

## Racism and Black Activism in Brazil: a literary and historical review<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

*This presents a review of the history and literature on racism and black activism in Brazil. It is divided into two parts: the first is focused on the way concepts such as racism and anti-racism were explored in the Brazilian academy, the emergence of the racial democracy thesis and its critics, and academic militance. The second follows the development of black activism in Brazil since the proclamation of the Republic (1889) until today, including two periods of authoritarian government. The literature in the field suggests there were three phases of black activism in Brazil. We argue that it is important to consider the role of police violence during the last phase of the black protest. We analyzed documents in which the Unified Black Movement (MNU, in Portuguese), the main organization of the period, mobilized around the agenda of police violence.*

### Resumo

*Este artigo pretende apresentar uma revisão histórica e bibliográfica do racismo e do ativismo negro no Brasil. O trabalho está dividido em duas partes: a primeira é focada na maneira como os conceitos de racismo e anti-racismo foram explorados na academia brasileira, o surgimento da tese da democracia racial e seus críticos e a militância acadêmica. O segundo segue o desenvolvimento do ativismo negro no Brasil desde a proclamação da República (1889) até hoje, incluindo dois períodos de governo autoritário. A literatura no campo sugere a existência de três fases do ativismo negro no Brasil. Nós propomos pensar qual foi lugar da violência policial na última fase do protesto negro. Analisamos alguns documentos em que o Movimento Negro Unificado, principal organização do período, se mobilizou em torno da pauta da violência policial.*

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<sup>1</sup> The word *black* (*negro*, in Portuguese) is used in this article follows the definition of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), for which blacks and browns are considered people of African descent.

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Soon after the Abolition of Slavery in 1888 and the Proclamation of the Republic in 1889, pro-whitening racialist theories and anti-hybridization began to spread in Brazil. These theories were the basis of the new developing state, which believed that Brazil aspired to be a white country (Duarte, 1946, 6; apud 1999b, Maio), and contributed to racist state action. This saw the import of European workers in place of integrational policies for newly freed afro-descendants into the new production system and society in general. According to some authors, these actions flagrantly demonstrate the state of racism in force at the beginning of the Republic (Silverio 2002; Guimarães 2012), which ultimately determined the place that afro-descendants would occupy within the Brazilian social stratification until the present day.

The intellectual debate that accompanied this process in Brazil was strongly impacted by the seminal work of Gilberto Freyre, *Casa Grande & Senzala* (1933). Before this work, the racial debate was managed by influential journalists and members of recently created scientific institutions in the country, such as ethnographical museums, historical and geographic institutes and law and medical colleges, as reported by Lilia Moritz Schwarcz in *O espetáculo das raças: cientistas, instituições e questão racial no Brasil, 1870-1930* (1993). Most of these scientific institutions defended pro-whitening ideas and looked at black organizations at the time with distrust and fear. Freyre revolutionized these ideas with his thesis that miscegenation was the result and basis of a peaceful coexistence between blacks and whites in Brazil which should be encouraged. Freyre's work forged – and provided an academic shield for – the myth of racial democracy.

These intellectual debates occurred in parallel with the development of black organizations for different purposes. Black activism in Brazil went through several phases – a phase of forging associations and mutual aid, a phase of afro-descendant cultural valorization, a phase which radically denounced racism, and a final and current phase, more purposeful, in which activists occupy public spaces to assert their voices and begin to demand reparation policies. Furthermore, these phases seem to have been accompanied by similar debates being conducted in academia regarding racism vs. racialism, racial democracy, and later the deconstruction of the myth of racial democracy.

The latest batch of studies on the issue of race in Brazil no longer deals with the existence of racism (with rare exceptions). Instead, it is concerned with the relevance of affirmative action policies, the universalist versus particularistic political policies debate, or relating the efforts of black activism to establish a government action agenda. Interestingly,

some studies focus on this latest phase of black activism - more purposeful and in which members of the Black Movement occupy prominent public spaces - pointing to a trend of denouncing violence, particularly that of the police, and the use of the term "genocide" to address the issue.

We do not intend to explore the direct correlation between findings within academic debate and the emergence of specific struggles on the agenda of black activists. For such a task intervenient variables should be controlled, such as facts concerning the historical political moment in Brazil (abolition of slavery and absence of inclusive policies, politics for whitening the worker population, authoritarian governments, the role of the press and specially the incipient but important black press developed in several instances) as well as at the international level (World War I, the rise of fascism, World War II, post-War, Cold War, the development of black activism worldwide and in the United States, UN Conferences, etc.). We instead limit ourselves to observe that it is possible to note the existence of a relationship between the knowledge produced in academia and the parallel development of ideas propagated by black activism in all of its phases, with the exception of the last one. Here we argue that the denunciation of a genocide of the black population through the homicide of black youth seems to have instead appeared first amongst black militants and later within universities.

The objective of this work is therefore to contribute to the understanding of the important landmarks in the debate on racism in Brazil and its reflection in black activism, emphasizing when it comes to police violence. We focus on Brazilian literature in order to reconstruct this debate, as most of its contributors were never translated into English, a fact which likely limits options for foreign researchers who may be interested in comparative studies concerning African Diapora and/or the legacy of slavery. It may also work as an introductory article for those who are interested in black activism in Brazil and/or references on racial debates.

### **Academia and Racial Studies in Brazil**

The author possibly most concerned with reconstructing a history on how academia thematized racial studies in Brazil is Guimarães (1999, 1999b, 2003, 2012). The author deals with the controversy over the use of the term "race", explaining that between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the term was used to describe native people of

certain continents, where a phenotype would be these people's hallmark. This concept of race, which related biological traits to alleged psychological, moral and intellectual characteristics, underwrote a series of scientific doctrines that helped to justify racist and genocidal actions of the first half of the twentieth century. These doctrines were named by Appiah (1997, 33; apud Guimarães, 1999b, 147) as racialism, which grounded nationalist ideologies and the creation of nation-states, especially in Europe. After the World War II tragedy, the term "race" fell into disuse in both biology (now using the term "population") and social sciences (which gave preference to the term "ethnicity").

The release of *Casa-grande & Senzala* in 1933, by Gilberto Freyre, had the interesting effect of challenging these racialist doctrines, as it valued miscegenation and inter-ethnic relations, exalting – in a romantic way to some – the contributions of Africans and their descendants to Brazilian national culture. The book also highlighted the harmonious coexistence among whites, afro-descendants, and mestizos in Brazil, supposedly the result of a greater tolerance towards Portuguese Catholicism in relation to other religious manifestations and a "more humanized" slavery model (Maio, 1999). Thus, Freyre (1933) and his supporters<sup>41</sup> challenged the growing intellectual elite – particularly from São Paulo and Rio – which, still strongly influenced by racialist theories, saw in Freyre's work a threat to the construction of the nation they desired, which superficially was white and which culturally and intellectually followed in Europe's footsteps.

Freyre's work had an important role in discrediting racialist doctrines ruling Brazil during the First Republic (1889 – 1930) as well as valuing African cultural heritage. Nevertheless, his work encouraged the idea that there would exist some kind of "racial paradise" in Brazil, a rare and peaceful coexistence between whites and afro-descendants, which could be proven by the high degree of miscegenation. This idea would later be subject to heavy criticism from researchers and activists alike, who would argue that Freyre's idea of racial democracy actually ignores and perpetuates structural and invisible racism (Bastide & Fernandes (1955); Fernandes (1962); Nascimento (1978); do Vale Silva (1978), Haselbalg (1979), Haselbalg & Do Vale Silva (1988)), inherited from slavery and translated into social inequalities (Guimarães 2012, Silvério 2003). Ironically, the first and sharpest

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<sup>4</sup> According to Maio (1999b), Black Movement leaders, such as José Correia Leite, as well as northeastern writers, for example Raquel de Queiroz and José Lins do Rêgo, were Gilberto Freyre supporters.

critics came from research developed within a UNESCO Project, attracted to and implemented in Brazil as a result of the racial peace propagandized by the works of Freyre.

### **The UNESCO Project**

The international context of the mid-1940s, strongly marked by the consequences of World War II, required the creation of transnational bodies of mediation and conflict resolution. The Organization of the United Nations (UN) and its leading agency, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), emerged with the explicit aim of solving the problems arising from the impact of racism, which culminated in the Holocaust. Motivated by the Nazi-fascism disaster and the need to prove that co-existence was possible, UNESCO decided to fund a major research on the foundations of peaceful coexistence, a study of environments where different people were able to live in a non-confrontational way. The organization saw Brazil as one of the countries which supposedly best equated the coexistence of different racial groups. At the time, it was considered a "great socio-anthropological laboratory" and was thus selected for observation (Maio 1999; Praxedes 2012).

The UNESCO project was developed between 1950 and 1952 in the states of Bahia, Pernambuco, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The Joaquim Nabuco Institute in Recife, recently created by Gilberto Freyre, was involved in the research following a request from Freyre himself, who was beginning to see his thesis criticized in newly developed Social Science courses in the country:

Gilberto Freyre lives in the early [19]50s a paradoxical situation: while his interpretation of Brazil, as a country with civilization lessons to offer to mankind, is an inspiring source for the anti-racist policy of UNESCO, it becomes an intellectual speech (Luso-tropicalism) legitimizing the Portuguese colonial empire (cf. Thomas, 1996) (Maio, 1999b, 112/113).

To UNESCO's surprise, the four reports elaborated within the project pointed to the existence of a hierarchical social structure which restricted social mobility for afro-descendants and mestizos, setting the existence of prejudice and racial discrimination (Praxedes 2012). However, this prejudice had no legal support, and said inequalities did not

generate any permanent climate of tension nor could they be translated into any triggered conflict.

The UNESCO project had an important role in initiating a series of systematic investigations into race relations in Brazil, a field of knowledge previously dominated by writers, journalists and essayists. It represented the first pieces of research on the subject with methodological and scientific rigor. By the time it was over, the project had deconstructed the idea that Brazil was an exemplary case of harmonious coexistence between races. It had demystified the myth of racial democracy and ended with the romantic view of miscegenation as examples which illustrated the absence of segregation and discrimination in the country. According to Praxedes (2012), a report from Roger Bastide, who was responsible for the research in São Paulo alongside Florestan Fernandes, summarizes the general conclusion of researchers engaged in the project:

For Roger Bastide, Brazilian society limits or prevents afro-descendant upward mobility without institutional segregation. Bastide considers that 'white people defend their dominant position by indirect but effective means' (Bastide, 1955, 149). When comparing Brazil with the United States in respect of existing forms of social discrimination, the author concludes that a well-established 'color line' in the US made the upward mobility of afro-descendants easier compared to the Brazilian society which, while non-supportive of institutionalized segregation, lives, as we have seen, with numerous practical and covert forms of discrimination and restrictions that prevent afro-descendants from assuming the most prestigious and better paid positions (Praxedes, 2012, 211/212).

Despite the importance of the UNESCO project for race relation studies in Brazil, the deconstruction of the racial democracy myth remained a challenge for the academic field. The myth was still present in common sense throughout the subsequent period, which corresponded with the military dictatorship. Speaking of racial inequalities during this period necessarily implied "being racist": since differences between afro-descendants and whites were not allowed, they could be expressed only in the form of inequalities between social classes (Guimarães 1999b). The "race" category was considered a foreign invention, disconnected from the Brazilian context, and its use would be characterized as "racism". Thus, an anti-racist ideology was being forged in Brazil, which paradoxically meant the denial of racial inequality as a social phenomenon. The apparent confusion between anti-

racialism and anti-racism seems to have contributed to the reproduction of social inequalities among races and continued racism in Brazil (Guimarães 1999b).

### **Race and Inequalities: the studies of Nelson do Valle e Silva and Carlos Hasenbalg**

From the late 1970s, the racial democracy myth, still in force both in society and in the state, began to greatly disturb the afro-descendant population. Some specific events, the focus of this next section, particularly contributed to this, understanding the term "race" as just the opportunity to reaffirm differences and a position against racial discrimination:

This tension between an anti-racist ideology that correctly denied the biological existence of races, and a national ideology that denied the existence of racism and racial discrimination, eventually became unbearable and unsustainable for all the facts (Guimarães, 1999b, 153).

To prove the existence of racism, it was necessary to rescue the term race, strip it from its racist content, and assign it with the social guise it needed. In other words, it was necessary to affirm the existence of racial differences so that racism could be evidenced – after all, it is not possible to fight something which does not exist. Otherwise, according to Guimarães, "if afro-descendants consider that races do not exist, they will eventually find that they do not entirely exist as people, as they are partly perceived and classified by others as a race" (Guimarães, 1999b, p. 154). Until then, to deny the existence of race was a strategy used by the dominant white class to ensure their continued privileges. It needed to be broken.

During this time, the studies of Nelson do Valle e Silva (1978) and Carlos Hasenbalg (1979) were also released. Do Valle e Silva was a Brazilian economist who defended his PhD thesis in the University of Michigan under the title "Black-white income differentials: Brazil, 1960" in 1978 – in Portuguese, his work was published as *O preço da cor: diferenciais raciais na distribuição de renda no Brasil* (1979). Hasenbalg was an Argentinian who defended his PhD thesis in Berkeley under the name "Race Relations in Post-Abolition Brazil: The Smooth Preservation of Racial Inequalities", which was later published in book form in Portuguese in 1979 as *Discriminação e Desigualdades Raciais no Brasil*. Together, the authors produced a

seminal work, *Estrutura Social, Mobilidade e Raça* (Hasenbalg & Do Valle e Silva, 1988), and several other works written in close partnership were released by both authors during the 1990's.

The work of these two researchers may be considered a landmark in racial studies in Brazil. Using several socio-economic indicators, they showed that the color of an individual is a very strong factor in determining their condition of poverty and its reproduction. With this they were able to demonstrate that racial inequalities were not only a matter of social position, but that disadvantages in the socio-economic and geographical dimensions are systematic and have a cumulative effect (Do Valle e Silva, 1978; Hasenbalg, 1979; Hasenbalg & Do Valle e Silva, 1988; Hasenbalg & Do Valle e Silva, 1990).

Using a quantitative methodology, the research proved that social inequalities in Brazil "had a clear racial component, which could not be reduced to educational, income or class differences and, critically, could also not be diluted by a color gradient" (Guimarães, 1999b, 154). The "color gradient" issue is an important finding of these studies: although it was commonly acknowledged that a possible whitening of the population could be translated into better opportunities for social integration, Hasenbalg and Do Valle e Silva concluded that while there was a subtle difference between the conditions of non-whites (blacks and browns), the gap between them and whites was much larger. There existed, therefore, a great polarization between whites and non-whites, regardless of the color gradient of the non-whites. This led the two researchers to prefer a combination of these two classifications – black and brown – into a single category: non-whites or blacks (Hasenbalg & Do Valle e Silva, 1988; Guimarães, 1999b).

These studies seem to have appeared at a crucial time for the Black Movement's mobilization. As we shall see, they legitimized the importance of re-adopting the concept of "race" to combat racism and also stimulated afro-descendants to reaffirm their African roots, regardless of their skin tone (Guimarães, 2002). The racial democracy myth, still widespread, masked the fact that the alleged absence of racism in terms of interpersonal relationships was coupled with the existence of racism at institutional and structural levels (Silvério 2002, Guimarães 2012). This type of racism, in place since the abolition of slavery through regressive policies, prevented the equal access of afro-descendants to goods and services, pushing them into a subclass and forging the notion that afro-descendants were uneducated, unemployed and homeless as a result of being poor and afro-descendants. Racism was thus subsumed within a characterization of class and not race prejudice

(Guimarães, 2012), relegating blacks to a subordinate position even in situations where national indicators showed significant improvement (Henriques, 2001).<sup>5</sup>

### **Academic activism and affirmative action**

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was a state of confluence between activism and academia. With the period of military dictatorship (1964-1985), afro-descendant researchers began to feel more comfortable denouncing racist situations in their academic research, giving visibility to the anti-racist efforts through the production of knowledge (Silva, 2010). The growing amount of research run by afro-descendant men and women engendered links among researchers in both academic and governmental environments, which strengthened this research agenda as well as proposals for inclusive policies for the black population. During this period, several academic events seeking to bring together afro-descendant researchers took place. However, the most important and enduring of these took place only in 2000 with the Afro-Descendant Researchers Congress (COPENE), which has since taken place every two years and leveraged the creation of the Associação Brasileira de Pesquisadores Negros (ABPN). Since the third COPENE, a network of Afro-Brazilian Studies centres began to network and pressure the Ministry of Education for affirmative action policies in Brazilian universities (Silva, 2010).

The emergence of affirmative action policies in the academic debate has been – and still is – the subject of much controversy. The area that perhaps generates the most debate among intellectuals, as well as the Brazilian press, is that of public universities quotas (Silvério, 2002, 2003; Guimarães, 2003b; Lima, 2010). As with any affirmative action policy, the principle of quotas is that they set the standard for which ethnic and racial differences are recognized in a nation. This is already a subject of debate by those intellectuals who still believe and defend the myth of racial democracy. For them, Brazil is seen as one population, regardless of their social condition and/or race, for which universal policies would be fairer (Silvério, 2002). Thus, punitive policies, such as those that criminalize racism, as well as cultural policies of recognition, are well accepted by society as well as these intellectuals, since the first focuses on “deviant individual behaviors” and the second on cultural heritage of Africans for developing the Brazilian nation. However, redistributive-natured affirmative

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<sup>5</sup> The study by Henriques (2001) is quite impressive, especially in relation to education. It measures the level of education of afro-descendants and white people over the 1990s and concludes that although there was significant improvement for both groups, the difference between them remained constant. The curve was up in both cases, but the points separating them did not suffer any changes.

action policies whose goal is to promote structural changes in the distribution of opportunities between afro-descendants and whites (Lima, 2010), cause visible discontent amongst white intellectuals, who defend numerous arguments to deconstruct the need for quotas. Yet at the end of the day, this leaves one thing clear: that there is an alternative agenda at play which is that of continuing to ensure their own privileges in a segregated society (Silvério, 2003).

According to Munanga (2007), the most common arguments raised against quotas are that: a) it is unknown who exactly the afro-descendants in Brazil are; b) affirmative action policies are being abandoned in the US; c) quotas are not intended for indigenous people; d) quotas could harm the professional image of afro-descendants who have benefited from it, and; e) quotas could lead to a deterioration in the quality of education. The author challenges these arguments by showing that in countries where quotas were implemented, it was possible to generate social mobility without undermining the professional image of its beneficiaries. In addition, the discussion on the ease of distortion of color statement (which is based on self-attribution) for obtaining quotas could be a risk. Yet, further research could verify in a few years whether the quotas have benefited whites more than afro-descendants, which would then be the case for reviewing the policy.

Guimarães (2002) shares this idea: public power must stick to the results. If, at the end of the process, the universities quotas policy has been efficient and ensured access to afro-descendants and greater social mobility in subsequent years, the policy can be considered successful (Guimarães, 2002). On the issue of degradation in the quality of education, research shows that, even if students enter desired courses with grades lower than those not using of quotas, the quota students have similar or better performance than non-users of the quota (IPEA, 2008). In brief, the performance of quota-users and non-users tend to equalize after some time.

Another common argument is that quotas generate more segregation and that only universal policies should be applied in the field of education. Silvério (2003) states that this argument disregards the role of "race" in the allocation of individuals in lower roles in the labor market, subsuming racial inequality to social inequality, at a time when there is already a significant amount of research demonstrating that in Brazil "poverty has a color" and that it is no accident. Also, according to the author, the social blindness of some intellectuals as well as the media does not recognize that racialization is already in place: a quick survey among the most prestigious positions in society is enough. The elite is white,

and quotas would only “deracialize” the elite, making it multiracial and contributing to the deconstruction of afro-descendants' negative stereotypes.

Despite the reasonable amount of research assessing the relevance or otherwise of affirmative actions, particularly in the area of education, there are very few studies assessing the impact of these policies in Brazil. This is because quotas are very recent and it is necessary that beneficiaries are already graduated for a few years before any changes in their respective trajectories can be evaluated. Leaving the area of affirmative action in education, Ramos (2014) conducted an evaluation on the appearance of the Juventude Viva program. Here, he highlighted the integration of black youth activism and the importance of this particular area of the black movement with academic debate, as a means to develop a government agenda for the reduction of black youth homicides.

Importantly, and parallel to the discussion of quotas and their implementation, the field of academic black activism demonstrates further developments. These can especially be seen in the area of social sciences where several studies on Public Health have begun to discuss black population specifics and demand specific policies for this population, drawing attention to the fact that social inequalities separating afro-descendants and whites are also reflected in the black population's health (Werneck et al, 2000; Werneck 2001, 2005; Araújo et al, 2010; Lopes, 2005). This literature highlights the importance of breaking down health data by color so that targeted policies can be developed (Araújo et al, 2014; Soares Filho, 2012).

### **The three phases of the black movement in Brazil and one persistent issue**

Capturing a definition of the Black Movement in Brazil within the literature at hand is somewhat difficult. Some writers and activists work with a broader definition, suggesting that even recreational associations, cultural movements, charities or religious entities could be incorporated to what is conventionally called the Black movement in Brazil (Santos, 1994, 157; apud Domingues, 2007), as they offered alternatives on sociability, tolerance and even protection to runaway slaves (Moura, 1943, 49; Silva, 2010). Others prefer working with a more specifically political definition that takes into account movements mobilized around the race issue.

This would be the case of Domingues (2007), who divides the black movement into three phases: from the First Republic to the Estado Novo (1889-1937), the Second Republic

to the Military Dictatorship (1945-1964) and Redemocratization (1978-2000). This division, although it does not appear so schematically in other papers, is present within the work of other authors who have sought to reconstruct the Black Movement history in Brazil (Guimarães, 2003; Silva, 2010, Silverio, 2002). Domingues also proposes a potential fourth phase covering the early twenty-first century, in which the activism of the black movement concentrated on denouncing violent and lethal police actions, as can be seen, for example, in the discourses often found in Hip Hop productions that emerged in this period.

### **First Phase: the Frente Negra Brasileira (“Brazilian Black Front”)**

The Black Movement's first phase begins with the Proclamation of the Republic (1889), which occurred shortly after the Abolition of Slavery (1888). The abolition of slavery was not accompanied by policies to include these freed individuals in the labor market, tackling neither the still fragile institutional apparatus of the Republic, nor the influence of the scientific racism doctrines or "whitening theory", which led employers to give preference to European immigrants (Andrews, 1991, 32; apud Domingues, 2007). The fact is that newly freed afro-descendants were in a very marginalized situation both from the material point of view as well as the symbolic, since their cultural and religious manifestations were also socially devalued.

During this time, various black racial mobilization entities arose in Brazil, such as recreational clubs, 'colored' workers associations, communities, etc. In principle, these organizations had no political purpose. They provided a space for sociability and mutual aid, both material and otherwise. This stage even saw the development of what is usually called a "black press", a set of papers written by afro-descendants with content aimed at the black population of the largest cities in the country. In 1931, the foundation of the Frente Negra Brasileira (FNB) took place in São Paulo, the first organization to bring together members throughout Brazil through established "branches" in several regions.

Besides the number of members, the great advantage of the FNB over entities which preceded it was the fact that it had a deliberated agenda of political demands (Domingues, 2007), including the idea that a second abolition was necessary (Guimarães, 2012). The organization, led by Arlindo Veiga dos Santos, even became a political party which ran for presidential elections, presenting an authoritarian and nationalist political program, heavily influenced by European Nazi-Fascism. The organization, which had a school, a football

team, and even medical care for its members, was made extinct in 1937 with the installation of the authoritarian period of the Estado Novo (1937-1945).

Some authors place the FNB as the reproducer of values imposed by the whitening ideology, expressing the aspirations of middle class afro-descendants (Barbosa, 1998, 12; apud Silva, 2010), who valued miscegenation and assimilationism (Domingues, 2007). Still, the FNB played an important role in black mobilization around an anti-racist effort, already pointing to education as a way for ethno-racial inclusion (Silva, 2010).

### **The Second Phase: the Teatro Experimental Negro (“The Black Experimental Theater”)**

The second phase of the Black Movement mobilization took place in the Second Republic, a democratic period from 1945 to 1964. Organizations that emerged during this period presented a more defined denunciation of racial discrimination than the previous phase. The black population was still very socially marginalized, another factor which incited these organizations, although this meant they were smaller and more diffuse than before (Domingues, 2007).

The most important grouping of this period, in political terms, was the Teatro Experimental Negro (TEN), founded in Rio de Janeiro in 1944 and led by Abdias do Nascimento, an ex-military and former member of the Frente Negra Nacional and Integralismo.<sup>6</sup> Although the concerns of this group were initially of a cultural nature, with the objective of forming an all-black theater group, TEN gained other contours over time. It launched a newspaper, offered literacy courses, organized congresses and competitions, founded cultural institutions, organized and attended public debates and clearly defended civil rights and the creation of an anti-discrimination legislation for afro-descendants in Brazil (Domingues, 2007).

Until the military coup of 1964, when its activities ceased, the trajectory of the TEN and its leaders was unstable. During their twenty years of activities they changed and consolidated various positions within their structure. They started as an artistic group that claimed the recognition of African heritage ended as an activist movement which supported afro-descendants and denounced racial inequalities. In the beginning, they flirted with the idea of racial democracy, but soon abandoned it as they realized inequalities could not be

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<sup>6</sup> Participation in Integralismo, which was a nationalist and anti-imperialist political group, was convenient until the end of the 1930's, when its militants adopted racist ideas from Hitlerist Germany (Custódio, 2011).

solved by social integration and racial miscegenation alone. Words such as “resistance” and “revolt” were gradually incorporated into the discourse of Abdias do Nascimento (Macedo, 2006; Guimarães, 2006), an important figure who assembled black activists around him and around the TEN (Silva, 2010).<sup>7</sup>

Abdias do Nascimento went to the United States in 1968 during what he called a self-exile, and there he stayed until 1981. Custódio (2011) explains that this period was an intense one in terms of black and cultural activism and that Nascimento left Brazil as an artist and returned as a political actor. It does not mean that the Nascimento of the TEN and the TEN itself might not be considered political actors. What Custódio (2011) explores is that Nascimento's experience in the USA – including the events he participated in and the contacts he developed within American black activism – definitively altered his discourse, something visible within his production at the time (Custódio, 2011).

Some of the developments visible in Nascimento's post-exile discourse include a radicalization towards the myth of racial democracy and the incorporation of elements of pan-africanism (Macedo, 2006; Custódio 2011). Interestingly, Nascimento was the first author to thematize Brazil's attempt to physically eliminate the afro-descendants of its territory in his work *O Genocídio do Negro Brasileiro* (1978), written during exile. In this work, the author highlights the process of miscegenation encouraged by the government as a means of whitening the country and completely eliminating the black population from its territory. This idea of a “genocide” perpetrated by the state against the black population would later be reframed by the black activism of the 2000's (Ramos, 2014), as we shall see below. Not by chance, this publication was re-edited in 2002.

Abdias do Nascimento had also began a political career upon his return from the United States. Affiliated to the Worker's Democratic Party (PDT), a center-left Brazilian party, he helped construct an agenda for the Black Movement inside the party, ran a mandate as a federal deputy (1983-1987), and was elected senator of the state of Rio de Janeiro in 1991. He had also assumed political positions in the government of the State in Rio de Janeiro, particularly during the mandate of Leonel Brizola, a well-known center-left Brazilian politician. He died in 2011 after receiving several prizes and homages for his contribution to the fight against racial discrimination.

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<sup>7</sup> Domingues (2007) still classifies TEN as an "integrationist" organization, as opposed to FNB, which was "assimilationist" and MNU, which came later and was considered "differentialist".

### **The third phase: the Movimento Negro Unificado (MNU) (“Unified Black Movement”)**

The third phase of the Black Movement was preceded by a period which actively silenced protests. Besides repression from the dictatorship itself, the political right continued to adhere to the racial democracy myth, according to which there was no such thing as racism in Brazil, while the political left rejected anti-discrimination, since it divided workers and weakened the struggle for socialism. Despite this, various cultural organizations emerged during the dictatorship period. On the political arena, the late 1970s saw the emergence of the Movimento Negro Unificado (“Unified Black Movement”), greatly influenced by the struggle for black civil rights and its leading figures in the USA.

The movement arose from the forces of several existing movements and organizations, who united around a public act of repudiation and protest triggered by the death of the commerce worker Robson Silveira da Luz, an afro-descendant and family man killed by police in Guaianases, a district of São Paulo. This act, which took place in July 1978 and was attended by around 2,000 people, rearticulated black activism. From here on it began to work on urging Afro-Brazilians to join the organization and fight in public spaces against racial oppression, social and economic marginalization, and police violence against afro-descendants (Domingues, 2007; Silva, 2010). The MNU had a program of action aimed at the anti-racist struggle on a national scale, with the purpose of strengthening the movement’s political power. Part of their political agenda was to demystify racial democracy, encourage afro-descendant men and women to reaffirm their roots and appreciate African culture (music, clothes, hair style, dances), radically affirming the need for actions aiming for racial equality (Guimarães, 2012).

It is worth noting that this phase also marked the addition of black women to the political mobilization, when specific gender-related demands for the black population began to appear (Silva, 2010). The Movimento de Mulheres Negras (“Black Women Movement”) was particularly active in the area of health. More specifically, this concerned reproductive health, an issue introduced to the militancy program by afro-descendant women (Lima, 2010) such as Jurema Werneck, an afro-descendant physician, director of the NGO Criola, and author of several papers on the subject.

Land issues related to quilombo<sup>8</sup> communities also began to take shape at this stage, as well as the promotion of academic meetings to discuss work on racial issues by afro-descendant graduate students and researchers. This culminated in the organization of the Congresso de Pesquisadores Negros (COPENE), the creation of the Associação Brasileira de Pesquisadores Negros (ABPN), and the emergence of Afro-Brazilian studies centers in various universities across the country (Silva, 2010). In the 1980s, afro-descendant scholars were commonly MNU militants too. Here it is important to note that the relationship between these academic centers and the agencies of Ministry of Education was responsible for creating the Uniafro Program, aimed at promoting affirmative actions in Brazilian public universities, which were under the coordination of these centers.

### **Police violence: a persistent issue**

The humiliation suffered by Manuel do Nascimento, 80 years old, at Lojas Americanas, in Porto Alegre, on November 24, the death of Marcelo de Jesus, are not isolated facts; spectacular facts of everyday violence that victimize black workers in Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Porto Alegre - and across the country, humiliating and killing blacks in the indifferent eyes of society to the point of constituting themselves as "normal" facts.

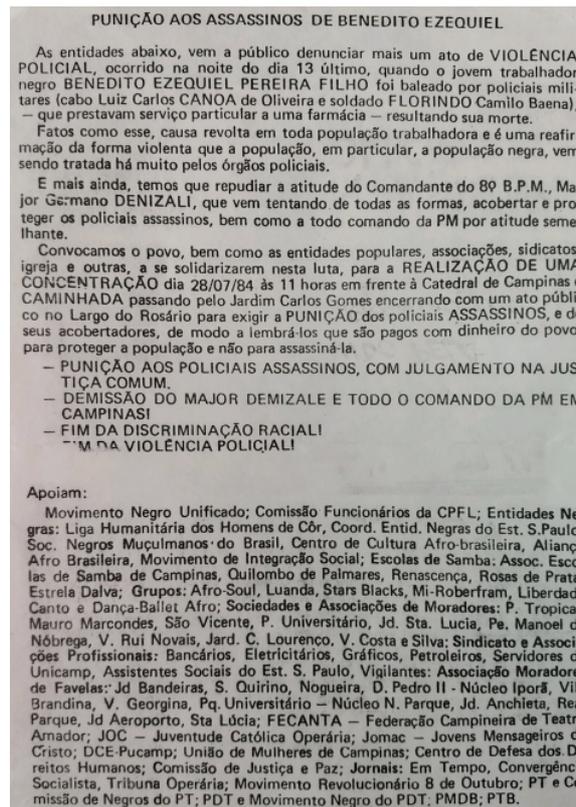
Milton Barbosa, 1989. *Racial Violence in Brazil*.  
Private Collection of Milton Barbosa.

Police violence was at the center of the reformulation of Brazilian black movements from 1978. This moment is a milestone in this story as it marks the reorganization of black movements after a long period of little action, due to the pressures experienced in the military regime. On July 7 of that year, the founding act of the Black Movement against Racial Discrimination, which would later be called the Unified Black Movement, was held. The act, carried out on the stairs of the São Paulo Municipal Theater, was marked by protest against the death of Robson Silveira da Luz. Robson was a street salesman and was taken to the police station in the neighborhood of Guaianases on suspicion of stealing fruit. He died in the facilities of this police station after undergoing interrogation and confessing nothing, under torture.

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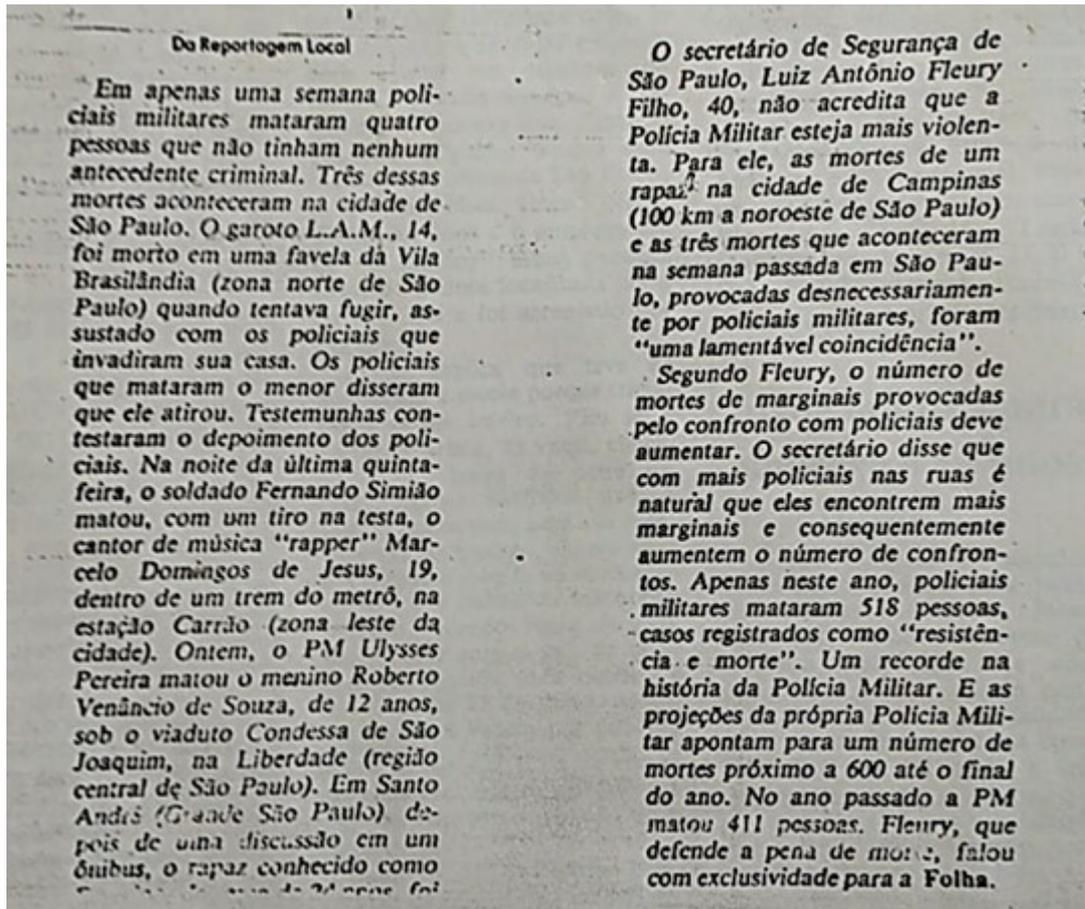
<sup>8</sup> Small hidden villages formed by runaway slaves, or descendants of afro-descendant slaves from the period of the sugar cane mills. They exist until today and their inhabitants fight for recognized ownership of the land.

Years later, new mobilization took place with similar contours. The State Council of Participation and Development of the Black Community of the State of São Paulo mobilized for the conviction of two police officers involved in the murder of Benedito Ezequiel Pereira Filho on July 13, 1984. The police corporal Luiz Carlos Canoas de Oliveira shot the young black man in the mouth after a disagreement between them, in the context of a police approach in which the young man had refused to show documents.



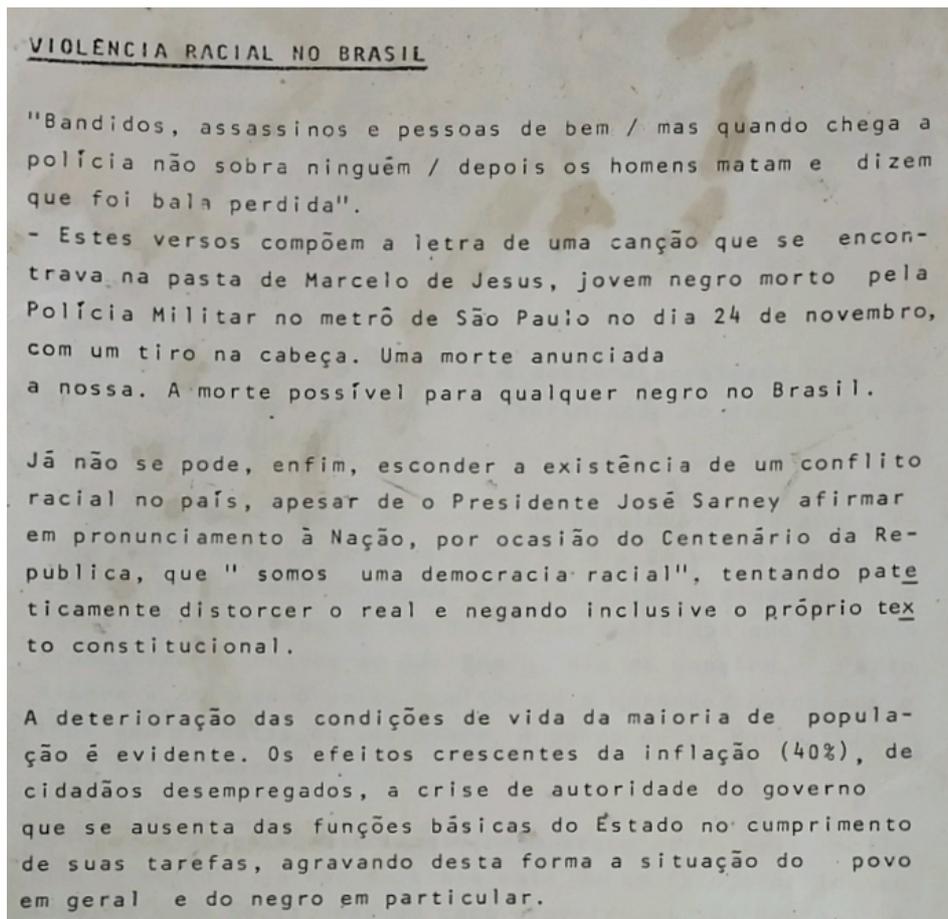
Source: Personal collection of Reginaldo Bispo

Five years after Benedito Ezequiel's death, the rapper Marcelo de Jesus, a 19-year-old black man, was murdered by a military policeman on the red line subway in the state capital. The young man had quarreled with the policeman, when he was returning home from a show.



Folha de São Paulo 28 de nov. de 1989 "Fleury diz que PM vai matar mais este ano",  
Caderno Cidades, D.3. Personal Collection of Milton Barbosa.

The Black Movement turned against the police, denouncing Marcelo's death, under the term Racial Violence, and no longer racial discrimination, as the document below tells us.



Source: Personal Collection of Milton Barbosa

The 1990s were marked by the systematic denunciation of daily police violence against blacks in rap lyrics by various groups, such as Pavilion Nine, DMN Group, Racionais MC's. The decade also marked the denunciation of the Candelária slaughter, which took place in the city of Rio de Janeiro. On July 23, 1993, eight homeless boys were murdered while sleeping in the Praça da Igreja da Candelária, located in the center of the state capital. The boys' killers were a group of policemen, who would be "avenging" the youth *who stoned* a police car some days earlier.

Lecturer Mario José Josino, a 29-year-old black man, was shot dead in the head by the leader of the police operation known as Favela Naval, name of the community of Diadema (SP) where the case occurred. He was in the back seat of a car, along with his friends, leaving the place where they had been beaten and tortured. The shooting was filmed by an amateur cameraman who recorded this and other barbaric scenes of abuse of authority. The images

were disseminated in a large article by the most important Brazilian newscast, in March 1997. The controversy won the world and the black movement denounced the death of Mario José Josino as a case of racial violence.

**REAJA À VIOLÊNCIA RACIAL**  
*PELO FIM DA IMPUNIDADE DA POLÍCIA MILITAR*

As cenas "monstruosas e chocantes" que as redes de televisão tem exibido estes dias, é rotina na vida do trabalhador pobre e negro de qualquer média ou grande cidade deste país.

Este tipo de violência é respaldado por uma antiga lei do tempo da Ditadura Militar que garante aos PM's julgamento na Justiça Militar, que entre 6.000 (seis mil) processos apenas 50 (cinquenta) são julgados.

A morte de **Mário José Josino**, trabalhador e pai de família, de 30 anos, na Favela Naval, em Diadema, é movida pelo mesmo motivo que levou os PM's a executarem **Oswaldo Manoel da Silva**, comerciante, também negro, em Santo André, assim como as chacinas da Candelária, Vigário Geral, Carandiru, Eldorado dos Carajás, Corumbiara e outros.

Estas chacinas, fazem parte da política de exclusão das elites racistas brasileiras, sobre a maioria da população negra e pobre deste país, um projeto de genocídio do negro brasileiro, implementado através da esterilização em massa de mulheres negras, alto índice de mortalidade infantil, morte por fome, doenças infecto-contagiosas, morte por proliferação da cocaína e do crack na juventude negra, ação de grupos de extermínio e violência policial extrema.

A política que gera a concentração de renda, o desemprego, o sucateamento do serviço público - hospitais, escolas, creches, e outros - tem como solução a violência da polícia sobre a população negra e pobre deste país.

É necessário reagirmos a esta violência e pelo fim da impunidade.

Justiça para os policiais que torturam e assassinam.

Eles devem ser julgados pela Justiça Comum.

O **Movimento Negro Unificado - MNU**, convoca a juventude negra e todos que lutam pelo fim da violência e do racismo, para participar do:

**ATO PELO FIM DA IMPUNIDADE DA POLÍCIA MILITAR**

DIA: 08 DE ABRIL - TERÇA FEIRA  
HORARIO: 17:30 HORAS  
LOCAL: PRAÇA RAMOS - EM FRENTE AO MAPPIN

**MOVIMENTO NEGRO UNIFICADO - MNU-SP**  
**COMISSÃO DE DIREITOS HUMANOS - CÂMARA MUNICIPAL - SP**

Source: Personal Collection of Reginaldo Bispo

In 2004, several organizations of the Black Movement mobilized against the death of Flávio Santana at the age of 24. The young black man was a dentist and was murdered by police officers who were looking for a car thief. Flavio was shot by police who say they found him suspiciously. The police said they had found a wallet in the dentist's pocket that connected him to a robbery, and claimed that Flavio had resisted arrest. This version of events, however, was dropped because forensics found no trace of gunpowder on Flavio's

hands. A few days after the crime, the robbery victim revealed that she was pressured by police to identify the dentist as the robber.<sup>9</sup>



Source: Personal Collection Milton Barbosa

In 2008, the National Black Youth Forum promoted the campaign “Fight against Black Youth Genocide”, which was boosted by the event of the 1<sup>st</sup> National Black Youth Meeting and was quickly echoed in the public sphere, having been an important item on the agenda of the 1<sup>st</sup> National Conference of Youth Public Policies, in 2008, which was promoted by the National Youth Council of the Federal Government. Such a campaign has penetrated other spheres such as national and international Non-Governmental Organizations, political parties and other levels of government, just as Black Movement

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.afropress.com/post.asp?tipo=fotos&id=9965>, consulted in 11th, jul.2017.

organizations have resumed the Genocide agenda. The difference for this new moment is the direct association between black youth homicides and police violence (Ramos, 2014).

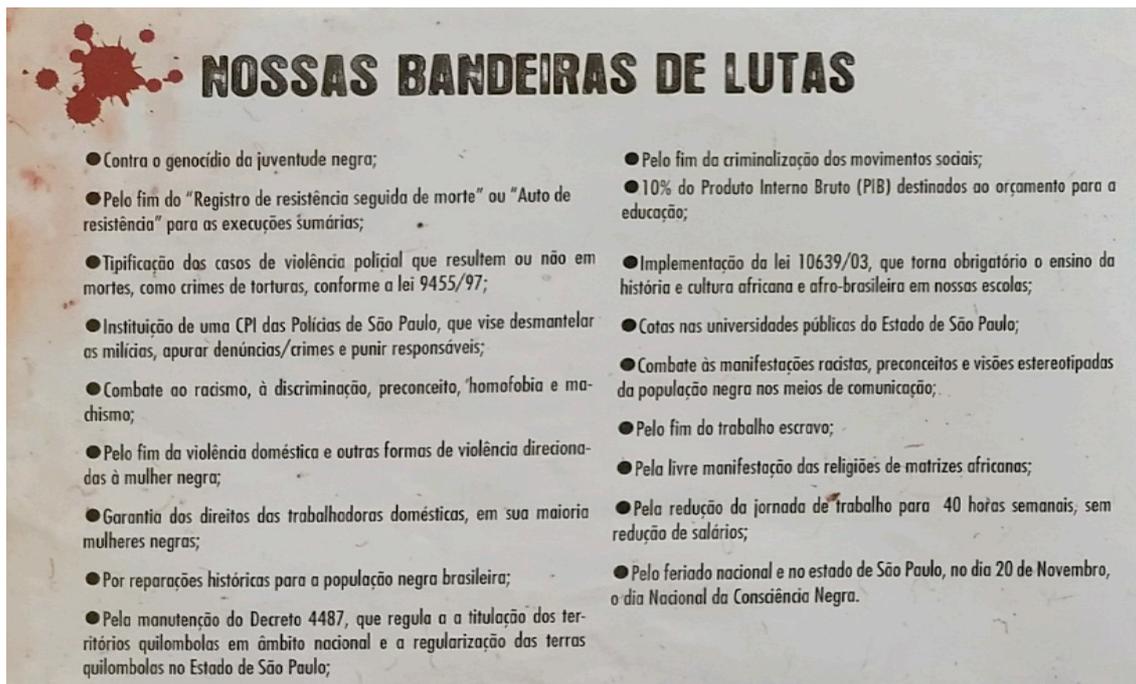
At this moment, mobilizations against police violence intersect with campaigns against the “Black Youth Genocide”. In 2011, a more than 500-page dossier was handed to the Legislative Assembly's Human Rights Commission and a request for the establishment of a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry to investigate human rights violations by the São Paulo State Military Police. The document was signed by more than “70 entities of the social movement, and especially of the Black Movement”,<sup>10</sup> organized around the Poor and Peripheral Black Youth Counter Genocide Committee. Such action resulted from protests against the murder of two delivery men. Alexandre Menezes dos Santos, 25, beaten to death by police officers in front of his mother and younger brother, at the door of his house, in Cidade Ademar neighborhood, in the state capital. Eduardo Pinheiro dos Santos, killed on April 10, 2010 also beaten by death.

Eduardo Luís Pinheiro dos Santos, then 30 years old, engaged in a discussion with three other people on April 9th. After the police arrived, the four men were taken to a battalion near Casa Verde Avenue, where it all began. On arrival at the battalion, Eduardo asked the *military police* why he had not been taken to a police station and, failing to receive an answer, revolted. The other three men were released, while Eduardo was arbitrarily detained and tortured by more than 10 police officers. His body was found at dawn the next day at the corner of Rua Voluntários da Pátria and Avenida Brás Leme.

Thus, from 2007, “genocide” will appear among the themes of black movements on a recurring and sustained basis. There is a centrality of this issue in spaces of social movements, such as in the 1st National Black Youth Meeting, in the National Youth Conference, in public policy formulations and various other moments. In 2011, given the episodes of police violence that were occurring and gaining visibility from that time, the idea of genocide appears associated with the police expedient and high police lethality, in a pamphlet focused on the VIII March of the Black Conscience, November 20th, 2011.

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<sup>10</sup> [www.ptalesp.org.br/noticia/print/?id=2489](http://www.ptalesp.org.br/noticia/print/?id=2489), accessed on 11 Jul 2017.



Source: VIII Marcha da Consciência Negra, 2011. Personal Collection of Milton Barbosa.

The repeated occurrence of episodes like this throughout the four decades of black movements leads us to question the role of police violence in its history. It is worth remembering that these occurrences are accompanied by variations in the intensity of mobilization and variations in the way police violence is classified, named and publicly expressed in protests. The recurrence of these mobilizations seems to have a low degree of continuity between them since the years in which Brazil underwent a process of democratization, marked by the social upheavals of 1978 – as a strike by ABC metallurgists and the Black Movement reorganization with the creation of the Unified Black Movement and pressures for political openness.

It can be said that during the period of democratization there were a number of competing themes in the mobilization and articulation of black movements, such as work, education, the valorization of black culture and the fight against racial discrimination. Most of these themes have gained a positive agenda and a place in the public policy arena over the last democratic period, which ended in 2016, be it with quotas in the public service, the requirement to include color in public registers, the obligation to teach for racial ethnic relations, or socio-racial quotas in higher education institutions. As much as police violence has always been a problem for blacks, as much as “staying alive”, we cannot say that since

the reorganization of the Black Movement, there has been a strategic agenda to address violence.

Perhaps the biggest emblem of this persistent problem and the way in which it is connected with other problems is the episode of the murder of Marielle Franco on March 1st, 2018, in Rio de Janeiro. Marielle was a resident of the Rio de Janeiro's Favela da Maré, held her first term as councilor for the Socialism and Freedom Party, was black, lesbian, a sociologist and her political platform was the struggle for the visibility of political minorities and the protection of human rights. According to the police, the retired police officer Ronnie Lessa fired at the councilwoman, while former military officer Elcio Vieira de Queiroz drove the car that chased her. Marielle and her driver, Anderson Pedro Mathias Gomes, died on the spot.



Source: This image appeared on a Facebook live broadcast by the newspaper *Brasil 247* on 30 April 2018. [www.facebook.com/Brasil247/videos/2020419544677709/](https://www.facebook.com/Brasil247/videos/2020419544677709/) Accessed on 10 Dec 2019

There were immediate mobilizations to demand justice, all of which were expressed in terms of black movement's language of the time, referring to black genocide and police violence. Months after her death, March 14th entered the Rio de Janeiro State Official Calendar as "Marielle Franco Day – Day to Fight Black Female Genocide" (State Law 8054/2018).

### The genocide of the black youth in Brazil: the emergence of a new agenda

Domingues (2007) suggests a fourth phase of the movement, related to the hip-hop and rap movement. While he sees this phase as having no clear political platform, other authors characterize this new phase as more purposeful (Guimarães, 2003; Lima, 2010; Silverio, 2002; 2003), highlighting that it was precisely after the 2000s that the movement not only saw its main demands turned into policies, but began actively participating in their formulation (Lima, 2010).

The two events often cited as turning points in this period “between phases” are the *Marcha Zumbi dos Palmares* on November 20, 1995 – from which point the black movement began to openly claim affirmative action policies – and the Conference of Durban (South Africa) in 2001 - which played the important role of pressuring the then-President, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, for policies directed exclusively towards afro-descendants (Lima, 2010; Silva, 2010; Guimarães, 2003). Affirmative action policies that began to gain recognition on the government agenda over the past fifteen years – mainly focused on education, health and labour – are the result of mobilizations that occurred in both the 3rd and 4th (current) phases of the movement. Rios (2009, 2012) highlights the current period as the institutionalization of the Black Movement in Brazil, given that the movement took advantage of opportunities offered by the state during redemocratization to develop new mobilization strategies, including the gradual professionalization of militants and specialization of activism.

Despite the fact that violence – particularly police violence – had already been mentioned in MNU documents, the issue would only really gain strength in the Black Movement’s fourth phase. On this topic, we state that the black movement not only remains active and very mobilized, but that there is a specific segment of militancy that gained particular prominence over the past fifteen years: the black youth. In previous works, RAMOS (2014) reconstructs black youth mobilization since ENJUNE, the Black Youth National Meeting in 2007, demonstrating how this segment came to be organized since the early 2000s around an almost unique and specific agenda: black youth genocide. Young people gathered at ENJUNE denounced the early deaths of young black men mainly due to state violence, particularly by the military police. Also, according to Ramos, proposals from this event granted the youth the space to participate in other events, such as the Conselho Nacional de Juventude (National Youth Council) and the Conselho Nacional de Segurança Pública (National Public Security Council). Although the theme was already on the black movement agenda for some time in the form of complaints and localized reactions, the

author contends that actions since ENJUNE demonstrate a shift. The current plan of action would be to implement a strategic agenda, in which members organize to occupy spaces of social participation, make their demands public, and pressure the government for specific actions - which seems to corroborate Rios' (2009) thesis.

In support of the movement initiated by ENJUNE to denounce state violence against young black men, other groups emerged, such as the FONAJUNE – Fórum Nacional de Juventude Negra (“National Black Youth Forum”), the Comitê contra o Genocídio da Juventude Negra e Periférica (“Committee against Black and Suburban Youth Genocide”), Mães de Maio (“Mothers of May”), the “Reaja ou Seja Morto” (“React or Be Dead”) campaign and others. Several marches were organized and the issue of violence against young black men appears to be gaining space in the field of public security, both from a governmental and academic standpoint.

The term “genocide” has also been used frequently in the media, government agencies, organized civil society entities, and internationally (Ramos, 2014). One example is how former president Dilma used the term in various presidential speeches during her first mandate (Ramos, 2014, 59/60). Another example is its frequent use in the manifestos of various human rights organizations such as the *Mães de Maio* (Mothers of May, in English, as a reference to the mothers who lost their, mostly, afro-descendant children to a massacre in May, 2006) (2011). While this could indicate success in the strategy adopted by these young black men, it has not been reflected in reduced deaths for this segment of the population. This said, efforts were able to leverage the creation of a national plan for the reduction of black youth homicides, the Plano Juventude Viva<sup>11</sup> (“Living Youth Plan”) in 2013.

In conclusion, this review of the literature on the history of racism and racial activism in Brazil has shown how intellectual debate taking place within university walls since the beginning of the twentieth century has been reflected, to a certain extent, in the agenda of organizations engaged in black activism. Whitening theories and the widespread myth of racial democracy impacted the ideas and priorities of the Frente Negra Brasileira. Similarly, the new winds of Projeto UNESCO and its results also influenced, if indirectly, the work of Abdias do Nascimento and the Teatro Experimental Negro. Interestingly, the TEN initially flirted with the racial democracy myth, but in the end its agenda was strongly marked by

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<sup>11</sup> The Juventude Viva Plan is a national plan coordinated by the Federal Government but with very localized actions to prevent and reduce homicide rates among afro-descendant youngsters.

the denunciation of racial inequalities. The UNESCO Project seemed to have followed the same path.

The Movimento Negro Unificado, the organization of a more political and militant nature than its predecessors, urged afro-descendants to recognize their African roots. In this instance, racial identity was also a political factor. We suggested that this idea was not disconnected to the studies of Nelson do Valle e Silva and Carlos Hasenbalg, for whom the racial inequalities between whites and non-whites (blacks and browns) was independent of the gradient of the color of non-whites. The MNU seemed to have understood this and thus represented an appeal for those non-whites who had never identified themselves as afro-descendants, but who could neither see themselves occupying white positions in society.

The last period, characterized by those civil society organizations articulated around the genocide of black youth, presents a different feature. Here, the term “genocide” appears first in the agenda of activist organizations, and is later appropriated by scholars who work with police violence and police fatalities. The political effervescence of these civil society movements and organizations' alongside Lula's government may have encouraged the emergence of this agenda, inverting the order of guidance between activism and academia. At least concerning the theme of genocide, the social mobilizations guided scholars towards deeper investigations into lethal police violence with racial bias.

In the case of the first three phases of black activism in Brazil, it seems that movements redefined and incorporated academic debate, while in the latest this order is subverted. In any case these are merely suggestions stemming from the literature review, suggesting an alignment between intellectual debate in academia and activism of the streets. Nonetheless, this convergence of ideas may not be direct and deserves further investigation.

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