

Discrimination, color and social intervention among youth in the city of Rio de Janeiro (RJ, Brazil): the male perspective

Fátima Cecchetto; Simone Monteiro

Instituto Oswaldo Cruz – Fiocruz

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the issues of discrimination and racism among Rio de Janeiro youth, by examining the perceptions, experiences and reactions of the group to situations where they confronted discrimination. The research is part of a broader study about the effects of social interventions in the trajectories of young, lower class males and females. In-depth interviews were conducted with 42 youths from 18 to 24 years old, some of whom participated in citizenship and professional training programs. The article analyzes the youths' statements about the circuits, networks and processes that involve discriminatory practices in the city of Rio de Janeiro. We emphasize the configurations that discrimination and racism take among young males with experience in social programs and their implication for sociability and access to certain social spaces. The comparison between youths with and without institutional experience provided interesting insights on race, class and gender, thus broadening the understanding of the specificities of racial relations in Brazil.

Key Words: Discrimination, Youth, Social Intervention, Racial Relations, Gender, Masculinity.

Since the 1980's various studies about racial inequalities in Brazil have revealed the degree to which individuals classified as *Negroes* (pretos and pardos)¹ are exposed to cumulative disadvantages during their lives. The scope of these investigations has highlighted the central role that *racial* filiation has in the intergenerational transmission of social inequalities. This was proven by lower rates of rising mobility for *Negro* individuals, as well as by greater obstacles found by families headed by *Negro* individuals – even those belonging to the middle and upper classes – to

¹ Considering that there are different acceptations of the categories used in the classification of color-race, in this article the terms will be presented in italic, as used in the works cited, or as defined in the self-classifications of those interviewed. Translators Note The terms *Negro*, *preto*, *pardo*, *mulatto* and *mestiço* will be left in Portuguese. Translation may only compound confusion about the terminology which carries different connotations in English and Portuguese. For purposes of clarification, we can offer the broad translations to be: *Negro* = Negro, *preto* = black, *pardo* = brown, *mulatto* = mulatto and *mestiço* = mestizo.

transmit the *status* they reached to their children.² Based on these findings, some studies demonstrate the disparities between people of different color in access to education and health care, in social stratification and in Brazil's labor structure.³ Nevertheless, the importance that color and race have in everyday sociability and in different forms of illness is still little investigated by academic studies in Brazil. In addition, there is a notable scarcity of qualitative studies about perceptions and experiences of racial discrimination in Brazil.

Within this context, this article considers the experience of discrimination and prejudice in the vision of lower class male and female youths in Rio de Janeiro. The purpose is to analyze the meanings attributed to their experiences. In-depth interviews were conducted to reach this objective, focusing on the educational-professional and sexual-emotional paths of 42 young people from 18 – 24 years of age, some of whom participated in four social programs realized in the city of Rio de Janeiro.⁴ It is worth highlighting that this research is part of the study *Sexuality, gender and the Negro population in Brazil and Colombia: qualitative evaluations*, which is supported by the Ford Foundation. The purpose of the study is to evaluate the impact of the social interventions⁵ on the life paths of the lower class youth.

The research presented here began by analyzing studies of the repercussion of social programs promoted by non-governmental organizations designed to provide opportunities for youth who live in regions that are poor or considered to be at *risk*.⁶ The studies reveal that “youth who participate in programs”⁷ have greater symbolic capital, manifest by an assertive attitude and broader language about social rights in comparison to their peers in the same social circle who do not have experience in social programs. In other words, the actions of the social programs contribute to the mediation and expansion of the social network of the youth. The analysis of the

² Carlos HASENBALG and Nelson do Valle SILVA, 1993; and HASENBALG, 1996.

³ The scholarly production mentioned was based on data from demographic censuses and home studies conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) in 1976 and 1980. The procedure of the studies consisted in establishing a statistical relation between the declared color of the people interviewed and other social-economic and demographic characteristics of these people (cf. HASENBALG, 1996, p. 239-241).

⁴ The following criteria were used in the selection of the four programs: a) inclusion of two programs that attend former street children; c) the possibility of supporting an institutional partnership, by the incorporation of social programs developed by the Fundação Oswaldo Cruz; d) inclusion of at least one program that concerns the theme of racial relations; e) safe access to the communities, considering the urban violence in the Rio de Janeiro slums; f) perspective of comparison with the study of Simone MONTEIRO, 2002, undertaken with youths from the slum of Vigário Geral.

⁵ The term *social intervention* refers here to professional training and educational programs for citizenry, conducted by government institutions and or civil organizations. These programs vary in their thematic focus, duration and other factors, as illustrated by the work of Regina NOVAES and Clara MAFRA, 1998.

⁶ NOVAES, 1997; and Mary CASTRO, Miriam ABRAMOVAY and Maria das Graças RUA, 2001.

⁷ NOVAES, 1997, p. 150.

configuration that racial discrimination acquires in a specific segment of young adults is guided by the dynamic of this social interaction.

The work is divided into three parts. In the first we reflect on the theme of racial relations in Brazilian society by conducting a brief mapping of Brazilian studies on the issue. In the second we present a social demographic characterization of those interviewed and the general results related to various dimensions of experiences of discrimination among the group in question. In the third part we focus on statements about the experiences made by the young men who have participated social programs.

Articulating discrimination and classification by color-race

Studies about racial prejudice among the inhabitants of Brazilian cities normally reveal a gap between the view individuals have about society, where the existence of racism is recognized, and a self-perception of prejudice, in which people affirm that they do not have racist attitudes.⁸ Thus, the identification of racism in *the other* reveals a peculiar dimension of racial relations in Brazil. In this sense, other studies have sought to reveal not only the mechanisms and vicious circles of discrimination and of racial prejudice⁹ in Brazil, but also to analyze their specificities from a critical point of view and in terms of their affirmation.

It is worth recalling that the notion that Brazilian society manifests a unique form of racial standards goes quite far back,¹⁰ but took on greater visibility with studies sponsored by UNESCO in the 1950's.¹¹ This work found a strong association between color and race and social economic

⁸ Cleusa TURRA and Gustavo VENTURI, 1995; Lílian SCHWARCZ, 1996; Kabengele MUNANGA, 1996; Lívio SANSONE, 2003; and Luiz OLIVEIRA and Paula Cristina BARRETO, 2003.

⁹ In the academic literature consulted, prejudice and racial discrimination, in general, are not distinct. In this work, we opt to follow this standard. However, there are conceptual specifications that establish distinct forms of approaching the theme of racial inequalities. The *Dicionário de Ciências Sociais*, defines “preconceito” [prejudice] as “a negative attitude, unfavorable to a group or its individual components ... with emphasis on ethnic groups”. In the same dictionary, discrimination “denotes unfavorable treatment given arbitrarily to certain categories of people ... the practices may include segregation ... and concrete expression in which prejudice is incarnated” (FGV, 1986). The understanding that discrimination necessarily involves a concrete action has been adopted by some non-governmental organizations involved in the defense of rights and citizenship, based on official documents that indicate those sanctions that should be applied in cases in which discrimination takes place. See <<http://www.dhnet.org.br/w3/ceddhc/bdados/cartilha14.htm>>, accessed March 20, 2006.

¹⁰ See Gilberto FREYRE, 1984.

¹¹ The UNESCO Racial Relations Project, which was planned to document, understand and disseminate to the world (post-Nazi genocide) the supposed formula of Brazilian racial democracy. The studies were conducted in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Bahia and Pernambuco and included participation of sociologists and Anthropologists including Luiz de Aguiar Costa Pinto, Florestan Fernandes, Roger Bastide, Thales de Azevedo, Oracy Nogueira, Charles Wagley, René Ribeiro and Marvin Harris. About the history of the UNESCO Racial Relations Project, see Marcos MAIO, 1997.

status and the broad documentation produced confirmed the presence of racial prejudice and discrimination in all spheres. Nevertheless, the studies also revealed a tension between the myth of racial democracy and the forms of racism found in Brazil.¹² More recently, based on initiatives that took place during the administration of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1994-2002), government affirmative action programs with racial elements have been implemented in the country, stimulating the public debate about the fight against racial inequality.¹³

Within the discussions about the particularities of racial relations in Brazil, we consider it relevant to highlight the system of color-race classification. As attested to by various studies, the concept of racial discrimination in Brazil is interrelated to discussions about physical characteristics attributed to “race”. This is to say that appearance (phenotype) is a central criteria for the classification of color. The classic work of Oracy Nogueira,¹⁴ for example, showed how the mode of classification of an individual’s color in Brazil is a procedure that includes a variety of factors. Phenotype is combined with other principal demarcations including social class, education and corporal attributes such as posture, style of dress and *hair*. There is, however, a close correlation between the degree of skin darkness and prejudice and discrimination suffered. This component of Brazilian racial standards, based on appearance or “mark”, distinguishes it from prejudice of “origin” characteristic of other societies, including that in North America, which combines in the same and single category *Negroes* and *mestiços* regardless of how *white* they may be phenotypically.

Authors such as Peter Fry¹⁵ and Ivonne Maggie¹⁶ contribute to this issue by developing, each in their own manner, analyses about the existence and articulation of various modes of racial classification. These are: the dichotomic or bipolar mode (Negro/white) , the census mode (“preto”(black)/white/”pardo”(brown)/yellow/indigenous) and the multiple mode. The latter, which is broadly used by the population, is characterized by a continuum of gradations expressed in a varied nomenclature, including “mulatos”, “morenos” (dark or light brown), dark, light, etc. For Maggie, the “dark-light” *gradient* speaks of a supposed naturalness and dilutes oppositions, because it is relative, although it gives greater value to those who are lighter and causes discomfort for those who are darker. Fry’s work, in turn, concretizes the specificity of a myriad of classifications, seen as native categories, which allows contact among people of various colors.

¹² MAIO, 1999.

¹³ See Antônio GUIMARÃES, 1999; Peter FRY, 2000; Rosane HERINGER, 2001; MAIO and MONTEIRO, 2005.

¹⁴ See NOGUEIRA, 1998, p. 199-243.

¹⁵ See FRY, 1991.

¹⁶ See MAGGIE, 1996.

Lívio Sansone,¹⁷ in a study about the rise of a new terminology of color in two Bahian cities, examined local inter-racial contacts, and characterized the spaces where color acquires greater or lesser importance in social and power relations. What this ethnographic study brings to light is the existence of an hierarchy of domains and spaces, which it designates as *light areas* and *heavy areas* for racial relations. The labor market, the matrimonial market, the realm of dating and contacts with the police are examples of areas in which color functions as an impediment. Some leisure environments, including the Catholic Church and some types of social parties, appear as spaces where there is a minimum of prejudice and discrimination.

The specific process of discrimination based on skin color, with repercussions on the violation of citizenship rights, has been described by some Brazilian social scientists, although they admit that the studies are still incipient in this country.¹⁸ Sérgio Adorno, in a study about police and the penal system in the city of São Paulo, identified discrepant treatment in terms of human rights for *Negro* citizens. His conclusion is that racism is an important criteria in the definition of police and penal practices. This discriminatory standard is also found in the growth of premature deaths of young *Negroes* by homicide due to violent rivalries between drug dealers and the police, a phenomenon typical of metropolitan areas and Rio de Janeiro in particular.¹⁹

The impact of racial bias on the victimization of the *Negro* population was analyzed by Inácio Cano and Carlos Eugênio Ferreira. Based on the National Home Sample Study (PNAD) 1998,²⁰ the researchers identified the possibility that a *significant portion* of *Negro* men would not reach advanced age because of homicide, aggravating the previously identified situation of population imbalance between the sexes. According to the authors, the life expectation of this group in Rio de Janeiro (63.6 years) is inferior to that of Brazil as a whole, but would be greater if not for the homicides, proving that the impact of violent deaths is more intense in Rio de Janeiro than the Brazilian average.

The dramatic increase of mortality by homicide of young *Negroes* in Brazil has drawn the attention of demographers and epidemiologists and is now considered a serious public health problem.²¹ Also in the health field, it is necessary to emphasize that the quantity of academic biomedical studies that focus on the interfaces between race and health is still limited in the

¹⁷ See SANSONE, 2003, p. 80.

¹⁸ See Sérgio ADORNO, 1996, p. 256; Antônio GUIMARÃES, 1997, p. 68; and Sílvia RAMOS and Leonarda MUSUMECI, 2005.

¹⁹ See Luiz Eduardo SOARES et al., 1996; and Alba ZALUAR, 1999 and 2004, among others.

²⁰ The authors indicate that *whites* constitute 54% of the Brazilian population, but only 45.1 % of the victims of homicide that year. Meanwhile *pardos* (brown) are 39.5% of the population, but 44.5% of the victims; and *pretos* (blacks) are 5.7% of the population and 9.7% of the victims, which reveals a greater risk of homicide for *pretos* and *pardos*. See CANO and FERREIRA, 2003, p. 281-316.

²¹ Maria Cecília MINAYO, 1994.

Brazilian context and there are very few studies about the consequences of racial discrimination in health care.²² In recent years, this scenery has been modified due to the interest of researchers from the field of public health and of public policies that focus on the “health of the Negro population”, as analyzed by Maio and Monteiro.²³

Another perspective that helps to understand the dynamic of racial discrimination is that of intersectionality. In a pioneer study, anthropologist Verena Stolcke²⁴ identified the need to examine the way that “sexual” and “racial” differences, allied to those of class, are articulated to reproduce oppression in capitalist society, based on a naturalization of social inequalities. Kimberlé Crenshaw,²⁵ in another research context, showed that racism, male domination, poverty and other discriminatory systems, frequently intermix, structuring the relative positions of individuals according to gender. The perspective presented by these authors appears to us to be fundamental in considering the various arrangements through which specific forms of discrimination are manifest in the dynamic of the sociability of the group studied.

Considering these references, the second part of the article presents a brief profile of 42 youths, of both sexes, with and without experience in social programs and focuses on their statements about experiences with discrimination. It should be mentioned that the examination of the issue emphasized the systems of social representations and practices of the universe selected, within the social-anthropological tradition, through the descriptions and interpretations of the values and practices of identified social groups. To facilitate the reading, youths with participation in social programs will be denominated “P” and those without experience “NP”.

Experiences of discrimination among Rio de Janeiro youth

Of the 42 youths interviewed, 24 had participated in social programs and 18 did not, but both groups had similar characteristics in terms of sex, age, social insertion and location of residence. All had attended school, but only half continue to study. The NP youths had comparatively less schooling, although the differences are not expressive.

In relation to their families of origin, it was found that the majority are from the Southeastern region. The youth are residents of slums and poor neighborhoods (Vigário Geral, Santa Cruz, Maré, Vila do Pinheiro or are living in the streets). Most of them have lived in these

²² It should be mentioned that there is solid international biomedical production that considers the racial perspective, above all in North America, which has presented various theoretical-methodological questions that are important to the studies about this issue. See MONTEIRO, 2004.

²³ Cf. MAIO and MONTEIRO, 2005.

²⁴ See STOLCKE, 1991.

locations since birth, which indicates the permanence of this group with their families of origin. In relation to conjugality, nearly half said they were single. Only 10 youths said they were in a stable relationship.

Of the 42 youths interviewed, about 50% said they are working. Of these, most have participated in social programs and are exercising activities linked to the cultural sector (production, locution, percussion, acting) or are employed in the service sector (in pharmacies, supermarkets, bakeries etc.). Comparatively, youths without experience in social programs are more likely to work in the informal sector and have a more precarious relation to the labor market (street sales, construction work, garbage collection, pick-up jobs) or be unemployed. Unemployment is expressive among the NP woman, the segment that is possibly most affected by the rapid transformations in the labor market, a situation that is indicated in the studies about the process of “social disaffiliation”²⁶ in contemporary societies.

It should be noted that according to the data available to us, most of the P youth perceive that they have a better social and economic situation than their parents did at the same age. The principal evidence of this is that they have fewer children, greater ability to purchase material goods, better living conditions and the distance from the place of origin. In the perspective of the NP youth, however, their parents had better living conditions, highlighted by the absence of unemployment (“they had more opportunities”) and of urban violence (“at that time there was no drug dealing”).

In terms of the youths’ self-classification of color and race – based on their responses to the open question; *What is your color or race?* – 18 youths said they were “Negroes”, 8 “pardos” (brown), 6 “morenos” (dark), 4 “pretos” (black) and 4 “whites”.

One did not respond, another gave an ambivalent response (“morena-preta”), and “pretinha” (a little black girl) appeared once. In general, there is no significant difference in skin-color among those interviewed with or without participation in the programs. The lower proportion of *whites* in the universe analyzed is coherent with national statistics about the higher concentration of *pretos* (blacks) and *pardos* (browns) in population groups with lower purchasing power.

In addition to little variation in the terminology of color-race, our attention was called to the greater recurrence of the term *Negro* among the youths who integrated the programs and the use of the category *preto* only by those without this insertion. In fact, this is possibly due to the change in

²⁵ Ver CRESHAW, 2002, p. 174-176.

²⁶ The notion of “social disaffiliation” is used by Robert Castel to elucidate the social processes that culminate in situations of social unprotection and disconnection of the close networks. Counter to the concept of exclusion, “disaffiliation” speaks of active subjects, participating in social struggles and not only of a subjugation to the economic logic. (CASTEL, 1995).

the connotation of the term *Negro*, which lost its offensive implication, becoming transformed into a symbol of modernity among the youths, as found by Sansone in studies in Rio and in Salvador.²⁷ In addition, given that the way that people indicate their own color is the result of a combination of factors such as educational level, income and age, style and others, we can suppose that the experience in the program is equally important in the incorporation of a taxonomy of color-race by the social movements that emphasizes the racial category *Negro*. This does not mean to affirm that a bipolar classification model was adopted by the group studied, since the use of the category *pardo* remained.

For a deeper analysis of the repercussion of the programs on the affirmation of racial identity and on inter-racial relations, among other issues, it would be necessary to articulate the data related to discrimination with an analysis of the biographies of the youths and of the actions promoted by the programs. In this study, we focused on the discussion of the racial issue, based on experiences with discrimination, which according to those interviewed are recurring in certain contexts. This focus was based on questions related to: 1) the perception and context of discrimination; 2) the reactions to the situations of discrimination; 3) opinions about opportunities in the labor market according to gender, color and class; 4) opinions about the implantation of quota systems in Brazilian universities and racism.

Not all of those interviewed reported experiences with discrimination. Of all those interviewed, 20 men and 10 women indicated that they have experienced some type of discrimination. Among the cases mentioned, discrimination by color and place of residence prevailed, followed by what was designated as *appearance* by the youth, which includes “style of dress”, “social condition” and “physical deficiency”. The responses were not exclusive that is, most of them described experiencing multiple discriminations. Of those interviewed who cited discrimination by color, half also mentioned discrimination because of *appearance*. This data, in principle, suggests that, for those interviewed, class, expressed by the manner of dressing and by locality, has a more expressive weight than color in their perception of the discriminatory situations, even among those self-declared as *Negroes* and *pretos*. Those who live in the streets tend to lose a tie with their place of origin, attenuating the importance of location in the configurations of discrimination.

The data about the importance of *appearance* in the triggering of discriminatory practices correspond to the already mentioned Brazilian classificatory standard, emphasized by Oracy Nogueira. That is, in the explanations about prejudice in Brazil, color is not the determining criteria, given that corporal posture, “style” clothes and context are perceived as equally important elements.

²⁷ SANSONE, 2003, p. 78-80.

In relation to the contexts of discrimination, most indicated public spaces, such as *shopping centers*, banks, streets and restaurants. In these locations, prejudice is manifest by passersby who steer away, poor service, laziness and violence by security guards in commercial establishments and by the police. The youth attribute the triggering of discriminatory attitudes to both social condition and color. After public space, the labor market is identified as a *tough* place for color. When questioned about the existence of equal opportunities in the job market, the majority of those interviewed recognized inequality among men and women, *pretos* (blacks), *pardos* (browns) and whites and the poor and the rich. Nevertheless, some perceive a decreased asymmetry by gender, because of the conquests of women in the labor market. Concerning inequality among rich and poor, the emphasis on the lack of schooling (“study”) among the “poor” in the determination of opportunities is highlighted.

In the case of the asymmetry between people of different colors in the labor market, the statements point to the existence of prejudice against *pretos*(blacks)-*Negroes*, in contrast to a privileged position for *whites*. Part of the group did not explain the motives; others referred to the absence of *Negroes-pretos* in spaces such as the electronic media, social condition or *appearance* to justify the lower access of *Negroes* to the market. The historic legacy of the disadvantages of the *Negro* population is also cited, as well as situations of racism in daily life, in various contexts. However, some highlight positive changes in terms of a decrease in racism. In general, the findings indicate a perception of unequal opportunities based on race in the labor market. Nevertheless, the explanations are varied and not restricted to color, demonstrating a close dialectic between color and class.

In relation to the feelings and reactions in face of discrimination, there was a prevalence of what we call a negative interiorization indicated by statements that expressed feelings of humiliation, embarrassment, sadness and discomfort. Some of the youths allege that they reacted with irony, silence and or indifference (“I don’t let it bother me”; I didn’t feel anything”; “I take it as a joke or a prank”) as a strategy to attenuate the prejudice suffered. The few cases of externalization, that is, a manifestation of an explicit reaction, were marked by a demonstration of anger, cursing and physical aggression.

We noted that discrimination is still experienced in a quite individualized manner with no references to the broader institutional context or a search for help from entities that defend citizenship or to social protection networks, such as Negro organizations. The finding that in the universe analyzed only two youths registered a police complaint in the cases of racial discrimination, collaborates this perspective. Thus, the data indicate that skin color and place of

residence are the most recurring discriminatory factors and that there is overlapping of these forms of discrimination, revealing the interfaces between color, territory and social class-status.

In relation to the system of quotas for *Negroes*, half of those interviewed had heard of them, most of whom were men who participate in a social program. The data suggests a certain visibility of this issue among the group, although the explanations, in general, indicate a difficulty in understanding the issue. In addition, most of the young men and women had unfavorable or critical positions about quotas. They allege, including some self-identified as *Negroes*, that this process disqualifies those who are supposedly benefited. One statement illustrates this view:

I as a Negro should support this. If everyone is human, there are equal rights, everyone has the same possibility, why should there be quotas for Negroes? Why? Is a Negro less competent? Who goes to public universities? The hundreds of owners of those cars that are there. Someone from the slum does not have a car. Its very complicated. There should be equal rights for everyone. Both for Negroes, whites, the overweight, the blind, the deaf, and for the guy in a wheelchair. Not quotas for just one group.

We can say that the youth with unfavorable positions defend universalist positions and fear the sharpening of racial prejudice. In contrast, those who argue in favor of quotas mention the difficult access the *Negro* population and or the *lower middle class* have to quality education, recognizing the need for specific treatment for these social groups, which is expressed in the following evaluation by another *Negro* youth.

I think it's interesting. Because the education of the Negro person is different from that of the rich, who has a private school, a truly good school. Public school is good, but not so much. There are differences in education, ... I think that there has to be a reserve for Negroes and the poor. Many are not able to pay, and in public school the education is weak.

It is worth noting the existence of ambivalent opinions that affirm both the individual benefits of the quotas, in that they broaden educational opportunities, and their negative implications, such as stimulating a lower sense of self and the possibility of reduced investments in public education. The findings converge with the current controversies about the quota policies, as some analyses indicate.²⁸

²⁸ See Mala HTUN, 2004; and Mônica GRIN, 2004.

Finally, we emphasize that the opinions about the existence of racism in Brazil reveal a high recognition of its presence among those interviewed, in conformity with other studies in this field.

Discrimination in male speech

In the analysis of the statements of the 30 youths who allege that they had experienced discrimination, attention is called to the predomination of statements from men (20) and the recurrence of the statements about discrimination by color and *appearance* among those with institutional experience. This configuration made us opt for a more systematic analysis of the material of the 12 male youths who participated in the programs. This choice proved to be important because it appears to be the first step towards understanding the interfaces between race and gender and the various forms they take. We now turn to the analysis of the discourses about discrimination from a male perspective.

Discrimination: contexts and reactions

In relation to the experience of discrimination in public spaces, such as shopping centers; bank agencies and other locations, there are statements about persecution and aggression by the security guards of these establishments. In the universe analyzed, only one Negro youth actively reacted. He called the police and registered a formal complaint against the aggressor:

[...] when I was leaving a store, a security guard approached me, threw me against the wall. I turned around, stepped away from him and said: “what’s happening? He said: “I am a police officer and you are under arrest”. I said: “Arrested for what? I know my rights. If you are the police, you are not in uniform, you have to identify yourself. If you have no identification, as far as I am concerned, you are not the police”.

On one hand, young *Negro* and poor men are generally more watched and persecuted in public spaces. On the other hand, it is rare for them to react to discrimination, often because of the belief that their rights are not guaranteed by police authorities. It is worth observing the data from the study by Ramos and Musumeci about police behavior and discrimination in Rio de Janeiro, in which most “preta” (black) youths maintain they were threatened or intimidated during contact with the police.²⁹ The statement of the person in the story below illustrates this vulnerability and demonstrates a break with the silence in light of this oppression:

²⁹ See RAMOS and MUSUMECI, 2005, p. 118.

[I said] “you think that I am a fool, I live in a community, in Vigário Geral. You think I don’t know anything! You want to beat me and say that I want to rob the shopping”. And one detail, I was very well dressed. Which is no justification, because everyone has the right to come and go, without problems. I was dressed, shoes, slacks, everything neat. I simply went out and called the police. There is a police booth there...we went to the police station to open an investigation against the guy.

This account expresses a possible relation between the educational actions of the social programs and the concept of social rights developed among the youths attended. This lead will be explored in subsequent analyses about the concepts and activities promoted by the social interventions. We also emphasize that the youth quoted above called the attitude of the guard he characterized as *white* as racism. Nevertheless, commenting on the episode, he does not attribute that behavior only to whites. He emphatically emphasized discriminatory acts of *Negroes*, marking a position that distances the discourse from one of racial polarization.

I think that he did it out of racism. The guy was white. Not because he was white, there are Negroes who are racist. There are guys who are Negro and don’t like to admit that they are Negro and do not like Negroes, I know people like that too.

Even in the public space, another *Negro* youth maintained that he was unfairly impeded from entering a bank agency: the automatic door blocked him. He realized, however, that equal treatment was not given to a “white guy in a suit and five other people ...” Many think that robbers are those who are poorly dressed”. The fluidity in the explanation about a distinct treatment for *Negroes* and the poor in certain social spaces is indicated in the statement of many of those interviewed who classified themselves as *Negroes*, *pardos* (browns) or whites. They lament the prejudice aimed at people of low social class, which is manifest by an indifference or lack of attention from sales people and merchants towards them. The discrepancy in the service due to class was commented by one *white* youth:

I remember it as if it was today, it was striking ... I entered the store, despite the fact that I was with my godmother, I was very young, I think I was still 16, I entered the shopping with her, a certain discrimination, the person did not want to attend us properly.

Meanwhile in the work environment, a youth self-classified as *Negro* realized that there are particular expectations in this circuit, through the looks aimed at him that signal a disdain of his way of dressing. In this sense, the interviewee gives a specific meaning to his experience:

[...] I do not believe that it was a form of discrimination, but a form of orientation when I was promoted to be assistant of representation and sales for the publisher. When they had a stand in the congress, they said that I had to go well dressed. Then I thought to myself: “How can I go well dressed if I don’t have money to buy good clothes?” This was a form of discrimination, but it was a person who said it. It was then that I saw that this person was discriminating, then the boss gave me his clothes. Then I started to go well dressed. I don’t know, I believe that it was more of advice ... I mean to say that if I was poorly dressed in that place I may not attract clients. You have to have a good image...

This statement says a lot about the weight of economic conditions, translated by *appearance*, in the explanations of the situations of discrimination experienced by those interviewed. The lack of explicit emphasis on racial prejudice was present in the speech of another *Negro* youth who stated in an incisive tone: “what’s most important is to have money in your pocket”. This affirmation expresses the view that racial discrimination tends to be supplanted by wealth. As such, it is related to some of the theoretical discussions about the way that color, class and status are related in Brazil in various situations of social interaction. This corroborates the situational aspect of racial discrimination among those studied, given the importance that other social criteria have in the processes of social differentiation. Nevertheless, a lack of distinction between race and class is not confirmed, for example, in access to the labor market, according to a comment by one *white* youth:

I think that for **Negroes** there is considerable racism in the labor market. Prejudice against a person’s race. At times a person is even well *educated*, speaks well, but does not have a chance.

Another *Negro* youth gave a similar opinion upon affirming that prejudice by color is distinct from that by class:

In the question of these jobs that ask for a profile, I think that for whites it is much easier. I have friends who went for interviews, they call on the phone and say: “We liked your resume a lot, very good, it has everything that we want from this person”. Then they ask about color, in the Resume, we don’t put it, and when they say they are *Negro*, *moreno* (dark), then the response is: “Ah, no I’m sorry, I didn’t see”.

The media also appears to be a factor responsible for the perpetuation of barriers to social mobility of *Negroes*. Two commentaries indicate the absence of men and women who are *pretos*

(black) and have “bad hair” on television programs, emphasizing the presence of racism in social institutions. Nevertheless, some noted the shift of a more generalized racism in society to a more psychological and individual dimension, as one interviewee who defined himself as *pardo* (brown) commented:

I think that this is something that comes from the person himself. For example, the Negro comes and says, ah because I am Negro and such. I think that he puts it into his own head. Its already his, but this doesn't exist. Today this doesn't exist.

A decrease in prejudice was noted by some of the youths, among those who had more opportunities for mobility and social circulation due to their participation in social programs. One youth interviewed spoke ironically about the internalization of a “negative” evaluation of his case, because he believed he carried a distinctive mark that favored exclusion:

Who knows, I think they look more to the white side... this has decreased a bit here in Brazil, no one is favoring this side any more, but it still exists. It does. For example, a really large company, if *you* go there you'll get it, if I go there with this face of a thief [shaking his head from side to side negatively]

Considering that this youth has been able to insert himself successfully in the cultural market, his perspective may indicate that institutional experience works to mitigate obstacles to social ascension of the poor and *Negro* population. In this sense, this statement stimulates a reflection about the specific processes that mark the experience of discrimination among the youths studied. The finding of a permanence of racism in certain social spaces, including possibilities for preterition, does not contradict the recognition of decreased prejudice. It may indicate simultaneous and varied experiences of social insertion (often promoted by the activities in the social programs) and of social barriers (limits to social ascension).

In this sense, most of the young men experienced multiple discrimination stemming from interaction between color and social class. The territorial “identity” defined here by the social and symbolic ties established with geographic areas, is also part of this process as we will see below.

Territoriality and Color

Some of the men interviewed alleged that they suffer constant tension due to the stigmas associated to their place of residence. The statement below shows the reaction of one youth, who

described himself as “moreno” (dark), when he faced a negative reaction to the fact that he is a resident of the Favela da Maré:

My friend said, are you going to say that you live in Maré? Where am I going to say that I live? In Barra da Tijuca, if I live in Maré? If I have to promote my program here, my big opportunity with people, NGOs from France, Spain, Peru, Paraguay, Uruguay. With this opportunity am I going to say that I live in Barra? No, I live in Maré and I am proud of it.

Also in this sense, a youth reacted to prejudicial comments about his community, emphasizing that the leisure options, such as dances, are attended by “people from the *asphalt*” – referring to people who do not live in the slums. Other slum residents also mentioned the discomfort of seeing the place where they live recurrently associated to criminality and to wars between drug dealers and the police. The statements affirm that this normally takes place when they need to leave their address in stores or when seeking employment. That is, territoriality, in this case, is considered to be a restrictive factor. It is worth transcribing a statement from another *pardo* (brown) youth about this issue.

[...] when I went to look for work I put my address on the CV: “Ah, you can wait”. I am still waiting. “Ah, Vila do Pinheiro, gunfights, thieves.” This is to say that the discrimination begins there. I read an article that young people who live in the Morro do Alemão, who live in the Cidade de Deus, can’t get jobs because they live there. Is it possible that there are only criminals here in Morro do Alemão? There are good people. But society doesn’t see the other side.

The position of this youth, like that of others who live in the slums of Rio de Janeiro, is different from that which is found in most of the cases of discrimination by color. Instead of being embarrassed by it, they see their territorial identity in a positive manner, reinforcing emotional ties to the location, notwithstanding the violence brought by drug trafficking in these areas in recent years and its implications for the symbolic and political planes for the web of youth sociability.

Final considerations

This study focused on the experiences with discrimination of youths from the lower classes of Rio de Janeiro. It sought to identify the contexts of this experience, its impact on life trajectories and the ways that the youths respond to discrimination. We found that experiences with discrimination were not mentioned by everyone in the group studied. The reports were more

frequent among men, principally those who have participated in social programs. The scarcity of statements by women indicates the weight of the asymmetry of gender relations in the perception of racism, which is manifest by the invisibility of the racial component in the situations of discrimination lived by the women.

This situation stimulates reflections about the interfaces between the hierarchies of race, class and gender, particularly in the Brazilian context in which the mark of color, as a domain of discrimination, is not disassociated from social condition. However, this does not mean to say that the identification of racism is always subsumed to the economic condition and that color does not play an important role in the dynamic of oppression. The descriptions of the youths reaffirm data from other studies in the field that found that the labor market and circulation in public places are contexts in which color and race interact with pre-existing social disadvantages to produce a specific dimension of discrimination. In this particular situation, it is essential to consider that poor *Negro* men who live in urban areas are more vulnerable to discriminatory and racist practices, even from institutions created to protect them, such as the police.³⁰

In the analysis conducted, the factor of class tied to place of residence was also perceived by the informants as an element that triggered discriminatory attitudes. We emphasize that unlike the situations of racial discrimination, the manifestations of prejudice linked to place of residence instigate reactions of positive feelings among the informants about their place of residence. That is, territoriality is a motive of pride, above all among the youths from poor communities, given the importance of territory in the social classification system in Rio de Janeiro.³¹ Location serves, therefore, as a parameter for other forms of classification, particularly social class and youthful styles. Among the youths, respect for territoriality can also be seen from the perspective of the real and symbolic gratifications that come from having a collective identity in a scenery disturbed by urban violence. In this sense, what appears to count among these men interviewed is a feeling of adhesion to a group and the affirmation of a common repertoire, established by territorial classification, linked to male codes of sociability.³²

Concerning reactions to discriminatory practices, male youths with institutional experience revealed more assertive positions supported by a notion of social rights than the others youths. Considering the other indications about the impact of social programs on social mobility and

³⁰ See ADORNO, 1996; SOARES et al., 1996; and RAMOS and MUSUMECI, 2005.

³¹ In the 1990's, the considerable increase in violence and criminality in Rio de Janeiro caused by illegal drug dealing came to be part of the daily life of residents and has contributed to the generalization of the feeling of fear and insecurity due to the absence of changes in the public safety policies in the violent regions (ZALUAR, 1999).

³² Fátima CECCHETTO, 2004.

professionalization of youths,³³ we can presume that an institutional experience confers a distinction to its participants, when compared to their peers without insertion in these programs. It must still be determined to what degree other distinctions, such as the predominance of the terminology *Negro*, can be attributed to the discourses and activities promoted in the realm of the social programs.

Based on the statements analyzed, we conclude that the youths interviewed are positioned in a space where the manifestations of discrimination by color-race, class and place of residence are found and produce simultaneous and varied processes, which are sometimes damaging. It was possible to deduce that racism does not act with equal force among the youths studied, or that is, the heterogeneity of the experiences of discrimination must be considered, and excessive generalizations should be avoided.

The comparison made between youths, with and without institutional experience, and the consideration of gender adopted in this text provides interesting clues about experiences with discrimination. These indications can be deepened by future studies of the actions of social programs, in order to expand the understanding of the circuits, networks and processes that involve discriminatory practices, in light of the specificities of racial relations in Rio de Janeiro and Brazil.

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³³ MONTEIRO and CECCHETTO, 2006.

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