

Racism and the restriction of individual rights: Racial discrimination in the Brazilian press¹

Antonio Sérgio Alfredo Guimarães
Department of Sociology
Universidade de São Paulo

Introduction

Based on information reported in 547 articles in the Brazilian press, this paper analyzes how racism in Brazil leads to the restriction of individual and group rights. Published between 1989 and 1994, these articles cover a wide variety of complaints concerning racial discrimination, reported in 44 daily newspapers and 2 weekly magazines, published in 20 different cities in 14 states.² Of the 879 news articles on racism in Brazil collected during this period, complaints of racial discrimination account for 62%.³

The purpose of this article is threefold. First, it presents research results in as detailed a manner as possible. In order to do so, the cases published in the press have been organized according to a typology that considers the kind of right that has been restricted as well as

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² The Lux Agency carried out this collection of articles for the Center for Afro-Asiatic Studies at the Cândido Mendes University in Rio de Janeiro. I especially thank Carlos Hasenbalg for making the results available.

³ Since I was unable to verify the procedures of this collection systematically, I cannot guarantee the extent to which the Lux Agency achieved full coverage, nor is it possible to evaluate the potential biases that the research might include. In any case, it seems as though the research covered a broad enough base to guarantee the quality of the data, as I hope to demonstrate. At first sight, the data seem to suggest that the agency focused more on certain newspapers in a few Brazilian capitals. For example, we have information from 9 newspapers and 2 weekly magazines from São Paulo, 7 dailies from Rio de Janeiro, 6 from Belo Horizonte, and 3 from Brasília; at the same time, we find only two from Salvador, Campo Grande, Curitiba, Florianópolis and Porto Alegre; for all the other cities – Belem, Blumenau, Goiania, Manaus, Niteroi, Recife, Santo Andre, Santo and Vitoria – only one paper was consulted. It hardly seems plausible that in cities like Salvador and Recife, where Afro-Brazilian culture is so deeply rooted and the black population so large, so few newspapers should be consulted. That raises a doubt: were other newspapers consulted in these cities? The answer most certainly is no. Nevertheless, if we assume that the collection was rigorous and systematic, even though the newspaper sample was biased, this does not invalidate our conclusions about the incidence of racial discrimination complaints and the circumstances under which these cases occurred, since the unit of analysis are the cases themselves and not the articles about them. Furthermore, so long as the research in the selected cities was systematic, which I assume to be so, it is possible to support other valuable suggestions surmised from the number of articles, the number of cases in different metropolitan regions, the types of cases, and so forth.

the context of social relations in which discrimination occurred. Second, the paper endeavors to establish and explain the geographical distribution of racial discrimination, or, more precisely, the distribution of discrimination-related news articles. Third, based on this data, I seek to contribute to the current debate on the peculiarity of race relations in Brazil, arguing that, in this country, discrimination and racism are inextricably bound to hierarchical relations, which are typical of a status-oriented society.

The text is divided in five parts. The first part presents a detailed summary of the data, dividing the information into different spheres of individual rights violations; the second part discusses the reasons motivating people to make their complaints public, whether through the press or to authorities, or both; the third part regroups the data taking into account the hierarchical power relations involved and introducing gender as an explanatory feature; the fourth part analyzes the geographical distribution of racism in Brazil; and finally, the conclusion seeks to place the present article within the broader discussion of race relations.

My general conclusions point in two directions. First, racial discrimination in Brazil walks hand in hand with the abuse of authority and with the arbitrary behavior of different social agents. Second, racial discrimination, or at least its visibility in the press, is greater in regions where income levels are highest and illiteracy rates lowest, such as in Porto Alegre, São Paulo, Curitiba, and Brasilia. My hypothesis holds that higher income and education levels are factors that undermine conformist attitudes towards traditional standards of hierarchy and social discrimination.

The restriction of individual rights

In my view, the notion of individual rights becomes an important criterion in classifying the data insofar as these events only make sense as part of a wider struggle to define the public sphere, that is, a formal space of individual equality, even when this space is located in private areas under the authority of a private party. In the cases analyzed below, these rights involve equal treatment and equal opportunity in the following situations: (i) circulation in public places (streets and public walkways, whether on foot or in vehicles, and in public areas of residential buildings); (ii) the consumption of goods and services offered by bars, nightclubs, banks, schools, clinics, stores, beauty parlors,

recreational clubs, consulates, state offices, among others, as well as the services offered by self-employed persons; (iii) on the job and in professional activities.

Aside from the cases of abuse of individual rights that fit within the above categories, the newspapers also reported complaints of physical, verbal, and symbolic abuse directed towards blacks in various situations. These cases will be treated separately, since they do not fit within any specific rights violation category, but rather have more to do with conflicts of a private nature within the context of social relations, that is, they infringe upon rules of sociability by developing into racial offenses. What they have in common is the fact that these abuses are committed by common persons rather than by some legally instituted authority. Generally speaking, we do not find in these cases the asymmetrical power relation that, in the other types of case, place law officers or property guardians against citizens operating in the public space.

Thus, to begin with, the 201 cases of discrimination registered in the press can be grouped into four major categories: (1) those restricting persons from circulating freely or from remaining in public places; (2) those denying the right to consume certain goods and services; (3) those denying rights to employment and to professional practice; (4) those involving racially-motivated physical or verbal aggressions in social relations. The cases contained in (2) can be subdivided according to the type of consumption, while those contained in (1) can be subdivided in two: (1.1) the incidents taking in public spaces under public authority, and (1.2) those occurring in residential condominiums under private authority. Table 1 summarizes cases registered by type and year of occurrence.

These cases are characterized below from the perspective of individual rights.

1) Cases where persons were restricted from circulating freely or from remaining in public places

As stated above, this category can be subdivided in two: the first subgroup (1.1), refers to cases in which black persons were unlawfully detained or subjected to physical and/or verbal abuse by police authorities, under the alleged suspicion of being criminals. Of a total 29 cases, 25 occurred in public places, involving 42 persons, broken down as follows: 5 were working at the time, 32 were passing by (14 by foot, 9 in buses, 7 in private cars, and 2 in taxis) and 5 were involved in some type of leisure activity (1 on the beach, 4 in bars or restaurants) when they were approached by military policemen. These incidents included

arbitrary acts resulting in body searches, verbal and physical abuse, imprisonment and even death. The perverse and arbitrary character of these arrests can be appreciated in the data presented in Table 2: only 31% of these actions were limited to searches and identification, while the remaining 69% were followed up with imprisonment, beatings, shootings, or assassination of those approached.

It is important to note that in 38% of the 29 cases reported by the newspapers, a police report was not even filed. The denunciation remained limited to the event's publication in the newspaper, and there was no news of punishment of any of the police officers involved. The newspaper articles, both in their headlines and in their quotes of police statements, lay bare the racist character as well as a natural attitude towards police brutality. For example, the *Jornal do Brasil* published the headline "Player is beaten like a thief", which suggests that any thief should naturally be beaten by the police; or, in another case, a policeman casually explained that he had mistaken a journalist for a criminal "because he looked like a robber".

The second subgroup (1.2), includes cases of blacks who were denied the right to circulate freely or to move into certain residential buildings. These add up to 17 cases, involving discrimination against 22 persons. As demonstrated in Table 3, these cases reveal three types of conflict: (i) those that involve black and white residents, where the latter harass the former, who complain of verbal abuse, anonymous threats, or unfair treatment, whether by the tenant representatives, caretakers or neighbors;⁴ (ii) those involving black visitors on one hand, and white residents, tenant representatives or doormen on the other, characterized by denying access to the building, to the social elevator, or to the building's lobby; (iii) those which exclude domestic employees from using certain facilities.

It should be noted that the number of persons who complain of racial discrimination in the buildings in which they live is greater than that of visitors and of domestic help who suffer discrimination. Similarly, the number of complaints of racial harassment is equivalent to the number of complaints of discrimination in the access to social elevators.

It is interesting to observe that the denial of access or the embarrassment suffered by black visitors who are barred from residential buildings follows the same logic as the

restriction to the right to free circulation, mentioned above. In both examples, people are considered suspect based on their *color*. In this case, color seems to be disconnected from social position (it is not linked, for example, to being well dressed or not, since after all, a robber could be well dressed), color here is only a marker for social origin, in other words, an attributed trait; for this reason, all blacks are considered, *a priori*, to be suspect.

On the other hand, except in cases of restriction or denial of access, discrimination in residential buildings is not based on the suspicion of criminality of blacks, rather, it takes on an overtly discriminatory character, justified either by social hierarchy (in the case of maids or visitors prohibited from using the hall or social elevator), or by avowed racist beliefs (in the case of residents).

Finally, it should be noted that in 76.5% of the cases of discrimination in buildings, a complaint was filed at a police station; percentages reached 100% when the person discriminated against was a visitor and 0% when the person discriminated against was a maid. Of the residents, 6 in 8 filed charges with the police, while only 2 preferred to limit their complaint to the press.

2) Cases where the right to consume certain goods and services was denied

This category includes 80 complaints of racial discrimination reported by the press, 59% of which were formally registered, involving 153 black persons who complained of bad treatment in different commercial establishments, banks, schools, taxis or social clubs, where they were refused service, denied access, verbally and physically abused, or subjected to illegal detention or searches. The distribution of these cases can be observed in the chart below. One notes immediately that 83% of the cases took place in stores, banks, schools, supermarkets, bars, hotels, social clubs, and nightclubs.

In the following section, these cases are regrouped according to 2 criteria: the type of service which was either refused or offered in a discriminatory fashion, and the alleged motive given to justify the discriminatory action.

Banks, stores, and supermarkets (subgroup 2.1)

Table 4 reveals that in cases taking place in banks, stores, and supermarkets, or in the refusal of taxis to pick up black passengers, people justify their discriminatory behavior by

⁴Only two residents made specific complaints, of being denied access to building facilities and of access to the building itself. In both cases, it remains obvious that the victims had recently moved in, and the abuses had to do with the fact that the perpetrators were unaware of their status as residents.

the *suspicious appearance* of the consumers, in other words, *color* is taken as a sign of criminality. This justification, used in 37% of all the 201 cases, was registered in 93% of the cases occurring in these establishments.

As one might expect, these are establishments where holdups occur quite often. Two assumptions implicitly accepted by Brazilian society makes this sort of justification plausible: (i) that most criminals are black and (ii) that rights protecting citizens do not exist.

Not unlike the cases mentioned above, where the police approached suspects in the streets, in these establishments suspicion alone justifies the violence against suspects. These instances reveal the private dimension of violence against blacks. Force is not sanctioned by the state (represented by the police), but rather by the private sphere (involving private security agents). The lightest offenses include poor service and searches of suspects, while the more serious ones can result in physical aggression, detention, and the shooting of suspects. Searches occur in all establishments, with the obvious exception of taxis; the refusal of service occurs in stores, supermarkets and taxis; physical violence and detention happens mainly in stores and supermarkets, but it is in banks where violence can reach the extreme involving threats to the lives of suspected customers.

Bars, night-clubs, clubs, and hotels (2.2)

Unlike the situations described above, cases that occurred in bars, nightclubs, social clubs and hotels are not explained by alleged security reasons. In general, discrimination victims are barred at the entrance of hotels, nightclubs or social club, or, in cases where they are already inside, either they are not waited on or they are thrown out. Here, we are dealing with a kind of racial discrimination masked by stereotyped assumptions about the habits and morals of those discriminated against. Twenty-six of these cases were reported by the press, involving 67 persons, of which 25 were part of a group barred from entering a night club in Rio de Janeiro (See Table 5).

The abusive parties, in these cases, are generally the authority responsible for these establishments: either the manager or an employee acting in his name, including waiters, bouncers or doormen. However, though obviously victims of discrimination, only half of the offended parties actually presented formal complaints, which probably indicates, as we shall see ahead, that these episodes remain difficult to be categorized as racially motivated.

Schools and clinics

Eleven cases of discrimination, involving 17 persons, occurred in clinics (two cases) and in schools (9 cases). In the schools, those discriminated against were students and the aggressors, with one exception, were school principals or teachers. The offence always involved a verbal manifestation of racial prejudice, publicly humiliating the victim. Only one case complained of abusive treatment by another student, and in one other case enrollment was denied. In the clinics, complaints included refusal of treatment or poor service.

In these establishments, the offending parties also did not justify their acts of discrimination in any of the cases. In spite of this fact, most victims did not file a formal complaint (see Table 6).

Other Locations (group 2.4)

The nine remaining cases, involving 18 persons, took place in beauty parlors (3), consulates (2) in an airline company, in a real-estate office, in a shopping center, and in a state congress. In all these cases, persons were refused service, were verbally offended or were served in a fashion they considered to be discriminatory. Once again, nearly half of the offended parties did not present formal complaints.

3) Discrimination in the workplace or in professional practice.

Between 1989 and 1994, the newspapers reported 33 complaints of racial discrimination in the job place, involving 37 persons. These cases make up Group 3 in our classification. They occurred, in decreasing order, in public service, public or private schools, industrial service enterprises, stores, bars, marketplaces, and in industries (see Table 7).

Most complaints refer to verbal abuse, the refusal to hire, dismissals and unjustified transfers. As one might imagine, the job refusals are concentrated in the private sector, since in most cases public service uses competitive exams for admission; transfers, on the other hand, are concentrated in the public sector, which shows that the private companies are, in this case, mostly small scale operations.

Unlike the cases previously presented, most victims of job discrimination (81%) file formal complaints in a police station. The number of cases registered in formal complaints did not reach 100% only in schools, bars, stores and markets.

Another important characteristic here is the hierarchical relationship between victim and perpetrator (64% of these cases), where the victim always occupies an inferior position. In another 21% of these cases, the victims were seeking employment and were rejected by their prospective employers, while in the remaining 15% of the cases, complaints had to do with presumably offensive statements or actions. It is important to note racial discrimination appears almost always as an abuse of authority, barring admission, promotion, or the maintenance of a job. It almost never appears as form of oppression present in social relations in general, and it rarely takes place among people occupying the same hierarchical position.

4) Discrimination between equals and discrimination with inverted hierarchy: physical and verbal aggressions

Table 8 summarizes the remaining 41 cases of racial discrimination against 42 persons and two organizations, as reported in newspapers (subgroup 4).

At first sight, this group of cases is characterized by the almost exclusive concentration of physical, verbal, and symbolic aggression. The only exception is the killing of a girl by someone on the street who took a shot at her father's car, taking him for a robber. This reveals the second characteristic of this group: it brings together, for the most part, cases where racism is spread diffusely throughout social relations, and does not depend on a hierarchical relationship in order to manifest itself.

In what follows, the cases are broken down based on the victim's relative social position:

Consumers and politicians

In 10 cases (24% of the total), blacks in various situations (bar, theater, police station, club, hotel, bus, school, store, restaurant, traffic) received racially-motivated verbal (8) or physical harassment by other persons in similar situations. Three cases involved politicians who verbally attacked other politicians in legislative assemblies or city halls. In each of the 10 cases, color appeared to be the only hierarchical distinction between aggressor and victim. With the exception of one case, formal complaints were filed in a police station.

When police officers and the authority are the victims

Police officers are also involved in another kind of racial discrimination, only in these cases as victims: these are black officers who arrest civilians and instead of charging them

with disregard for authority, take them in for committing a racial crime, for which there is no bail. Nine cases (22% of the total) involved police officers who claimed to be victims of racism. All of these incidents took place in public places (on the street or at the beach), involving the following situations: a) the black police officer was verbally harassed by someone in an elevated social position; b) the black police officer felt personally harassed upon witnessing a racial slur during the incident for which he was called to intervene. Thus, one must distinguish the cases reported by the press that suggest that the police officer's authority was disrespected and that he took his tolerance to the limit before arresting the offending party, from the cases suggesting that the officer used his authority to intervene in a dispute in benefit of one party.

Other situations provide similar instances in terms of the power relationship between victim and perpetrator. For example, in one case a black merchant was verbally attacked by a customer; another example comes from the racist political cartoons or insults by journalists against a police official and a municipal secretary; or that of four public servants, who rather than perpetrators of discriminatory actions against customers, were their victims. Of the remaining cases, those involving family relations stand out: for example, one daughter accused her mother of racism, while another complained that her father did not want her dating a black man.

What makes the news

Before proceeding, it is worth mentioning a few considerations concerning discrimination as a journalistic topic. A preliminary observation has to do with the volume of complaints. The 547 newspaper articles collected in research represent an annual average of 33 cases and 91 articles (that is, Brazilian newspapers reported episodes of racial discrimination every four days), which is a very low figure, given the country's geographical dimensions and the provincial reach of daily newspaper circulation. The fact is that few actual cases of discrimination against individuals received wide coverage. During the period under scrutiny, only Ana Flávia Azeredo's case, which occurred in 1993, received the same widespread media attention as the incident that victimized a fictional character in the soap opera *Patria Minha*, shown on Globo television in 1994. Another indicator in support of this argument comes from the *Folha de São Paulo* daily: while this paper mentioned "racism" 307 times in 1994, it referred to cases of racial discrimination in

Brazil only 36 times, that is, 11.7%. When racism was mentioned, it either appeared in editorials, in international news (for example, the end of Apartheid in South Africa), in national political news (for example, reactions to then candidate Fernando Henrique Cardoso's statement about his own mestizo origins), in intellectual debates (the discussion set off by *The Bell Curve*) or in the intense discussion of the racism scene in *Patria Minha*. In other words, though racism remains ever-present as a hot topic that touches both the imagination and feelings of all Brazilians, because it is part of their daily life, it seems as if it needs to be kept away at a certain distance, whether through fiction or in faraway places, in order to be faced.

After all, what does it take for a case of racial discrimination to turn into news? Obviously, newspapers select their subject matter directed towards two basic objectives, which correspond to complementary purposes. On the one hand, as a consumer good, newspapers are guided by the values expressed by public opinion. In other words, in order to sell papers, they try to please their readers by offering them what they want to read. On the other hand, newspapers manipulate values, their own and those of their readers, in an effort to shape public opinion. In the process, various groups and social segments seek to transform their interests into news, making particular interests seem universal.

In short, articles on racial discrimination can cater to different interests: the reading public, which consumes this news and can judge the legitimacy of the complaint, formal accusation, and punishment of different acts of racism; or the organizations or individuals who fight against racial discrimination and who see the newspapers as a vehicle for propagating their ideas and values. Any particular case will receive a greater or lesser journalistic coverage depending on its media appeal, or on the social position of the aggressor and of the person discriminated against. In some cases, an influential person may use the press to seek moral compensation, or a journalist may be trying to create or reveal parameters of conduct, or finally it may be a case deemed worthy of the public's attention for being considered exemplary in terms of mores and values.

During the period in focus, most cases (54.2% of the total) had only local repercussion, remaining restricted to a single article in a single newspaper. Eighty nine percent of the cases reached a maximum of only four articles published in no more than four cities. A state-by-state "visibility" index, showing the proportion of cases occurring in a given state

reported by newspapers of other states, is interesting insofar as it indicates the impact that certain cases have on a national scale, such as the ones that took place in Espírito Santo and Rio Grande do Sul, discussed below. The index also underscores the relative weakness of the press's anti-racist agenda in states like Bahia, Goiás, Pernambuco and Paraná, whose "own" cases were not highlighted with the same intensity as in states such as Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro, or São Paulo.

The impact of different cases upon public opinion can be measured in three ways: (a) by the number of published articles; (b) by the number of newspapers in other cities that reported the news; and (c) by the amount of print they received in different papers. In combining the first two criteria, we found only four cases of discrimination with a broad national repercussion, with more than fifteen articles published in more than five states.

The first case involved Ana Flávia Azeredo, daughter of the then governor of Espírito Santo, who in 1993 was physically and verbally harassed by a resident for using the social elevator in an apartment complex. According to the survey carried out by the Lux Agency, the case was reported in nine states in a total of 61 articles. Another widely-reported case occurred in Porto Alegre in 1989, when a security officer in the Lojas Americanas department store on Praia street arrested and humiliated an 80 year old man, accusing him of stealing toothpaste. This fact unleashed a great popular disturbance in the downtown area of the city, where crowds threw stones, looted stores, and confronted the police. Here, the Lux survey recorded 24 articles published in nine different cities.

Two other cases had a more modest repercussion: one involved a black girl verbally and physically abused by a shopkeeper for no apparent reason, while walking down a street. This incident took place in São Paulo in 1989, and was reported 17 times in 6 different cities. The other occurred in Rio de Janeiro in 1991, when a young black woman was refused employment by a store. This case was reported in 15 articles in 7 different cities, though occupying very little print.

If, however, we use an "exposure index", which multiplies the number of articles by the number of 8 x 5 cm. print blocks occupied by the article, only the first three cases had more extensive exposure (index above 200), while the Ana Flávia case alone was far and away the most significant, reaching a value 6222 on this scale.

Why does the press place so much emphasis on certain episodes and not on others? The answer appears obvious in the first two cases: the governor's daughter, discriminated against and treated like a maid, was presented to the public as a "Black Cinderella" (title of the article in *Veja* magazine); the discrimination suffered by the elderly, Rio Grande do Sul native drew widespread attention because the incident sparked a popular revolt reminiscent of American racial disturbances. Its coverage, therefore, had less to do with the exemplary character of this daily life drama and more with the fear caused by the prospect of social disorder.

As for the remaining cases, what makes them news in the first place? Unfortunately, the statistical analysis of the available data failed to detect any regular pattern connecting media appeal to the age, sex, or social prestige of either victim or perpetrator. The answer, therefore, cannot be found in the structural variables of social position or prestige.

Similarly, structural variables also do not provide a satisfactory answer to the question: what leads some citizens to file formal complaints while others do not? It seems that this decision has to do with the relative possibility of characterizing different kinds of aggression as crimes. Thus, in a tentative, preliminary interpretation, all we can say is that formal complaints are more likely to be filed in cases with witnesses, in cases where rights violations are more clearly defined, and when there is an authority willing to stand behind these rights.

Table 2 shows that the victims filed complaints in police stations, according to the information in the news articles, in 70.65% of these reported incidents. The most frequent complaints involved interpersonal conflicts either between people occupying similar positions on the power scale, or between people in relations marked by formally asymmetrical power, such as those on the job, within residential establishments, or in commercial situations. On the other hand, in situations where these asymmetrical power relations are less formal, less well-defined by law and, consequently, more difficult to be characterized, the incidents generally tend not to reach the police stations, and the only complaint made is to the press.

The politics of discrimination or engendered racism

So far, various types of discrimination cases reported by the press have been characterized here, taking into account basically individual rights. This section deals briefly with the power relations involved.

To begin with, the different cases can be regrouped taking into consideration the sphere of social relations within which they occurred. Table 3 demonstrates that 1/3 of the complaints refer to discrimination in the context of market relations. The buying and selling of goods and services, characteristic of the capitalist economy, far from being impersonal and formal, seems permeated by the social inequality of racial groups. Perhaps because of this, the number of charges of racism is much greater in states that are more developed economically. As argued above, formal relations are undermined by a series of assumptions about practices and behavior, which make black customers suspect or undesirable in markets, stores, banks, hotels, bars, restaurants, social clubs, and other places (Table 4). It is interesting to note that women are discriminated against much more frequently than men in market relations, both in absolute and relative terms: 45% of all women suffering abuses were discriminated against in this sphere of social relations, as oppose to only 25% of the men. This perhaps can be explained by the fact that marketplaces, especially where foodstuffs and other non-durable goods are sold, receive mainly women customers. However, as we shall see, it also has to do with the asymmetrical character of power relations, which tends to victimize the weak.

The second most important sphere of discrimination is found in interpersonal relations. Here, female victimization is greater when it occurs in residential buildings and male victimization is much greater when occurring in other situations. This does not necessarily mean that women are less harassed outside the residential sphere, but only that men, following the chauvinistic tradition, retaliate when attacked in the “street”, that is, beyond the domestic space.

The third most important sphere of discrimination is located in the public service sector, especially where public safety is involved. Here, again following a chauvinistic logic, black men are the greatest victims and the preferred suspects. Turning to relations at the work place, one finds that women are once again more discriminated against than men. But this fact cannot be understood without reference to the asymmetrical power relation

between victim and attacker. Indeed, this factor seems crucial to any understanding of the broader picture of the politics of discrimination in Brazil.

One must consider the fact that 59% of all cases of reported racism were committed either by the victim's hierarchical superior, by someone vested with private authority (owner, manager, tenant's representative, etc.), or by some representative of that authority (security guard or doorman). Table 5 shows that 84% of the women were discriminated against in this situation. If we include the discrimination committed by policemen, then 65% of the men and 86% of the women faced discrimination by a hierarchical superior, an authority or a representative of that authority. It becomes clear, then, that racial discrimination in Brazil walks hand in hand with the abuse of authority and with arbitrary judgment. Both public and private authority brandishes the right to judge and discriminate against individuals under their custody or within the space of their private property. The cases of discrimination where victim and aggressor found themselves in an equal hierarchical situation add up to only 17% of the total, and those where the victim occupied a higher social position reach a paltry 7.5%.

Table 4 also shows the places where racism takes on a strongly gendered character: in residential buildings, health clinics, beauty parlors, recreational clubs, hotels, and stores women face greater discrimination than men, either because these are spheres of a predominantly female presence, or because of the type of hierarchy favoring discrimination; on the streets, in state offices, banks, bars, night-clubs and restaurants, men face discrimination more frequently.

To conclude this section, a few words on the age of the victims are in order here. In the first place, it was possible to identify the age of those suffering discrimination in only 50% of the cases. This omission probably has to do with the fact that the age factor is not considered relevant to the point the article wanted to make. This perhaps explains why there is a relatively large concentration of victims over 50 (after all, disrespect for the elderly is particularly odious) and relatively small concentration of people aged 30 to 34. The greatest concentrations are the 25-29 and 35-39 age sets. This pattern is clearer among men than among women, and more common for those victims of aggressions justified by suspicious behavior than for those which were not justified in any way.

The geography of racism and anti-racism in Brazil

Table 12 shows that 51% of the cases of racial discrimination reported in the press were covered by only 8 newspapers in 4 state capitals: three daily papers in Rio de Janeiro (*Jornal do Brasil*, *O Globo* and *O Dia*), three in São Paulo (*Diário Popular*, *O Estado de São Paulo* and the *A Folha de São Paulo*), one in Brasília (*Correio Braziliense*) and one in Belo Horizonte (*Hoje em Dia*).

A few of these dailies have a truly national scope, that is, they vie for an audience in various states – as is the case of *Jornal do Brasil* and *O Globo*, from Rio de Janeiro, *O Estado de São Paulo* and the *A Folha de São Paulo*, from São Paulo, *O Correio Braziliense*, from Brasília, and *Hoje em Dia*, from Belo Horizonte – while the other two (*O Dia* and *Diário Popular*) are popular, local newspapers. In the major papers, as is the case of *Correio Braziliense*, as much as half of their articles report news from other states; the second type of newspaper, such as *O Dia*, reports only local incidents. In statistical terms, this greater or lesser local focus can be seen in the percentage of cases reported that occurred within the newspaper's own state: *Correio Braziliense* – 50%; *O Globo* – 51%; *Jornal do Brasil* – 55%; *O Estado de São Paulo* – 57%; *A Folha de São Paulo* – 62%; *Hoje em Dia* – 69%; *Diário Popular* – 92%; and *O Dia* – 100%.

Therefore, these eight daily papers, which account for 51% of all the articles on racial discrimination, provide examples of a kind of journalism that targets a wider audience, is based on more diversified sources, and seeks a broader geographical coverage, as well as one oriented towards less educated and more provincial readers, which explores the problematical and dramatic daily conditions of racism. This data also indicate that in the course of these six years, there appears to have been a general mobilization against Brazilian racism, involving not only the middle classes but also the general populace.

However, based on the data we have, what can be said about the geographical distribution of the charges of racial discrimination? Does the greater number of incidents reported in Rio de Janeiro in relation to São Paulo mean that the movement against racism is greater there? Is the number of cases reported in Salvador small or great when compared to that of other capitals?

To answer these questions, obviously one must control certain conditions affecting the total amount of complaints, assuming that the under-representation of cases in some cities

is not absurdly high. The first factor to be controlled is demography. A larger population generates a greater number of cases, all other conditions being equal. A good way to control the demographic variable is to correlate the number of cases to a wider population. Since we are dealing with a basically urban phenomenon, especially since the basic source of information involves city newspapers, the cases have been rearranged by metropolitan areas, including Brasília, while the population statistics from the 1992 national household survey have been adopted to calculate the proportion of reported cases per 1 million inhabitants. However, these ratios still do not allow for a complete comparison between regions, since each of these areas has a distinct ethnic and racial composition.

If not only the number of “*pretos*” (blacks) and “*pardos*” (dark-skinned person), but also that of “*pretos*” and “*negros*”,⁵ influence the propensity for these incidents to occur and determine whether or not racial discrimination is charged, then we would expect to find a proportionally greater amount of cases in regions such as Salvador, with its larger “*preto*” and “*pardo*” population, than in Brasilia, Curitiba, São Paulo, Porto Alegre, or Belo Horizonte (see Table 6).

One way to treat the ethnic and racial variability between regions is to correlate the number of cases to the risk population. But who belongs in this category? Blacks in general (“*negros*”) or a more restricted segment of the black population self-recognized as “*pretos*”? A number of reasons lead us to opt for the latter. First of all, in some of the cities in our sample, such as Belém, the term “*pardo*” does not necessarily denote a person of African descent since it includes other ethnic categories, while in the present study the only cases of discrimination are against Afro-Brazilians. Secondly, the statistical correlation between percentages of “whites” and “*pardos*” approaches 1, while the correlation between “*pretos*” and either “*pardos*” or “whites” remains small. This leads to a third argument: since the covariation between these percentages also is very high, only one of them can be used as a variable in an explanatory model. For these reasons, I have considered “*pretos*” to represent the population segment that is most clearly exposed to the risk of discrimination, and have calculated the discrimination ratio for each metropolitan region.

Table 6 demonstrates that Brasilia (11.51), Curitiba (9.87), and São Paulo (6.5) stand out with large numbers of cases vis-a-vis the black population, significantly greater than

⁵ “*Negro*”, in this context, refers to the sum of individuals classified as “*pardos*” and “*pretos*”.

Rio de Janeiro (5.6) or Salvador (4.2). It is somewhat disconcerting that Salvador, whose “*preto*” population is proportionally 1/3 greater than that of Rio de Janeiro, has 1.3 less cases (per 100,000 *pretos*) than Rio. In other words, one might expect that in Salvador, where the “*preto*” category makes up 15% of the population, we would also find 1/3 more cases than Rio de Janeiro, whose “*preto*” population reaches 10%. In order to express this diversity, Table 6 summarizes the number of cases one would expect to find if the proportion of “*pretos*” in the population indeed were the determining factor.

In other words, if under-representation is not the decisive factor in the explanation, as I argue, then what explains these differences? Obviously, the determining factors that immediately come to mind have already been mentioned: black activism, the repudiation of racism by the black population, the general public’s response to the anti-racism campaign during this period, more militant journalism, among others. It remains difficult to construct solid indicators that can be used to test this hypothesis. We can, however, adopt some strong indirect indicators as substitutes, such as the proportion of illiterates (or uneducated people) in the population, the proportion of people with higher education degrees in the metropolitan regions, or the per capita income of the states in which these metropolitan regions are situated.

Table 7 establishes a correlation between these variables, where there is a strong correlation between each of these variables and the number of reported cases. These correlations vary from -0.71 (illiteracy) to 0.85 (per capita income). In other words, as income increases, so does the proportion of people with higher education, as does the number of complaints reported by the newspapers, while the illiteracy rate decreases. Given the high correlation between per capita income and people with higher education (0.95), we employed a simplified explanatory model (multiple regression) including only the income and illiteracy variables. These two variables explain 90.46% (R multiple) of the variations found between regions, while the income variable explains 66.58% of them (see Table 8).

In sum, the data indicate that in regions with lower per capita income and greater illiteracy rates (Fortaleza, Recife and Salvador), the newspapers reported the fewest cases of discrimination, while, on the other hand, in places where income is greatest and the illiteracy rate smaller, such as Porto Alegre, São Paulo, Curitiba and Brasília, the number of

reports also is greater. This result is quite consistent with the explanation we have been developing up to this point.

Table 9 presents the adjusted values from the regression equation. These results allow us to surmise that the relatively low number of cases recorded in Salvador and in Rio de Janeiro, along with the relatively high number recorded in São Paulo and in Belem, can be attributed to state income levels and illiteracy rates rather than to a flaw in the data collection procedure. Indeed, when the income and illiteracy variables are factored into the model, the rates at which discrimination appear in the press in Belo Horizonte and Porto Alegre can also be fully explained by the same model.

Exactly how urban poverty and illiteracy condition a smaller number of racial discrimination complaints remains unclear. The most plausible hypothesis is that these are factors that underlie a widespread acceptance of more discriminatory and hierarchical social standards. Interestingly, one faces a greater difficulty in explaining the high rates (in relation to the proportion of the black population) found in Curitiba when compared to Porto Alegre through this two-variable model. Could this be attributed to a bias in the research base or is it due to the well-known fact that the exercise of citizenship cannot be understood solely through the “income” and “education” variables?

One final observation about the geographical distribution of the cases, something which has more to do with the relative force of black activism in the various states than with the structure of the population: the effectiveness of anti-racism can be measured by the diversity of the cases registered. Indeed, the seven types of discrimination in our classification appeared simultaneously only in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. In the other states, such diversity was smaller. In other words, it would appear that certain spheres of discriminatory race relations still remain invisible to social criticism in most states. For example, our data suggest that complaints of verbal or physical assaults committed by people in a symmetrical power relation, that is, beyond any type of work or market relation, are more common in the different states, while complaints of discrimination and offenses committed by the police are concentrated in a smaller number of states. Even the complaints about discrimination in the consumption of goods and services, which are more numerous, remain concentrated in few states.

Conclusion: racism, status, and hierarchy

Up until the late 1970s, both in Brazil and in the rest of Latin America, the study of race relations established a clear association between “race” and social position, on the one hand, and between “race” and social class, on the other.⁶ These studies were unanimous in their conclusion that in Brazil, social identity was not constructed in reference to the concept of race. Rather than “race”, “color” constituted the preferred category determining social belonging. Brazilians considered and used “color” as natural, objective and irrefutable evidence, though, according to Donald Pierson, “more than simply color, that is, more than pigmentation there is a number of other physical characteristics such as hair type (perhaps the most important) and physiognomic traits”. Thales de Azevedo, for his part, insisted on taking color groups as prestige groups, arguing for the strong correlation and the constant interchangeability between color categories (black and white) and status categories (rich and poor).

Marvin Harris provided an excellent summary of the interpretations offered by the generation of sociologists that preceded him in the study of “social races” (an expression framed by Charles Wagley). That generation of anthropologists and sociologists had perceived that both attributed variables (physiognomic traits) as well as acquired characteristics (such as formal education, wealth and good upbringing) made up that which became known in Brazil as “color”, or, currently, “race”.⁷

However, these scholars remained bound to a set of problems that had dominated sociological thought since its inception, that is, the problem of *development* and *modernization*, insofar as their analyses always took on the perspective of evolution and transition, whether from a traditional society to a modern one, in Weberian terms, or from a

⁶ See, especially, Donald Pierson, **Brancos e Pretos na Bahia (estudo de contacto racial)**, São Paulo, Editora Nacional, 1971. (1st American edition, 1942, 1st Brazilian edition, 1945); Thales de Azevedo, **As elites de cor, um estudo de ascensão social**, São Paulo, Cia. Editora Nacional, 1955 (1st French edition, 1953); Thales de Azevedo, “Classes e grupos de prestígio”, **Cultura e situação racial no Brasil**, Rio de Janeiro, Ed. Civilização Brasileira, 1966, pp. 1-43. (originally published in 1956 in **Arquivos da Universidade Federal da Bahia**, Faculdade de Filosofia, Salvador, no. 5; republished in **Ensaios de Antropologia Social**, Salvador, Progresso, 1959); Roger Bastide and Florestan Fernandes, **Relações Raciais entre Negros e Brancos em São Paulo**, São Paulo, Unesco-Anhembi, 1955; Marvin Harris, **Patterns of Race in the Americas**, New York, Walker and Company, 1964 (Brazilian edition: **Padrões Raciais nas Américas**, Rio de Janeiro, Civilização Brasileira, 1967); Florestan Fernandes, **A Integração do Negro na Sociedade de Classes**, São Paulo, Cia. Editora Nacional, 2 vols, 1965.

pre-capitalist, slave formation to a capitalist one, in Marxist terms. The hierarchical character of Brazilian society were always seen as vestiges from a “persistent past”, which were to disappear with industrial development, from one perspective, or with the emergence of a working class consciousness, from another.

In the 1980s, especially with in the works by Carlos Hasenbalg and Nelson do Valle Silva,⁸ this “tradition” was broken, as the new generation demonstrated a basic dissociation between color groups and social classes, on the one hand, and color groups and social position, on the other. Their analyses of social inequality in Brazil, showing that these were rooted in racial differences, along with their discovery that color groups could be realigned as two groups (white and non-white) in the study of income distribution and access to jobs and education, induced current scholars to reintroduce the “race” category as an explanatory variable.

However, while the current literature’s greatest merit lies in its rejection of developmentalist, evolutionist and integrationist perspectives on race relations, these studies have also clouded the permanent association between “race”, “color”, and social position in Brazil. After all, status distinctions (social positions) in Brazil have been of great importance since colonial times, first through the system of slave castes and later through rural and urban patron-client relations, which have resisted the remarkable urbanization and industrialization processes of the past 50 years. They have also resisted changes in regimes and in the political system. Roberto da Matta has interpreted this persistence as an ideology structured around the principal of hierarchical classification, rooted in social relations based on personal ties.⁹

Beyond the ideological level, my intention here is to develop the idea that Brazil is a *status society*, that is, a society where social groups, including social classes, have developed certain “rights” in relation to the state and in relation to other social groups. In terms of the relations between different subjects, these privileges are defined and

⁷ I discuss the Brazilian conception of color further in my article “Cor, classes e status nos estudos de Pierson, Azevedo e Harris na Bahia, 1940-1960”, in Marcos Chor Maio and Ricardo Santos, **Raça, ciência e sociedade**, Rio de Janeiro, Fiocruz/Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, 1996, pp. 143-158.

⁸ By these authors, see: Carlos Hasenbalg, **Discriminação e desigualdades raciais no Brasil**. Rio de Janeiro, Graal, 1979; Nelson do V. Silva, “O preço da cor: diferenciais raciais na distribuição de renda no Brasil”, **Pesquisa e Planejamento Econômico**. v. 10, n. 1, 1980, pp. 21-44.

⁹ Among others, see Da Matta’s classic article “Você sabe com quem está falando?”, in his **Carnavais, Malandros e Heróis**, Rio de Janeiro, Ed. Guanabara, 1990, pp. 146-204.

maintained by distances and etiquette, which, in a broad anthropological sense, use *appearances* and *color* and their main references and markers within the social space. The complex play of ambiguities involving “intimacy”, “good upbringing”, and “patronizing” has been the subject of many studies focusing on the relations between blacks and whites, so we need not pursue this here.¹⁰ Nevertheless, we need to remember that many privileges continue to be honored in Brazil to this day (1996), such as the exclusive use of special elevators or prisons for certain social groups. Both authorities and determined social groups believe they have the right to treat people from other social, ethnic, or racial groups in a differential manner, which is an attitude that remains widespread in daily life, especially in relation to civil rights. This constitutes the basic means of racist expression through which persons of color can be treated as inferiors.

The fact that such attitudes have been increasingly publicized in the press as “racist” indicates that times are changing, albeit slowly. Indeed, the volume of complaints reaching the daily papers grew six times over the last two decades.¹¹ The survival of a rigid social order based on rank has become increasingly challenged by the organization of excluded or partially excluded groups in their struggle for a more democratic order and in defense of universal individual rights. For this reason, categories such as “race”, “color”, “ethnic group”, “gender”, “outcasts”, “landless”, and others, shedding their evolutionist connotations, have come to occupy the same space as traditional categories in the sociological lexicon, such as class, status, and party.

More specifically in the context of this article, the groups defining themselves as “black” have set an example in their struggle to denounce the daily presence of racism in Brazilian society, a kind of racism that is closely tied to the abuse of authority and that seeks to maintain the social distances defining the hierarchical order.

In this perspective, the period between 1989 and 1994 under study here, which fell between two symbolic celebrations (the Abolition centennial, in 1988, and the 300th anniversary of Zumbi’s death, in 1995), proved particularly auspicious for the public discussion of racism in Brazilian society. This period included the involvement of black

¹⁰ A classic example is Anani Dzidzienyo, *The Position of Blacks in Brazilian Society*, London, 1971.

¹¹ See Antonio Sérgio A. Guimarães, “O recente anti-racismo brasileiro: o que dizem os jornais diários”, *Revista USP*, n. 28, Dec.-Jan.-Feb. 1995-96, pp. 84-95.

leaders in repudiating racism and the press's search for news capable of bringing those emblematic dates closer to the daily lives of its readers.

However, with the close of the celebrations marking Zumbi's death, it seems possible that the press's focus on these issues may abate. It seems also possible that the enormous social and economic inequality that divides Brazilians may once again serve to naturalize the discriminatory treatment that blacks face in their daily lives. After all, the task of changing Brazil is as gigantic as it is quixotic, unless more precise goals are pursued, unless problems are identified as having victims and culprits, unless viable solutions appear, even for "minor" problems. And just because the problems are so many, this does not mean that they are all insoluble.

In placing social hierarchy and "prestige groups" at the root of Brazilian racism, that is, the unequal treatment of people based on *color*, my intention here has been to develop a more solid ground for its discussion, focusing on the disregard for civil rights. From a theoretical standpoint, this means that in order to fight racism and to reduce economic inequality, we must first identify and condemn the social distances that naturalize, justify, and legitimize such inequality.

Table 1: Summary of racial discrimination complaints by type and year

Types of discrimination affecting:	Year						total		
	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	Total	%	%
1. free circulation	9	8	10	8	9	2	46		22,9%
1.1. in streets and public spaces (police violence)	5	5	6	7	5	1	29	14,4%	
1.2. in residential buildings	4	3	4	1	4	1	17	8,5%	
2. consumer rights	12	8	10	15	20	15	80		39,8%
2.1. in banks, department stores, supermarkets	2	2	6	5	10	9	34	16,9%	
2.2. bars, social clubs, hotels	8	2	1	8	5	2	26	12,9%	
2.3. schools, medical clinics	1	1	2	2	3	2	11	5,5%	
2.4. other places	1	3	1	0	2	2	9	4,5%	
3. employment and professional practice	4	3	8	3	7	8	33		16,4%
4. personal honor	9	10	5	4	9	5	42		20,9%
Total	34	29	33	30	45	30	201		100,0%
	16,9%	14,4%	16,4%	14,9%	22,4%	14,9%	100,0%		

Source: Agência Lux/CEAA

Table 2: Summary of racial discrimination complaints taken to police stations or not

Place of occurrence	Was the complaint taken to a police station?				
	yes	%	no	%	Total
2.2. bars, social clubs, hotels	12	46,15%	14	53,85%	26
2.3. schools, medical clinics	6	54,55%	5	45,45%	11
2.4. other places	5	55,56%	4	44,44%	9
1.1. streets and public spaces	18	62,07%	11	37,93%	29
2.1. banks, department stores, supermarkets	24	70,59%	10	29,41%	34
1.2. residential buildings	13	76,47%	4	23,53%	17
3. workplaces	27	81,82%	6	18,18%	33
4. personal interaction	37	88,10%	5	11,90%	42
Total	142	70,65%	59	29,35%	201

Source: Agência Lux/CEAA

Table 3: Cases by type of social interaction and victims' sex

Type of social interaction	sex						
	both	female	male	total	total	female	male
Market relations	2	37	29	68	33,8%	45,1%	25,4%
Job relations	0	20	13	33	16,4%	24,4%	11,4%
Personal relations	1	19	39	59	29,4%	23,2%	34,2%
residential buildings	0	10	7	17			
Other places	1	9	32	42			
Public services	2	6	33	41	20,4%	7,3%	28,9%
schools	2	3	4	9			
consulate	0	1	2	3			
police	0	2	27	29			
Total	5	82	114	201	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Source: Agência Lux/CEAA

Table 4: Place of occurrence and victims' sex

Discrimination that occurred in:	Sex					
	both	female	male	Total	female	male
Streets and public spaces	0	7	40	47	14,9%	85,1%
Public service buildings	0	2	9	11	18,2%	81,8%
Banks	0	3	9	12	25,0%	75,0%
Press	0	1	2	3	33,3%	66,7%
Bars and night clubs	3	7	11	21	38,9%	61,1%
Other places	0	4	5	9	44,4%	55,6%
Private firms	0	5	5	10	50,0%	50,0%
Residential buildings	0	11	9	20	55,0%	45,0%
Schools	2	9	7	18	56,3%	43,8%
Social clubs	0	4	3	7	57,1%	42,9%
Commercial buildings	0	17	11	28	60,7%	39,3%
Medical clinics	0	5	2	7	71,4%	28,6%
Hotels	0	7	1	8	87,5%	12,5%
Total	5	82	114	201	41,8%	58,2%

Source: Agência Lux/CEAA

Table 5: Power situation and e victims' sex

The aggressor is	victims' sex					
	both	female	male	Total	%	%Ac
An authority or a superior	2	39	22	63	31,3%	31,3%
An authority representative	2	30	23	55	27,4%	58,7%
A police officer	0	2	29	31	15,4%	74,1%
Another costumer	0	5	11	16	8,0%	82,1%
An equal or a familiar person	0	4	14	18	9,0%	91,0%
A client	1	1	13	15	7,5%	98,5%
An stranger	0	1	2	3	1,5%	100,0%
Total	5	82	114	201	100,0%	

Source: Agência Lux/CEAA

Table 6: Discrimination rate by 100.000 "pretos" in Brazilian Metropolitan Areas,

Metropolitan areas	observed	% pretos	expected	difference
Rio de Janeiro	5,55	10,5%	8,76	-3,21
São Paulo	6,37	4,6%	3,82	2,55
Salvador	4,22	15,6%	13,00	-8,78
Belo Horizonte	5,78	8,3%	6,94	-1,16
Porto Alegre	5,91	6,0%	4,99	0,92
Recife	2,43	5,6%	4,68	-2,25
Brasília	11,51	3,7%	3,07	8,44
Curitiba	9,87	2,5%	2,05	7,82
Belém	4,05	2,6%	2,20	1,85
Fortaleza	0,00	2,0%	1,69	-1,69

Sources: Agência Lux/CEAA; IBGE, PNAD 1992.

Table 7: Correlation between selected variables

Variables	% Illiterates	Number of Cases	Income	% of university educated
% Illiterates	1,0000			
Number of Cases	-0,7147 P= 0,020	1,0000		
State per capita income	-0,5537 P= ,097	0,8574 P= ,002	1,0000	
% of university educated	-0,5836 P= ,077	0,8476 P= ,002	0,9511 P= ,000	1,0000

Sources: Agência Lux/CEAA; IBGE, PNAD 1992; IPEA, 1994.

Table 8: Values of the regression between observed cases, per capita income and proportion of illiterates at the Metropolitan area

R multiple	,90117				
R square	,81210				
R square adjusted	,75842				
Standard error	1,63519				
Variables in the equation					
Variable	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
Income	1,262171	,358108	,678819	3,525	,0097
Illiterates	-,308208	,177198	-,334992	-1,739	,1255
(Constant)	4,584395	2,697007	1,700	,1330	

Table 9: Demographic and economic indicators, published discrimination complaints by 100 thousand pretos and the regression equation estimated values

Metropolitan Area	Discrimination rate	Rate estimated by the regression	% illiterates	income per capita R\$	% whites	% pardos	% pretos	difference
Rio	5,548471	7,531272	9,08%	4386	59,43%	29,90%	10,53%	-1,9828
São Paulo	6,36628	7,721122	9,15%	4666	67,19%	26,25%	4,59%	-1,35484
Salvador	4,225503	5,793878	11,60%	1839	19,25%	64,90%	15,62%	-1,56837
Belo Horizonte	5,780838	6,478216	8,74%	2833	48,33%	43,21%	8,34%	-0,69738
Porto Alegre	5,909086	6,8	6,84%	3670	86,88%	6,91%	5,99%	-0,89091
Recife	2,427509	5,620882	15,42%	1603	35,92%	58,31%	5,62%	-3,19337
Brasília	11,51486	9,366005	9,12%	7089	46,30%	49,65%	3,69%	2,148858
Curitiba	9,866019	7,051689	7,97%	3674	84,51%	12,53%	2,46%	2,814331
Belém	4,048911	5,876624	7,37%	1940	32,35%	64,74%	2,65%	-1,82771
Fortaleza	0	5,398199	17,86%	1287	36,49%	61,29%	2,03%	-5,3982

Source: PNAD 1992, IBGE.