [a rich neighbourhood in São Paulo], he's going to have a hard time. He won't be respected..." (Adorno, 2017)

Even though Brazil never had a separate penal code for whites and another for blacks as proposed in the XIX century, contemporary police practices, discursive or not, make this separation among Brazilians. However, the need for evasion when racism is pointed out by outsiders in an ever-increasing frequency, is met with forms of denialism so diverse and multiple that they often contradict each other. In addition, police academies rarely discuss racial profiling or the role of the police in racism in Brazil to novice police officers. All diversity training occurs in the courses on "Human Rights" which involve mainly lectures on laws and legal doctrines. As strange as it may sound, human rights courses at most Brazilian police academies do not engage in any debate on race, racism or similar subjects.

3.2 | Denying racism in police action

Research indicates that black people have between 2.2 and 2.4 times more chance of being arrested than white people in Brazil (Oliveira, 2020). In 2013, it became a media story when the Military Police in São Paulo instructed officers to "stop and frisk" young black people. Upon the bad press the police got due to this instruction, the police press office released a statement claiming that this was a misunderstanding¹ in communication.

Not even police officers are free from racial profiling while at work. A black officer from the investigative police was "stopped and frisked" twice and even physically abused and racially insulted by white military police officers (Bueno & Lima, 2020) The Military Police reacted just by saying it had opened an investigation and nothing else was said about the case.

Despite all the evidence to the contrary, police officers always deny that their judgment or daily practice is guided by racial discrimination. They can even be aggressive when arguing this. For example, when one of the authors spoke to an officer in charge of an educational branch of the police arguing the police is a racist institution, he replied very aggressively "This is an insult! I am not racist! My institution is not racist! I am white, but my mother and my father were very poor. I grew up in a favela! Don't dare to call me racist!" It is a common strategy to resort

one's poor origin in order to deny any racist practice in the police. Also, a police officer said in a Twitter post debating racism and police, "Our institution is not racist! We don't look at the race of people we arrest. We arrest criminals regardless of the color of their skin."

After writing an article for the media about racism in the Brazilian police, one of the authors of this piece was approached by several police officers. They mainly said that there is no racism in the police. One of them argued, "I worked on patrol for more than 10 years. I never stopped anyone due to the color of their skin. I usually stopped people because they matched our usual criminal profile." When asked whether the criminal profile included being black, he answered "not always."

3.3 | Trying to discredit those who try to discuss police racism

A group of people on a tour interested in black culture discussing racism was followed and even video recorded by the military police for 3 h in São Paulo. The police said this was a "normal procedure" (Oliveira, 2020). However, cases in which the police force takes the same steps for any of the several tourist tours that take place in São Paulo, especially those that do not focus on racial issues, are unheard of. Moreover, weeks later when a newspaper columnist wrote an article in a Brazilian high circulation newspaper questioning the real motives of the police action in the São Paulo's black culture tour case, suggesting the police acted in a racist fashion, the military police posted an official note on social media arguing that the police action was "legal, democratic and protective" and questioned the integrity of the journalist. They used an image of the back of the neck of a black policeman arguing that those who claim the police is racist are prejudiced toward police officers. This note was shared by officers of all levels from the Military Police in social media generating very derogatory and intimidating comments against the journalist. In fact, an author of this article was told he had "prejudice against the military police officers" when questioning a high-profile military police officer about his institution's avoidance when it came to discussing the role the police plays in Brazilian racism. Thus, instead of trying to address and debate the police force's racialized tactics, the military police force inverts the discourse of prejudice to claim it is the victim of prejudice and not the perpetrator of racism.

This strategy used by the members of Military Police is not new. When the first research on racial profiling and the military police was released in São Paulo years ago, the Military Police made a press release protesting against the researcher who conducted the study, and she was challenged in a rather aggressive manner by officers of the Military Police in different situations. The challenging of researchers who conduct studies that tackle problematic aspects of the organization is common practice. For example, in a debate about police racism in the Brazilian Forum on Public Safety's Annual Meeting, a retired Military Police officer shouted at a female researcher who was debating the ways the police force targets black and poor people in the country. More than one author of this paper has had to face very aggressive verbal reactions when trying to discuss the problematic high incidence of police lethality with members of the military police force. These are just a few examples of the attempts by police forces to avoid seriously debating how the police's daily actions end up victimizing black Brazilians.

3.4 | Considering the racial debate on racial profiling police practices a "left wing" strategy to destroy the police institution

A few days after the annual statistics compendium of crime and violence statistics for Brazil (Pagnan, 2020) was released, a Capitan of the Military Police posted a video on social media questioning the "real motivation" of releasing the data on police brutality, arguing that race is a misguided focus for debates on police actions and activities in Brazil. Focusing on racialized practices perpetuated by the police, according to the Capitan, could mean a "waste of financial resources" that could "be better invested in other initiatives." He also argued there is a "political motivation" in discussing race. Very often when criticisms of military police racial profiling tactics and

actions are made, officers argue that the critique is “biased,” that the interlocutor is not “neutral” and that those who criticize have a vested political interest in attacking the institution.

During the last general elections in Brazil, the Military Police was used by the ultra-right wing elected President Bolsonaro in his campaign. Bolsonaro made speeches inside military police units in different parts of Brazil and police officers used their social media to share Bolsonaro's political propaganda and defend the President. Bolsonaro also took pictures with military police officers in uniform, on duty and often shared them on his social media account. When Bolsonaro made the G20 speech reinforcing the Brazilian “racial democracy” myth mentioned above, several high-ranked police officers used their social media profiles to agree with the president. Defending that Brazil is a racist country, and the police has racialized discriminating practices is perceived by many military police officers, not as a matter of defending basic human rights, but as a left-wing strategy against the right and the President. Even a Colonel from the Military Police in São Paulo argued in a newspaper article that questioning of the “allegedly” racist police actions are “ideological” and underlined by prejudice against the police (Duque, 2020).

One of the authors of this piece has been told several times by different police officers that the left wants to “destroy” the military police and uses the racial debate to this aim. Any discussion about race is perceived as left-wing propaganda by many police officers. Thus, when academics talk about race and police, they are perceived as being part of a left-wing plot to discredit the Military Police.

3.5 | Considering police organization to be meritocratic

In all police organizations in Brazil, entrance to leadership positions is different from entrance to operational positions. Operational police officers can only become police chiefs if they sit an external examination in “equal conditions” to all candidates from the public. The examination to join the police at all levels comprises a written examination, whose content varies according to the level of the position (operational or leadership), a physical examination and a psychological examination. Once inside the institution, police officers can be promoted, be it operational or leadership. Because theoretically, all candidates are thought to equal when applying, officers say there is a “non-prejudice or unbiased system, all people have the same opportunities to become a police officer, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religious faith, sex, anything,” as it is usually expressed by police officers.

In Brazil, the meritocratic ideology is prevalent (Mesquita & Bezerra, 2020). Police officers seem to share the “myths of meritocracy” (McNamee & Miller, 2004) regarding entry and access to higher hierarchical positions within the force. They tend to be very skeptical about affirmative action to either entry or promotion of police officers, creating a meritocratic trap (Markovits, 2019). According to several officers we spoke to in different situations, affirmative actions are “unfair,” carrying a risk that “not the best candidates” are selected by the police, while also being fair to “those who are competent.” Some police officers go as far as stating affirmative action for the black population in the police would be to “reverse racism against white people.” In practice, this means that black police officers are much more often likely to be doing operational work than occupying leadership positions. In the São Paulo Military Police, for example, 43% of operational police officers are black while only 12.7% of colonels, the highest post in the police hierarchy, are blacks. The result is that of every three police officers killed in the line of duty, two are black (Pagnan, 2020).

3.6 | Making racial police data opaque

As the Brazilian government is unable to produce reliable national statistics on crime and violence, the non-governmental organization (NGO) Brazilian Forum on Public Safety makes an annual compendium of all crime and violence statistics for Brazil. When justifying the decision not to publicize his state's data on violent deaths categorized by race, a police officer argued that in his state, Bahia, everyone is black, hence there was no need to

inform the victims' race. On the other hand, some police officers complain that it is too difficult to define a dead victim's race due to the impossibility of applying the self-declaration criterion.

The results are displayed in the map (Figure 1), representing the percentage of victims of intentional violent deaths whose race was registered during the years of 2017 and 2018.

Seven out of the 27 units of the Federation kept no racial data of the victims. Fifteen out of 27 units had racial information for less than 50% of the victims. The discursive strategy of opacity impacts the production of data on racial vulnerability to violence. Despite this, black people remain highly overrepresented among victims, especially of police lethality. The fact that Brazil's model of policing has arbitrary police stops as its core activity is often highlighted as one of the main reasons why our polices are so prejudicial against the black people (Pacheco, 2020).

3.7 | Secrecy about police procedures

From the organizational perspective, the fact that the polices' *Procedimentos Operacionais Padrão* (Standard Operational Procedures) have never been publicly presented, nor are available for public scrutiny, a position that the police justify by saying their secrecy is in the Public Safety's best interest, means that there is no public social control over police activities, nor a public pact on what it is supposed to be. As a result, the polices generate administrative registers of police stops, but deny society access to them. Such opacity is then used to deny police racism and selectivity, by stating there is no such thing as approaching mostly black, poor, young men from the favelas, even though this has been confirmed as a pattern by academic research for decades (Feltran, 2010; Fridman, 2008; Holston, 2008; Misse, 2008; A. Teixeira, 2012), becoming part of the Brazilian collective consciousness.

The public discourse of the police and State Public Safety Secretaries often aims to obscure the way through which racism directs state interventions on society, while making use of the produced opacity in order to depict racism as an individual, noninstitutional problem. Instead of recognizing the influence of structural racism, the organizational position resorts to conveniently approaching racism as an exclusively relational, interpersonal issue, reinforcing the Myth of Racial Democracy. The most common approach in this distortion is to oppose the idea of structural racism and to refer to the legal definitions of racism as presented in Brazil's Penal Code, as the crimes of racism and racial injury. The crime of racism, as in Law 7.716/1989 is defined by the offense against an indetermined collective of individuals, being understood as discrimination against the integrity of the population of a certain race, nationality, or religion. Since a decision made by the Brazilian Federal Supreme Court, in 2019, the Law of Racism includes discrimination against the LGBTQI+ population as well (Brasil, 1940) as a qualified form of the crime of injury. It consists of "offending someone by exploiting elements referring to race, color, ethnicity, religion, origin, age, or disability," as provided in the Penal Code (Brasil, 1940). If a person does not commit any of these crimes, then it was not racist. At the same time, public institutions cannot commit crimes, only the individuals representing them. Following this line of rhetoric, any accusation of racism directed toward the police becomes a criminal accusation, having to be directed at a specific individual. Since that is never the actual point being made by denunciations of institutional racism, there is no possibility of dialog, only delegitimization of denunciations.

3.8 | Lack of police accountability

Linked to the absence of publicity and public scrutiny of police procedures, there is also the issue of the lack of police accountability. This occurs at multiple levels. The Brazilian law enforcement system is underlined by "secrecy, opacity and lack of governance" (Lima, 2019, p. 63). There are more than 150 law-enforcement agencies in the country and no clear governance nor articulation among them. This means that in practice, police organizations are poorly regulated and have long leveraged discretion to act at their will or for the benefit of local elites (Lima, 2019). Since the XIX century, no clear system of police governance and accountability has been created in Brazil. Moreover, the public

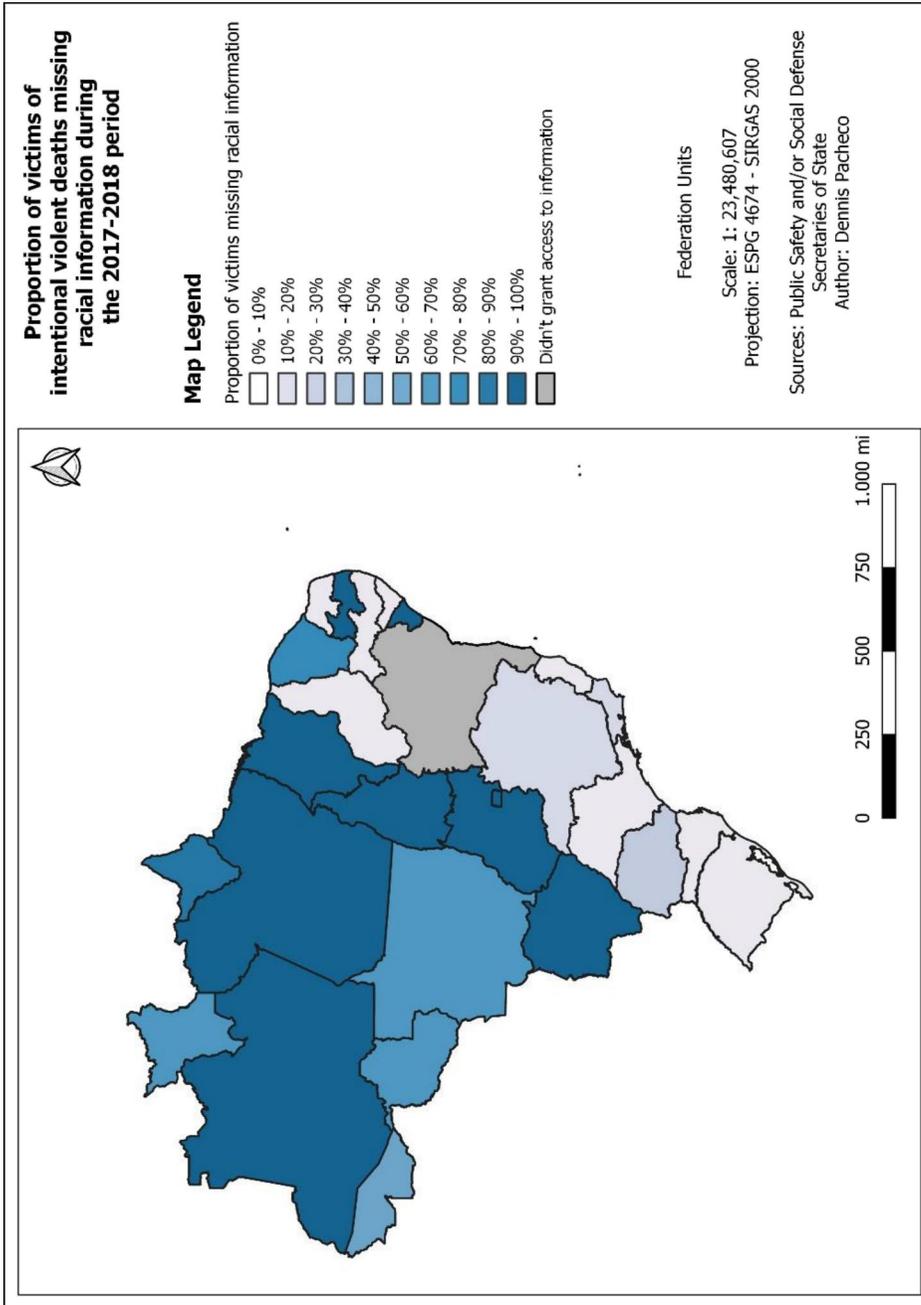


FIGURE 1 Proportion of victims of intentional violent deaths missing racial information during the 2017–2018 [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

attorney and judiciary system are very distant from the reality of police work and rarely ever challenge police actions, especially those perpetrated against the black and the poor. As a consequence, police officers are rarely ever found guilty of killing civilians, especially when killing black people. The race and location of the individuals killed by the police, as well as their criminal record usually signal to the investigator that “a bad citizen” deserved to be killed by the police (Bueno, 2018). There are cases of police officers who appear on footage killing a criminal, who are later declared not guilty by the jury after the victim's long criminal record is displayed in court.

3.9 | Pathways toward the future

On February 9, 2021, a São Paulo's Military Police (PMSP) lieutenant colonel suffered racist abuses during an online speech he was giving at Brazil's most prestigious university, Universidade de São Paulo. The event was being promoted in order to publicize the manufacturing of a new Human Rights Manual that had been produced by PMSP in an effort to discuss and change its participation in perpetuating institutional and structural racism. The case promoted an important inversion in the general attitude of police toward debating racism internally, producing a wave of fresh debate inside its walls, pointing toward a future where the way toward accountability might be built by listening to black officers, hearing their voices and empowering them to implement the necessary changes from inside out.

On February 27, 2021, São Paulo's Military Police received a call denouncing “suspect attitude.” Once the police officers arrived, they found what was reported as an “agglomeration of people playing music loud.” As a response to that, police officers entered a house, beat, and arrested Salvador da Rima, an emerging rapper whose lyrics highlight the crossroads of crime and police brutality in which Brazilian youth is caught up on in the favelas, applying a headlock¹ to “contain” him.² The action was broadcast live on Instagram by Salvador's wife, who accompanied him to the police department. On the way there, police officers who didn't seem to know they were still being recorded and broadcasted live on audio, can be heard telling each other to hurt themselves in order to produce a fake narrative that Salvador had aggressively resisted prison. Such excessive use of force justified by manufacturing fake evidence comes as no surprise, but PMSP's institutional position does. When questioned by the media, the organization's Public Relations department stated, “When instructing the event's partakers, the police officers, who are black, were cussed and harassed by a white man, who resisted prison, as shown by the images.” Despite being unable to recognize racism in its historically persecutory activities toward black people, the police seem eager to mobilize antiracist rhetoric against poor white men brutalized by its excessive use of force in poor neighborhoods. The case points toward a future in which police appropriate and mobilize antiracist discourse in order to justify its own racist practices,³ presenting a new challenge in the shape of this emerging tactic.

The differences between two recent cases point out two distinct pathways being built by Brazilian police organizations in terms of how they operate institutional discourses and practices regarding racism under pressure. Having an active and effective civil society, as well as internal and external control structures enforcing accountability on police action is essential in order to face such challenges.

4 | DENOUNCING ORGANIZATIONAL RACISM'S DENIALIST STRATEGIES: HOPE FOR CHANGE

Inspired by our long-term involvement with police and crime research in Brazil, engaging with both police and the general public, with the aim of reducing police brutality and having fewer victims of violence at the hands of police officers, we discuss organizational strategies to avoid the racial debate in this piece. In our discussion here, the police in Brazil have emerged from a history that features a persistent aftermath of violently controlling the black

population. The strategies deployed by police organizations to avoid debating police racism involve making the racial debate an internal taboo, denying racism in their daily practices, discrediting those who indicate police racism, considering the racial debate a strategy to destroy the police forces, presenting the police as meritocratic and in no need of affirmative action, making data about racism opaque, keeping their own policies and procedures secret, while disenfranchising its governance and accountability systems. Working together, these strategies interrelate with each other and help the police to avoid engaging in a serious and profound debate about its responsibility in sustaining the high levels of police killings of black people in Brazil. Thus, these strategies make black lives not matter for police organizations.

If, on one hand the case discussed here is rather extreme (Eisenhardt, 1989), on the other it opens the question of which strategies other organizations are using to continue making black lives not matter or to sustain inequalities and oppressions related to gender (Knights & Pullen, 2019; Pullen & Knights, 2007). If we consider, for example, that business schools are racist, we need to investigate which organizational strategies there are that sustain racism in business schools in order to denounce and overcome them (Dar et al., 2020).

That is precisely what the Brazilian Forum on Public Safety has been doing by creating data about racial violence in Brazil (e.g., Bueno, 2020). This along with other researchers' discussions on racism and policing (e.g., Sinhoretto, 2020; Sinhoretto et al., 2014) are inspiring discussions about racism in different media outlets inside and outside Brazil, promoting the engagement of public figures in the racial debate and aiding the public to access data about police violence against black people, as well as pressing the police for change. Coincidentally, as on few occasions before, the police are very timidly starting to openly discuss racism (see Godoy, 2020). Simultaneously, a more significant change is being made to how the media approaches this subject, moving from its previous silence about racism in general to covering the theme more frequently in its broadcasts. It is important to reinforce the fact that these changes were inspired by the reactions and demonstrations mobilized by the Black Lives Matter movement after the killing of George Floyd. There is an international network being built around the issues of racism and policing, as well as international expectation, or rather, international anxiety regarding their solutions in an antiracist framework.

This paper was inspired by these mobilizations and intends to join them in producing such antiracist solutions. Writing about it is difficult, especially for researchers of color like one of the authors who have had several encounters with police brutality and racism, precisely because it demands facing individual and collective racial traumas. On the other hand, the fact the challenges make the task all the more essential, as the fact that we are exposing our ethnographic experiences might allow other scholars who have a desire to make a stand and promote racial justice but might either not know how or where to begin from, to build the courage and a means to doing so through our experience all the way from Brazil, one of the most extreme cases of police lethality, wherever they might be.

The brutal killing of João Alberto de Freitas at the front door of a supermarket owned by the giant French multinational Carrefour in Brazil or the Rana Plaza massacre (Chowdhury, 2017a, 2017b) where workers from Bangladesh were killed while manufacturing goods for international companies such as Walmart and Primark remind us that organizations openly sustain strategies that make black lives not matter. The brutal loss of Emily and Rebeca cannot be in vain. It is time to denounce organizational practices in order to hope for a better future.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no conflict of interests.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared due to the qualitative nature of the study.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ On July 30, 2020, São Paulo's Military Police forbid the use of headlocks on the aftermath of several cases of excessive use of force being highlighted during the first months of the pandemic.
- ² The case got major repercussion, being covered by major media outlet, such as G1: <https://g1.globo.com/sp/sao-paulo/noticia/2021/02/27/salvador-da-rima-e-detido-em-sao-paulo-video-mostra-cantor-sendo-derrubado-e-levando-mata-leao.ghtml>.
- ³ It is important to highlight the fact that police's racist and brutal practices aim towards black culture and black neighborhoods such as favelas. Police racism does not mark its targets based only on their skin color.

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