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# “Racism is a perfect crime”: *favela* residents’ everyday experiences of police pacification, urban militarization, and prejudice in Rio de Janeiro

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines residents’ everyday experiences and perceptions of changing urban politics and racism in a “pacified” *favela*, or poor informal neighbourhood, in Rio de Janeiro, drawing on longitudinal ethnographic data from 2011 to 2018. The findings suggest that despite a discourse on inclusion, human rights, and citizenship, the police pacification program and urban security interventions aimed at “civilizing” the *favela*’s residents as “undesirable others,” drawing on racialization. The naturalization, legitimization, and reproduction of police violence promote the operation of racial and socio-spatial inequalities and privileges through what I describe as *pigmentocratic everyday practices*. These processes continually shape the condition of possibilities for the dehumanization of blackness, exclusion, inclusion, and resistance in a society influenced by the myth of racial democracy and that celebrates both diversity and ideologies of whitening.

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**KEYWORDS** Racism; police violence; urban militarization; whiteness; UPP; Brazil

## Introduction

This article examines residents’ experiences of everyday city life and perceptions of changing urban politics and racism in a “pacified” *favela*, or poor informal marginalized neighbourhood, in Rio de Janeiro drawing on longitudinal ethnographic fieldwork from 2011 to 2018. Since 2008, 38 Police Pacification Units (UPPs) were implemented in *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro. The UPPs were located in strategic areas during preparations for the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics. I argue that in order to understand how urban politics aiming at the inclusion of the *favelas* into the formal city through so-called “pacification” operating in combination with police violence,

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racialization and racism must be accounted for as they unfold in urban security politics aiming at inclusion and in *everyday pigmentocratic practices*.

Through analysing the ethnographic data, I coin the term *pigmentocratic everyday practices* to unfold the complexity of the reproduction, presence, and silencing of racism through inclusion and exclusion in a society marked by extreme social and racial inequalities (Telles 2006).

Pacification has been a dominant biopolitical dispositif of “race war” (Foucault 2004) in Brazil for exerting socio-spatial control of urban poor and black neighbourhoods, including both the *favela* (territory) and *favelados* (inhabitants) as unbounded bodies since the colonial period. During and since colonial times, whitening has been a tool for the massacre or “social lynching” of blacks both physically and spiritually (Nascimento 1989, 59). Pacification thus entails both physical and symbolic violence or social lynching through whitening and a war on blackness. Residents of *favelas* experience pacification daily in the most visible forms through militarization of everyday life and physical violence such as police violence, shooting, and the mass killing of blacks. Criminalization of blackness is entangled with pacification in more subtle forms including a moralizing and civilizing mission, which also legitimizes the war on blackness through social lynching as whitening.

The article is structured as follows. First, I discuss “racism as a perfect crime” as revealed through police violence and strategies of security such as the police pacification program directed at the *favelas*. Second, I examine how residents of a “pacified” *favela* perceive prejudice and racism in more veiled forms in the everyday practices of *racismo à brasileira*. Third, I discuss the conditions of possibility of visible discriminatory practices and more subtle forms of pigmentocratic everyday practices, actualization of privileges, and resistance.

### Police violence and racism as “a perfect crime”

Police violence in Brazil kills thousands of young black men each year in Rio’s *favelas*. Some argue that it is difficult to distinguish racial violence in Brazil, which is a racially mixed country. Racism in Brazil is described by Munanga as “a perfect crime” (*Revistaforum*, February 9, 2012) that points to the “Brazilian way of racism” (*racismo à brasileira*), which is characterized by ambiguity and difficulty of being accepted, understood, and decodified (Munanga 2017, 37). However, research shows how racism is revealed as a “pigmentocracy” (Moraes Silva and Paixão 2014; Telles 2014, 2006) in which black and brown Afro-Brazilians are at the bottom of a pyramid statistically regarding health, education, work conditions, salary, political representation, incarceration,<sup>1</sup> and police killing.<sup>2</sup>

Regardless of the abolition of the racial democracy myth<sup>3</sup> that for decades silenced racism in Brazil, I argue that dynamics of resistance, discrimination, whitening,<sup>4</sup> racism, and criminalization of blackness<sup>5</sup> are actualized through *pigmentocratic everyday practices*.

Abdias do Nascimento criticized Gilberto Freyre and the ideology of racial democracy and “race mixing” (*miscigenação*), identifying forced *miscigenação*, colour prejudice, racial discrimination, and immigration policies designed for whitening the country (1989, 8). However, the lived reality of the myth plays out while articulations of the social lynching of blacks persist in the context of increasing necropolitical violence in Rio’s *favelas*.

Reported killings by police officers in Rio de Janeiro rose from 236 in 2013 to 1,575 in 2018 and to 1,810 in 2019. Police killed more than 5,000 people throughout Brazil in 2018 and 5,804 people in 2019 (NACLA, April 10, 2019; Cerqueira 2019; ISP 2020; Monitor da Violência). When ambiguous racism and the colour of police violence victims are questioned, black activists have responded that “[i]f you want to know who is black or brown in Brazil, just ask the police” (Alves 2018, 20). According to Alves (2018), state sovereignty in Brazil relies on “race” as a construct and “political resource” to terrorize and produce black enemies as killable bodies (8). It is crucial, then, to also account for aspects of racialization in the context of police killings and changing urban politics by drawing on both so-called pacification and warfare. Researchers have pointed to the “unbounded body” (Caldeira 2000), marked by the “disjunctive democracy” and “disjunction of Brazilian citizenship [through] the association of violence, disrespect for civil rights and a conception of the body that is constantly subject to intervention” (339). The differential treatment by police of PPG *favela* residents and the *favela* territory as an “area of risk,” in contrast to the *asfalto*, or white rich neighbourhoods of Ipanema and Copacabana, reveals complex socio-spatial relations (Håndlykken-Luz 2019, 19) and the treatment of *favela* residents as unbounded bodies. This includes negotiations, inclusion, and exclusion where white residents in the *asfalto* might claim citizenship and resist police invading houses (19). The *favela* residents, however, mainly black people, are treated not as *gente* (humans), as one resident said while witnessing a police operation in a street providing access to PPG from Ipanema, where only afro-Brazilian *favela* residents were stopped by the police (field notes, 2018). Another resident commented that “the police are always shooting from down here (from the above-mentioned street) and toward the *favela*” (Interview, 2018). *Favela* residents are thus treated as unbounded bodies and are constantly subject to intervention.

The war on blackness, in contrast to whiteness as the valued norm and an ideal of being “civilized,” legitimates the treatment of *favela* residents as unbounded bodies. These pigmentocratic everyday practices are entangled in Brazil’s social fabric and social relations, as well as within the military police force, which largely comprises black men (French 2013, 162) and in afro-Brazilian communities such as in the *favela*. French (2013) notes that black military police officers behaving in racist

and violent ways toward the black population are also treated with distrust and racially stigmatized, while government officials deny responsibility (French 2013, 162–163).

Rio Governor Wilson Witzel was confronted about 2019s alarmingly high numbers of police killings and sniper use. He responded that “snipers are used in absolute secrecy” and that “the principle is clear: if an individual carries an assault rifle, he must be neutralized immediately by lethal means” (*O Globo*, March 31, 2019). Witzel quipped about the increasing use of shooting from helicopters toward *favelas*, asking “has any resident been shot yet?” (2019).

In March 2019, the military fired 80 shots toward a car carrying a family, killing the father, Evaldo dos Santos Rosa, a black musician. Bolsonaro, newly inaugurated at the time, claimed that “the army didn’t kill anyone” (*Global Voices* April 15, 2019). Right-wing president Jair Bolsonaro has expressed his support for militias and the killings of bandits without trial (*New York Times* December 21, 2017) while also denying that racism exists in Brazil (Alfonso 2019). Protesters responded that the military would not have shot 80 bullets toward a white family in the south zone of Rio.

Black residents are 2.7 times more likely to be homicide victims, and 75.5 per cent of victims of police violence are black (Cerqueira 2019). In 2015, an Amnesty report showed that 79 per cent of victims killed by police in Rio between 2010 and 2013 were black (Amnesty 2015, 35). It is thus problematic to discuss violence and police killings in Brazil without examining dynamics of racialization and of how racism unfolds and is experienced in everyday Brazilian life.

The reaction to police violence directed at whites or blacks differs, as Alves and Vargas note (2017); the first provokes complicity, the second disavowal (256). It is commonly said in Brazil that a “good bandit is a dead bandit” and that human rights constitute “privileges for bandits” (Caldeira 2000, 373.) Defenders of these expressions support denying life to criminals and other residents who are mostly young black men in forms of *necropolitics*, defined by Mbembe (2003) as “forms of subjugation of life to the power of death” (39). These cases reveal power mechanisms combining the right “to take [the] li[ves]” of Afro-Brazilians and to “let [them] die” (Foucault 2004, 241) in forms of biopolitics, necropolitics, disciplinary forms of power, and activation of racism through biopower (2004, 258), thus drawing on the fiction of “race” (Mbembe 2017, 89) to demarcate certain bodies as “killable.” Such power mechanisms and strategies unfold through security interventions toward the *favelas* as “area[s] of risk” and the killing of Afro-Brazilian residents in terms of disciplinary power and biopower in addition to affirmative biopolitical strategies such as the pacification program. While Afro-Brazilians are at the bottom of the social pyramid, social and spatial population control is also

revealed in biopolitical strategies such as health or education policies and also “let to die” through poor services. In addition, the racialization dynamics unfold daily through inclusion and exclusion practices providing conditions that actualize racialization and racism despite the celebration of diversity and the influence of racial democracy.

Racial mixing (*miscigenção*) can be understood as a subjective massacre of blacks, a social lynching of Afro-Brazilian memory and social imaginary through whitening (Nascimento 1989), while the discursive formation of luso-tropicalism functions as a biopolitical dispositif of (cultural) war toward blackness and blacks. I argue that “pacification” can be seen as a biopolitical dispositif of socio-spatial control and social lynching through whitening. This war toward blacks is revealed in terms of necropolitical violence and structural racism and in more subtle forms of colour prejudice and “*racismo à brasileira*” actualized through pigmentocratic everyday practices.

How are pigmentocratic everyday practices lived, challenged, and negotiated within the context of necropolitical violence of Rio’s *favelas*? What are the conditions of possibility that render certain bodies in Brazil more likely to be killable?

## Everyday experiences of “*racismo à brasileira*”

### *Residents’ reflections on prejudice, racism, and whitening*

This section provides examples from discussions with *favela* residents about their perceptions of colour prejudice (Nascimento 1989). Residents in Rio’s *favelas* live in increased necropolitical violence despite a decade of the so-called pacification program. The data come from ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in a *favela* in the South Zone of Rio from 2011 to 2013 and six weeks in 2018. The first semi-structured recorded interviews<sup>6</sup> were conducted after 10 months of participant observations, participation in community meetings, numerous walks, and informal conversations. Fieldwork in 2018 included daily walks in the *favela* and interviews with residents I first met during my earlier research and included six photo walks and two video walks with two residents. In 2018, I recorded five semi-structured interviews, three of which were follow-up interviews with residents from the first phase of fieldwork who were asked direct questions about racism in Brazil. Pedro, a 42-year-old man, commented:

There is racism here in the community, there is racism in the rua (literally “street” but referring to the formal city), there is, yes. There is ... a different treatment, because of the media, right ... that many times ... it is the government that allows this to happen ... Everything is in reality, the white majority is admired. If you are white, you are treated well, if you are black then you are, there is distrust. (Interview, 2018)

Although few people spoke in our informal conversations about being discriminated against directly, differential treatment, distrust of being poor, from the *favelas*, and black or dark was described. For instance, *favela* residents with lighter skin (e.g. from Northeastern Brazil) were preferred for service sector work and as guards in condominiums in Ipanema and Copacabana. Racism in the *favela* and amongst Afro-Brazilians of different skin tones and appearance was also frequently emphasized. Mario, a 42-year-old man, stated:

There are different forms of racism that [in] Brazil. Racism isn't only related to the color of the skin ... I will tell you something that you will find absurd. In Brazil, we have black people who are prejudiced against black people [who have] a little bit lighter skin. (Interview, 2018)

This echoes studies of middle- and working-class blacks in Rio in 2007 and 2008 (Lamont et al. 2016), research on a Brazilian *favela* in the 1990s (Sheriff 2001), and studies of negotiations of racial hierarchies within Afro-Brazilian families (Hordge-Freeman 2013). Paula, a 52-year-old woman, was told by her mother to “marry a man with lighter skin [because it] would be better for the children” (Field notes, July 2018). Similar experiences are described in studies on working- and middle-class blacks in Rio (Lamont et al. 2016). Mario also stated that people from Brazil's interior, regardless of colour, do not want to adapt to Rio's culture:

They bring with them this culture from the interior ... to [Rio] ... They don't want to absorb [Rio's] culture, that is, they can't discriminate against anyone because of class, color, [or] preferences.

There are numerous layers involved, as Mario emphasized:

Racism ... appears in various forms [and] appears at time embedded, within homophobia, sometimes within social class ... And I will never tell you that there is less, because no, because I am nearly everything that they have prejudice against [laughs] ... I am black, gay, *Candomblesista* [an adherent of the Afro-Brazilian religion Candomble], poor, and *favelado* ... [Laughs] So I know ... what prejudice is. (Interview, 2018)

Mario's experience of discrimination, prejudice, and racism reveals aspects of intersectionality and prejudice that relates to the social imagination of blackness and Afro-Brazilian cultural practices that have been popularly associated with criminality (Lamont et al. 2016, sec. 3.1). It is, however, interesting to note how Paula commented on changing perceptions and practices among youth in the *favela* since 2013, when I last spoke with her. When asked about everyday changes, she pointed at some young teenaged girls and said, “Look at them, they are now affirming a more *black* identity, not straightening their hair.” This was not the case just five years prior.

Paula, who was born in the *favela*, managed to get a university education and had lived some years in the *asfalto* before moving back to the *favela* to be

closer to her grandparents. She described numerous accounts of racism and tensions and of affirming her black identity. She also described racist incidents in the *favela* and the *asfalto*. Certain jokes and insults might be evoked as racism.<sup>7</sup> However, Pedro said the following:

Children do not know about racism—look at the kids [pointing at kids in the street], they don't know it, they learn it from society. It's different [in the *favela*] when they play, it's not like [outside the *favela*], but they're joking: "You are a monkey, you have hard [kinky] hair." (Fieldnotes, photowalk, 2018)

Pedro's remarks reflect the importance of context and space in practices emphasizing racialization. He also emphasized that children learn racism from society. Furthermore, he commented that he was often treated differently because he is black.

The Vice-Minister Hamilton Morão, posing in a photo with his grandson in 2018, commented while pointing to his grandson's light skin that; "my grandson has a nice face, have you seen? *Whitening of the race*" (*Folha de S. Paulo*, August 12, 2018). Morão later said in response to criticism that he had indigenous origins. His comments and the controversy around them indicate further that the ideology of "whitening" remains present today. On another occasion, he referred to the "bad" characters of indigenous people and people of African origin as indicating the "backwardness" of Brazil, justifying how part of the population was an undesirable workforce in the period of white immigration politics from the 1880s until 1930 (Andrews 1991, 235). Elsewhere, a judge stated that a certain criminal was not a "usual criminal" as he was blond and had blue eyes (*Folha de S. Paulo*, March 1, 2019). Thus, there is an association of whiteness with being "civilized". As these examples show, whitening and the myth of racial democracy operate at different levels that have real effects upon Brazilians' everyday lives in terms of cultural and moral prejudice and racism toward black people and "undesirable" blackness, contrasting with the ideal of whitening. *Racismo á brasileira* thus appears as more veiled and difficult to grasp and acknowledge,<sup>8</sup> even as it is brutal, increasingly visible, and contested as an organizing principle of social relations (Vargas and Alves 2010, 614), reproducing socio-racial hierarchies and privileges for the mostly white elite in visible or masked ways. Pedro emphasized the dissimulated aspect of prejudice and racism and about "looks": "it's racism, it is very dissimulated, but the society is very racist. There is a different treatment" (Fieldnotes, photo-walk, PPG, 2018).

Pedro experienced "looks" in the community from a *nordestino* (a person from the Northeast with lighter skin) because, he said, he is very dark. Such "looks" constitute a gaze and "racialization" that can thus be experienced beyond the dichotomy of white/black racism or the *asfalto/favela* distinction. Paula, in her fifties, explained that when she was younger, her siblings also commented that she had it easier because she was not as dark-skinned as



them and her hair was not that “hard and kinky”. What can be seen as pigmentocratic everyday practices appearing in different forms can also be observed in informal talks in the neighbourhood, where a white middle-class resident from the *asfalto* stopped talking to me and a resident from the *favela*. The resident spoke to my neighbour of someone he knew who “is black like you, with light skin”, only to be told, “I am not black with light skin, I am black!” This experience reveals both inclusion and exclusion features and how such intentional whitening, which could be seen as polite in some contexts, was responded to with an affirmation that “*I am black*,” revealing resistance to “whitening.”

### **Pigmentocratic everyday practices**

Despite living in a context of increasing police killings and necropolitical violence, few residents mentioned such killings, and no one mentioned this in the recorded interviews. Interviewed residents were not activists and were mostly occupied with daily life challenges in the *favela* as the pacification program had officially failed and shootouts were again taking place nearly daily since 2017. One reason that people would not mention residents’ killings may be the possibility of being associated with criminality. Most victims of police killings were presented as drug traffickers and criminals during frequent confrontations and tensions between drug factions and the police in PPG. However, both black and white residents emphasized that black and darker-skinned people experienced more racism, often seen as potential bandits with less opportunities for work and social mobility, echoing Telles (2006) forms of pigmentocracy. The pigmentocracy thesis has been critiqued for relying mainly on census categories relating to skin colour in Brazil, not including phenotypes for measuring social and racial inequalities (Monk 2016; Hordge-Freeman 2013). Nevertheless, Telles (2017) emphasizes that the Brazilian census asks people to identify based on of skin colour often reported by others in the household. Telles’ studies showed that in most cases in Brazil, self-identification corresponded with classification by interviewer-rated skin colour. Moreover, classification according to skin colour is packed with connotations of power (Telles 2012) and captures variation in meaning often depending on context and how questions were asked, as seen in the PERLA study (2017, 2341).

The racism accounts in the largely dominant Afro-Brazilian community in a so-called pacified *favela* also indicate how entangled racism is in Brazil’s social fabric. “*Racismo á Brasileira*” is possible because of the impact of a pigmentocracy and because social interactions are still largely dominated by both a hyper consciousness and negation of race dialectics (Vargas 2008). A recent example of Brazil’s complex reproduction and negation of racism was the appointment of Camargo, a far-right black man denying

the existence of racism in Brazil, as the new president of Palmares Foundations, an organization defending black rights in Brazil (*Huffpost Brasil*, December 04, 2019). Despite large protests and the court suspending his appointment, he continued as president of the association. Afro-Brazilians as social subjects are thus victims of structural racism and at the same time potential reproducers of the same discriminatory social structure. Internal battles and tensions thus create secondary levels of marginalization or reinforce the broader marginalization and hierarchies required by racial capitalism (Vargas 2008).

The above experiences of residents reveal themes related to the stigmatization of blackness, cultural prejudice, intersectionality, and whiteness or whitening. Miranda 2017 defines *whiteness* as a “racialized habitus, an expression of racism” (64). *Whitening*, according to Souza (2012a), is a symbolic process by which an individual is subordinated in order to be accepted by a group that would normally reject them for being black (184). Whitening can also be considered as an everyday strategy that non-whites might engage in to move up in status and racial hierarchy (Osuji 2013, 1492). However, studies from the past decade have shown that alongside a rising black consciousness movement in Brazil, whitening may have changed (2013, 1492), and whitening might be perceived differently by insiders and outsiders depending on context. These were revealed in conversations with residents; Paula, for example, referred to relatives suggesting she marry a lighter skin man, and today she rejected being “whitened” by one of the neighbours. She affirmed a rising valorization and affirmation of blackness. Some residents thought there was not much racism; however, they pointed out prejudice toward blacks, the poor, or homosexuals, and others emphasized racism in the *favela*. I suggest the term *pigmentocratic everyday practices* for these practices relating to both *whitening* and the myth of *racial democracy* in its various forms. Pigmentocratic practices unfold the struggles of everyday negotiations of racial hierarchies (Hordge-Freeman 2013) and resistance revealing “the hyperconsciousness/negation of race dialectic [which] is the mode through which the social construction of race in Brazil is manifested” (Vargas 2008, 107).

Although there are references to whiteness and racial democracy in diverse forms relating to inclusion and exclusion, there is also social classification where, despite diversity and conviviality beyond the limits of *asfalto/favela*, or black and white, blackness appears as less desirable and whiteness as ideal. Blacks also appear to be at the bottom of the social pyramid in a pigmentocracy within the *favela* with its mainly an Afro-Brazilian community. These dynamics can be revealed through pigmentocratic everyday practices in which the fiction of “race” has real effects on everyday lives. The forced *miscigenação* described by Nascimento can also be understood as a social and cultural massacre unfolding daily where blackness is criminalized and

whiteness is still an ideal, though present in more veiled forms or manifested as pigmentocratic everyday practices.

### Resistance and actualization of privileges in a pigmentocracy

This section provides a glimpse into the increasing number of protests and growing resistance to social inequalities, racism, and police violence in Rio de Janeiro in the past decade, brought into dialogue with ethnographic material and residents' reflections from a longitudinal perspective. Numerous researchers attribute Brazil's social and racial inequalities to the legacy of slavery (Jodhka, Rehbein, and Souza 2017, Souza 2012b). However, historian Amílcar Araújo Pereira contests this interpretation, emphasizing:

The racist strategies for perpetuating privileges for the white population in Brazil are not a permanent legacy of slavery. There are several ways of actualizing these discriminatory processes [which] will result in the racial inequalities with which we live today. (*Nexo Journal*, May 13, 2018)

Andrews (1991) also emphasizes the risk of focusing on slavery as the principal factor determining the present state of socio-racial relations, pointing to the work of Gilberto Freyre on racial democracy (6–7). The widely circulated photo of a white middle-class couple walking with their nanny at a protest in Ipanema in 2016 (Figure 1) illustrates the persistence and actualization of Brazil's racial and class disparity.

The Afro-Brazilian nanny *remains in her place*, dressed in white uniform, while the white middle-class couple participates in the protest. A common expression, *cada macaco no seu galho* ("each monkey on its branch"),

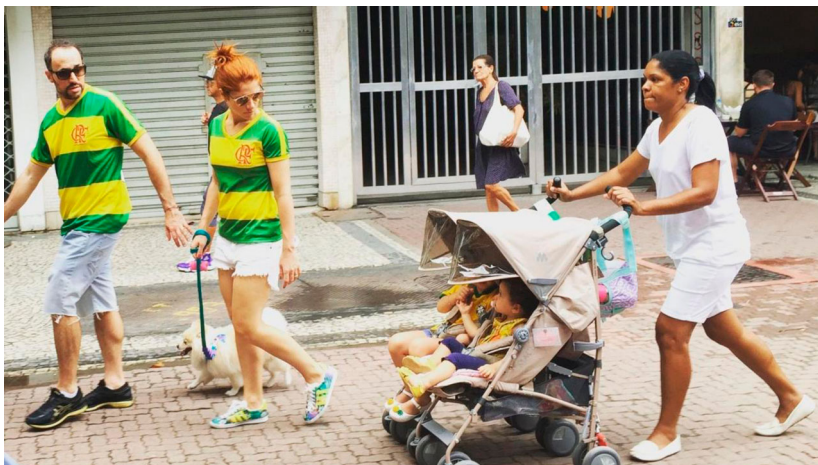


Figure 1. ©João Valadares 2016.

indicates that society tolerates multiculturalism as long as blacks remain in their *social* place, as in this case.

In June 2013, millions of Brazilian took to the streets, initially against the rising prices of bus tickets; however, the protests became one of the largest in Brazil's history. People with different agendas protested against corruption, increasing police violence, militarization, and the "genocide"<sup>9</sup> of black Brazilians (Nascimento 2016; Vargas 2008). Social media images showed people from different groups protesting together, and scholars such as Negri and Cocco pointed out that the "multitude" participated (*Global/Brasil* June 28, 2013). How, though, did people in the *favelas* who were not engaged in activism feel about the protests? I asked Pedro if he participated. He said,

I did not protest, because it's not a part of my life here in the *favela*. The ones who protested ... were not from the *morro* (*favela*; literally "hill"). They were not poor. (Interview, 2018)

As Pedro stated, mainly people middle-class Rio residents protested, not poorer *favela* residents like him. Most of the residents I talked to did not protest and also confirmed that protest was not a part of their daily struggle to work for survival. Although now working with an NGO, Pedro said that when he was selling cement and materials for construction in the main street of the *favela*, he had to frequently hide as there were shootouts in the street. His priority was everyday survival and working. Nevertheless, Pedro's reflections also suggest that he is very much concerned with social justice and access to education. When he did not protest, it was not because he did not care. He had reasons for choosing not to do so. In addition to being able to prioritize time to participate in protests, such participation would have been a risk of police harassment and even aggression for a black person from the *favela*. Members of the white middle class might be able to pay their own bail and are less likely to be accused of being criminals.

In 2018 there were numerous protests against police violence and after the murder of council member and human rights activist Marille Franco (see [Figure 2](#)). She was from a *favela* and fought for the rights of marginalized people and minorities, particularly the poor, *favelados*, blacks, women, and LGBTQ people. She was a vocal critic of militarization and police violence, including the UPP<sup>10</sup> and the military intervention in 2018, leading a committee for human rights and monitoring the 2018 federal military intervention in Rio. Two days before her assassination, she tweeted: "how many others will have to die before this war will end?"

Numerous black women are fighting against discrimination, inequalities, and violence, and point out their experiences with racism. Council member Talíria Petrone from Niterói in Rio de Janeiro, in a 2018 interview, said: "I've been called a 'disgusting N—,' I've been told to "go back to the slave house." She emphasized the importance of confronting "those who want to



**Figure 2.** Protest in Rio against police violence. Mothers protesting the killing of their children and the assassination of Marielle Franco (Photo by the author, July 12, 2018).

remain with their privileges and keep black people marginalized.” (*Nexo Journal*, May 13, 2018). This relates to Pedro’s comments about social inequalities in Brazil and the lack of access to education and opportunities that could enable change:

You see there is no sensibility towards us, the people in the *rua*, down there (in Ipanema), they do not care about ... the enormous inequality. Brazil is a rich country – if people outside would change it, it could be done. But they don’t want us to be educated. They want the situation to remain like this, like a mental slavery. (Field notes, July 21, 2018)

These accounts illustrate the numerous struggles in claiming rights, how privilege is maintained, the general lack of sensibility toward the poor, the disavowal of black suffering (Alves and Vargas 2017), and persistence and naturalization of extreme social and racial inequalities, while meritocracy is a way of maintaining privileges for a few. In this way, Pedro describes the control of the social and spatial mobility of Blacks in particular and the poor in general that are naturalized and reproduced. The social and spatial control of blacks are maintained and actualized as we have seen through dispositifs such as *whitening*, *racial democracy*, and racial mixing as massacre in terms of the social lynching of blacks alongside colour prejudice (Nascimento 1989), or *pacification* revealing *pigmentocratic everyday practices*. When Pedro pointed to the *rua*, he was pointing to Ipanema and Copacabana a hundred

meters down the road. Another resident also photographed the blocks in Ipanema laying side by side with the *favela*, and said, “you see the differences, it is so close.” Although people in the South Zone *asfalto* and *favela* live close to each other and share the beaches and shops, many *favela* residents were outraged about the social inequalities. They pointed to differentiated treatment by the police, while *favela* residents are living in a context of increasing necropolitical violence, urban militarization, and lack of access to higher education, as well as the elites’ and *asfalto* residents’ lack of sensibility toward the poor, blacks, and the *favela*.

This illustrates how visible institutional racism and everyday more subtle forms of racism are negotiated, reproduced, and actualized through symbolic, social, and material forms as an organizing principle of social relations, even when denied (Vargas and Alves 2010, 614). These dynamics of “racism as a perfect crime” operate through pigmentocratic everyday practices actualizing and maintaining socio-racial hierarchies, socio-spatial control of blacks, and privileges for the mostly white elite despite increased protests against racism and racial inequalities and implementation of so-called pacification programs in Rio’s *favelas* in the past decade.

### **Final remarks – beyond the 2013 protests: racism, resistance, and change?**

Mbembe (2017) stated that although “race” is a fiction, it has real effects in everyday life, whereas black movements and discourses of rehabilitation in most cases embrace this fiction (89). This is the case of the Negritude movement and of versions of Pan-Africanism in general, and can also be seen in forms of emerging black movements in Brazil, revealing pigmentocratic everyday practices. Some scholars have been skeptical of Brazil’s racial quotas and affirmative action policies, also criticized by Wacquant and Bourdieu, accused of bringing black race politics to Brazil (Moraes Silva and Paixão 2014, 182). However, research shows that the affirmative action policies have worked well since their first implementation in 2002, and a decree made racial quotas mandatory in all federal universities in 2012 (182). Research suggests that changes such as the success of the affirmative action policies show that the image of a racial democracy has been abandoned (183). However, racialization is at stake in the enactment of police violence on individual bodies and can be revealed in the control over the social and spatial mobility of certain individuals and groups. According to Leite, these aspects reveal veiled forms of institutional racism (*Le monde diplomatique Brasil*, July 3, 2012) and a pigmentocracy.

The first part of this article discussed police violence and *racism as a perfect crime*, and evidence of “pigmentocratic everyday practices” are revealed in forms of institutional racism, urban militarization, and police exerting socio-



spatial control of *favelados* and *favelas* through a war on blackness. The findings suggest that the criminalization of “undesirable bodies” (*favelados*) and “areas of risk” (*favelas*) are at stake through control of social and spatial mobility enacted through dispositifs such as the *pacification program*, *whitening*, and *racial democracy*, which have real effects on the present. This racialization of bodies and social lynching of black people legitimate killings of black and poor people, presented as criminals, drawing on racialization that renders certain bodies killable. Racialization is thus an organizing principle of social relations and “stigmatizing the stigmatizers”: black military police officers also are stigmatized racially and reproduce socio-racial hierarchies terrorizing black communities while the government denies responsibility (French 2013, 167).

Second, I analysed residents’ diverse everyday experiences and perceptions of prejudice and *racismo à brasileira* in different socio-spatial contexts relating to both inclusion and exclusion. In order to do so, I introduced the term *pigmentocratic everyday practices*. Although colour is popularly said not to matter, and the myth of racial democracy has officially been abandoned over the past decade, colour has real effects on everyday life. Criminalization or distrust of blackness in contrast to whiteness and *whitening* together indicate an ideal that unfolds in diverse forms, and the findings indicates that blacks are located at the bottom of a pigmentocracy also within Afro-Brazilian communities such as the *favelas*.

Third, I discussed the conditions of possibilities for the actualization of socio-racial inequalities and racism in Brazil that continue to persist despite the embracing of diversity and ideology of racial democracy. Privileges are maintained for a small elite, a fact borne out by statistics that reveal a pigmentocracy favouring whites and whiteness against darker or even black skin (Telles 2014; Moraes Silva and Paixão 2014). Owing to the naturalization, legitimization, and reproduction of police violence, racial and socio-spatial inequalities and privileges operate through what I described as the pigmentocratic everyday practices. These continually shape the condition of possibilities for the dehumanization of blackness, exclusion, inclusion, and resistance in a society influenced by the myth of racial democracy and claiming to celebrate *both diversity and* ideologies of whitening.

I have argued that pacification as social lynching through whitening can be seen as a dispositif that makes “genocide” possible both as a physical and cultural massacre of blacks (Nascimento 1989), visible through institutional racism and police killings, everyday racism in more subtle forms, or whitening as scientific racism and the whitening of Brazil’s population (a public policy from the beginning of 1900s until 1930 and Vargas’ promotion of racial democracy). Whitening was thus further masked as *miscigenação* (race mixture) with the aim of whitening the population. Pacification and whitening are actualized in new ways in everyday life as brutal visible

(necropolitics, war on blackness, physical violence, militarization, and institutional racism) and subtle forms of violence (symbolic and moral, social, and cultural war on blackness or everyday racism) and represents pigmentocratic everyday practices.

Finally, I believe that experiences from Brazil in particular and Latin America more broadly are relevant for the study of racism globally,<sup>11</sup> and particularly in areas implementing neoliberal urban security politics or “ghetto-politics.”<sup>12</sup> It is also useful to research cultural racism, multiculturalism, the inclusion and exclusion of undesirable citizens and sub-citizens, and resistance. At present, there might be similar enactments revealing a pigmentocracy, pigmentocratic everyday practices and cultural racism beyond Latin America and Brazil. However, the Brazilian context, where racism never was formally institutionalized after the abolition of slavery (1888) and where cultural diversity and racial mixing have been embraced as part and parcel of national identity for over a century, whiteness is still an ideal and socio-racial inequalities persist. Blacks are killed en masse and continually constitute the “wretched of the earth” (Fanon 2001) or “sub-citizens” (Souza 2012b) at the bottom of the social pyramid in a pigmentocracy. While privileges, social justice, and access to education and resources are maintained for a small elite, new forms of resistance are emerging.

Although this study is limited to a *favela* in the privileged South Zone of Rio de Janeiro, it provides experiences from residents in a community that have been exposed to urban security interventions the past decade. *Favela* residents’ changing, diverse perceptions are excluded from most quantitative studies, whereas qualitative studies covering a short period mostly ignore the presence of racialization and social classification related to the rationale or racial axis with a colonial origin and character that has proven durable (Quijano 2008, 181), and unfolding in the so-called pacification program and urban neoliberal politics. I have attempted to add to some of the “unexplored” field of urban studies as pointed out by Alves (2018): “the racialized” aspect of the politics of security. The gendered aspect also needs to be further studied (4), as do the cases of young black men being killed; increasing femicides; murders of the LGBTQ population, activists, and minorities; and violence suffered by mothers, children and families.

More research should be done across *favelas*, or so-called “ghettos” globally and over longer periods of time. UPPs have been abandoned in some areas since 2018, and other *favelas* have police pacification units present while the current mechanisms of control are unfolding in a laboratory not of “peace” but of urban militarization and warfare with snipers, helicopters, and military drones. Movements of resistance and anti-racist struggles are currently rising in Brazil, and while politics of affirmative action might appear promising, socio-racial inequalities persist. To struggle for the abandonment of racial thinking, as black intellectuals aspired to do in early 1900s Brazil



(Alberto 2011), or a planetary humanism (Gilroy 2002), creating a shared world beyond race and racism (Mbembe 2017, 177) seems far-sighted while targeted urban militarization towards the poor, minorities, *favela* residents, and blacks intensify.

## Notes

1. See Alves (2018, 117–166).
2. See statistics in *Nexo Journal* (May 13, 2018) and the Latin American PERLA project (Telles 2014) and Telles (2006).
3. Most scholars describe racial democracy referring to Gilberto Freyre (1987), and the nationalist politics of exceptional racial harmony since the 1930s. Freyre used the concept of luso-tropicalism to describe how Portuguese colonization was less brutal as they encouraged race mixing. Following Freyre's publication and 1930s Vargas nationalist politics, racial democracy and idea of "racial harmony" was used as an ideology and a dispositif to "pacify" the population, preventing social uprisings and social mobility for Afro-Brazilians and former slaves. In the 1950s, UNESCO sponsored a study lead by Bastide and Fernandes to analyse "racial harmony" in Brazil. The study concluded that racial discrimination was strongly present in Brazil (Bastide and Fernandes 2010). In 1974, Skidmore argued that the white elite used racial democracy to obscure racial oppression (1993). Abdias do Nascimento was one of the most important antiracists and activists to openly denounce racism in Brazil since the 1930s. Nascimento denounced a genocide on blacks in Brazil and criticized Freyre for presenting a sugar-coated vision of relations between black and white in Brazil, creating a false image of a mild or pleasant slavery in Brazil and Latin America (1989, 3). The ideology of racial democracy is also said to have prevented black Brazilians challenging and grasping the deep racial inequalities and racism until the black movements of the 1970s overtly labelled racial democracy as a myth (Alberto 2011, loc. 138). On the contrary, Alberto (2011) points out that "ideologies of Brazilian racial harmony were both constructed and contested from below" (loc. 161) and that black thinkers in the early 1900s saw racial democracy not as a reality but a hope of what Brazil could become (loc. 308) as black activist struggled for citizenship, rights and social inclusion. In modern Brazil, the myth and ideology of racial democracy is officially abandoned and racism is acknowledged to exist; however, the myth continues to exist and to effect everyday life while the tendency to negate the presence of racism and emphasize how Brazil's multicultural-ness remains.
4. In 1888, Brazil was one of the last countries to abolish slavery. The ideas of eugenics took a different form in Brazil, where the aim was to eliminate the black population through "whitening" and miscegenation. State-sponsored white European immigration was presented as a solution to "Brazilian racial inferiority" (Morales Silva and Paixão 2014, 176), and a large number of the 3.5 million white Europeans who migrated to Brazil between 1880 and 1930 received subsidies (Andrews 2004, 136).
5. An 1891 federal decree prohibited immigration of "the black race" to Brazil, and the 1890 penal code defined cultural and religious practices such as Capoeira and Afro-Brazilian religions such as *candomblé* as a serious crime (Lamont et al.

- 2016, sec. 3.1). Black immigration was banned by law until 1907 and continued to be banned in practice until 1930.
6. My translation. All interviews during fieldwork were conducted in Portuguese by the author and translated into English. All mistakes are the responsibility of the author. Participants are anonymized.
  7. See example where inclusion combines with exclusion and a soccer player who was insulted by the word “ape” in public. This would have been more likely never to have consequences if it did not happen in public and in that context (Schwarcz 2018).
  8. See numerous studies on the ambiguity of racism in Brazil (Telles 2006, 2014; Lamont et al. 2016; Munanga 2017; Schwarcz 1999, 2012).
  9. See *O Genocídio do Negro Brasileiro* by Nascimento (2016) and Vargas (2008).
  10. See Franco’s master’s thesis on UPP (2014).
  11. On what anti-racists and US racial discourses can learn from Latin America see Warren and Sue (2011) who discuss issues of race mixing, colour blindness, and multiculturalism.
  12. In January 2019 Denmark implemented a “ghetto-package”. Sentences for crimes are double those for residents living elsewhere, and if a resident of a ghetto-designated area commits a crime, their whole family could be thrown out of their home. These are referred to as “parallel societies” and “black spots on the map” (*The New York Times*, October 8, 2018; *The Guardian*, July 10, 2018). The rhetoric is similar to that of “areas of risk” or “parallel cities” in Brazil where *favelas* are targeted, although with extrajudicial killings and urban militarization there is no formalized double penalization as in the “ghetto-package”. In this case, that refers to areas dominated by poor and largely a population with immigrant origins, criminalizing residents of these areas further.

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