POLICE STOPS, SUSPECTS AND DISCRIMINATION IN THE CITY OF RIO DE JANEIRO

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"the police car was approaching slowly/ and suddenly, suddenly decided to stop me/
One of the guys from inside / saying before he was out: hey, buddy, you're done for, we gotcha!"

(...)

"It was just another one [police stop]/coming down on us/ left overs from the dictatorship"

(Marcelo Yuka, *Tribunal de rua*) [*Street Tribunal*, translation]

This paper presents the results of *Abordagem Policial, Estereótipos Raciais e Percepções da Discriminação na Cidade do Rio de Janeiro* (Police Stops, Racial Stereotypes and Perceptions of Discrimination in the City of Rio de Janeiro), a study carried out in 2003 by the *CESeC* and supported by the Ford Foundation. The research was designed around two main objectives.

Our first aim was to gather information on the relationship between Rio's citizens and its police, and specifically their experiences with police stops or *blitz*,[1] identifying the possible variations in quantity and quality across racial and social lines and assessing the impact of police stops on the currently held opinions of police work.

Our second aim was to investigate the mechanisms and criteria involved in the military police officer's (the uniformed street cop) definition of a "suspect" in order to verify the possible influence of racial, class, or other social profiling. In other words, is the police definition of a suspect conditioned by that person's social and racial status?

We consider police stops ideal situations for the study of these topics since they involve direct contact between the police and the population, in which: a) citizens are not free to choose whether to initiate contact or not (in contrast with, for example, the decision to file a complaint or to call the police to solve a problem) and b) these encounters happen outside the context of criminal activity, irrespective of concrete information on which to base suspicion, and therefore are more conducive to the influence of stereotypes and prejudices. In theory, any citizen, male or female, traveling on foot, driving a car or using any other form of transportation, may be stopped and searched in the course of both routine police action and special crime fighting operations. In practice however, police stop only a fraction of the population, and it is well known that the practice

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is not random, but in fact selective and, as such, one that depends largely on previously held criteria for suspicion, be it physical appearance, attitude, place, time or circumstances, or even a combination of these and other factors. The city population, on the other hand, has its own ideas and expectations concerning the criteria adopted by the police force in such situations – ideas and expectations that may or may not be confirmed in the encounters experienced on the streets, which may or not change through concrete experience, and which may or may not coincide with opinions on how the police *should* act. The context of police stops provides us, therefore, not only with an objective basis for identifying *profiles* being adopted by the police force, but also with a privileged angle to observe the overlap between these profiles and the perception of citizens, between perception and experience, or, in other words, how images, expectations and stereotypes are played out between police and citizens in their day to day encounters.

This study combined quantitative and qualitative methods. We began by interviewing militants of the black movement and young people involved in cultural activities in the shantytowns. Four focus groups were organized with young people of different regional and class backgrounds in the city of Rio de Janeiro.[2] Apart from providing extremely rich qualitative material, this approach to the topic gave us firm grounds for building a questionnaire to be used in the quantitative survey. The second stage of the project consisted of a home survey carried out by *Science – Sociedade Científica da Escola Nacional de Ciências Estatísticas* (The Scientific Society of the National School for Statistical Sciences) – during June and July of 2003. For this survey a sample of 2250 people, statistically representative of the population of Rio between the ages of 15 and 65, completed a form with 79 questions designed to convey their experiences and perception of police stops in the city, as well as their general views on police, justice, public safety, and on racial and class discrimination.[3]

Open interviews with military police officers from different battalions of the municipality – low and high ranking officers – were also carried out with the objective of understanding the dynamics and the logic of the police stops and *blitz*, and also of registering the opinions held by different groups within the Military Police regarding the survey topics. We had originally planned to include focus groups with military police officers, and a sample survey of the Military Police in the State of Rio de Janeiro, but this stage of the project was abandoned because of numerous obstacles raised by the Rio de Janeiro Public Security Authorities to any survey being carried out within police institutions. The interviews that were carried out for this project, as well as previous studies by other authors and the analysis of technical documentation relative to the *blitz* became, therefore, this paper's primary source of data on police stop procedures and the criteria used by the police for determining suspects.

This preliminary report discusses some significant findings of the study done focusing on the practice of police stops. Complete results, including other types of experiences and perceptions related to the police will be part of the final report, soon to be published as a book.[4]

Police Stops A little over one third (37.8%) of the *cariocas* – those living in Rio de Janeiro – interviewed for the quantitative survey said they had at one time been stopped or approached by the police. Forty-three percent (43%) of these recalled having had this experience at least three times in their lifetime. In almost seventy percent (70%) of the cases the latest experience had occurred in the twelve preceding months and in over ninety percent (90%) of the cases, the person had been stopped by the Military Police. For the majority of the people stopped, the most recent experience had taken place while driving a private vehicle (56.4% a car and 5.7% a motorcycle), for 51% the police stop happened in the context of what are commonly denominated *blitz* and which are technically called "*A-Rep3*": unexpected actions of vehicle search with the aim of apprehending weapons and drugs and fighting robbery and auto theft. Police pedestrian stops in streets accounted for 19% of the latest experiences reported, those occurring in public transportation (buses, trains, kombis or vans) were of approximately 15%, and police stops that took place in other situations (taxi cabs or bicycles) accounted for approximately 4%. See **Table 1** for more details.

Table 1

DISTRIBUTION OF PEOPLE STOPPED BY THE POLICE, ACCORDING TO THEIR LATEST EXPERIENCE

TYPE	%
PRIVATE CAR IN A BLITZ	48,1
ON FOOT, STREET	19,5
BUS OR TRAIN	11,2
PRIVATE CAR OUTSIDE A BLITZ	8,3
VAN OR KOMBI	3,5
MOTORCYCLE IN A BLITZ	3,0
MOTORCYCLE OUTSIDE A BLITZ	2,7
TAXICAB IN A BLITZ	2,1
BICYCLE	1,3
TAXICAB OUTSIDE BLITZ	0,2
OTHER	0,2
TOTAL	100,0

The prevailing incidence of police stops of private vehicles among the most recent related experiences is probably indicative of a policy the Military Police adopted of intensifying *blitz* operations in the city of Rio de Janeiro in the aftermath of the tragic episode of the 174 Bus line of June of 2000.[5] We will begin then by raising a few issues concerning this specific form of police approach.
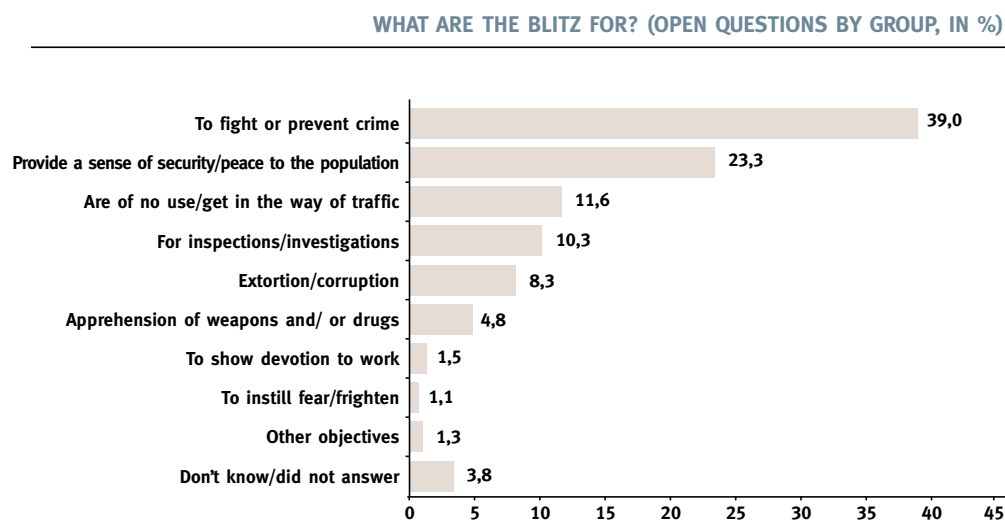
What are the Blitz for?

What is important to me is not the fact that only one vehicle is stopped, but it must be the one that the police officer is pretty certain is a suspect.

The most important thing isn't catching criminals red handed; it is the feeling of security that all these operations will be conveying to the public in a general way.

(MP Officers)

The survey done for this study indicated that the great majority of the population of Rio de Janeiro (71.6%), whether having had direct experience of police stops or not, approved in 2003 of continuing the *blitz* policy, considering it useful for the prevention of crime, vehicle inspections and the apprehension of weapons and drugs, or more generally, to generate a feeling of security among citizens through increased police presence in the streets (**Graph 1**).

Graph 1

WHAT ARE THE BLITZ FOR? (OPEN QUESTIONS BY GROUP, IN %)

Category	%
To fight or prevent crime	39,0
Provide a sense of security/peace to the population	23,3
Are of no use/get in the way of traffic	11,6
For inspections/investigations	10,3
Extortion/corruption	8,3
Apprehension of weapons and/ or drugs	4,8
To show devotion to work	1,5
To instill fear/frighten	1,1
Other objectives	1,3
Don't know/did not answer	3,8

The high approval we found seems initially to indicate the success of the policy adopted by the Public Security Office of the State of Rio de Janeiro. However, the results from the interviews carried out whit the Military Police indicate that there is no mechanism in place to evaluate the efficiency of the A-Rep 3 regarding their official aims, (and which the majority of the population believes is their main attribution), that is, crime fighting and crime prevention and vehicle inspections. The *Blitz* operations are rigorously planned. The concrete results however – arrests, apprehensions or reduction in the crime rates – are either negligible or are not even taken into consideration, suggesting that the *blitz's* purported aim is its *visibility effect* and not criminal prevention or repression of crime. This has, in fact, been admitted to explicitly by some Military Police officers interviewed and has been confirmed in the survey. Only a very small fraction of the people interviewed reported that their latest experience resulted in having their vehicles apprehended (1.8%), papers apprehended (1.4%), or a crime being reported to a police station by the Military Police officer involved in the encounter (1.9%).
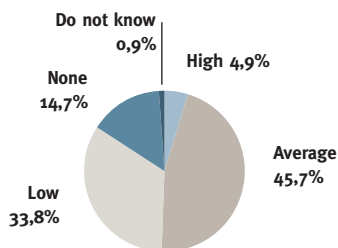
It merits asking therefore, if the direct and indirect costs involved in the A-Rep 3's (the amount of time invested, personnel, vehicles, traffic jams, risks to the safety of policemen etc.) can be justified by merely increasing the visibility of policemen on the streets. One is left to wonder whether the resources utilized in this manner could not be deployed more rationally and efficiently, or, at least, in a more qualified and targeted manner.

This last question arises from contradictory results of the undertaken survey. Although the majority of the *cariocas* (citizens of Rio) approves the continued existence of the *blitz*, almost half of them evaluates the Rio Military Police as *mostly* or even *completely* inefficient, and considers the police as having *little* or even *no* respect for citizens. The police was also classified by 68% of our respondents as being *very* corrupt and by 57% of our respondents as *very* violent (**Graph 2**).[6]
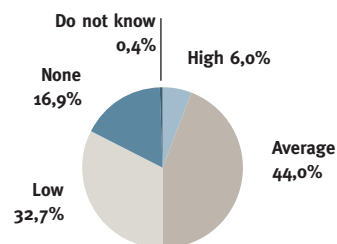
Graph 2

RIO DE JANEIRO MILITARY POLICE EVALUATION FOR ITS EFFICIENCY, RESPECT TOWARD CITIZENS, DEGREE OF VIOLENCE AND DEGREE OF CORRUPTION
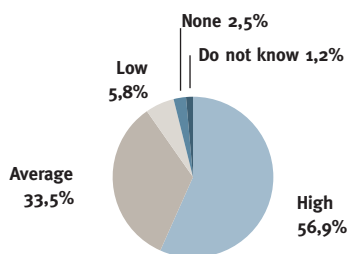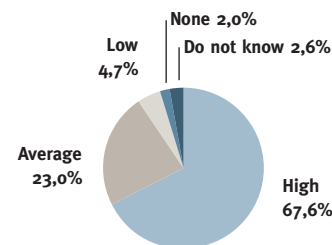
Efficiency

Do not know 0,9%
High 4,9%
None 14,7%
Average 45,7%
Low 33,8%

Respect toward citizens

Do not know 0,4%
High 6,0%
None 16,9%
Average 44,0%
Low 32,7%

Degree of violence

None 2,5%
Do not know 1,2%
Low 5,8%
Average 33,5%
High 56,9%

**Degree of corruption**

None 2,0%
Do not know 2,6%
Low 4,7%
Average 23,0%
High 67,6%

These opinions are not necessarily representative of personal experiences, nor specifically of the *blitz* themselves, but they do point out that support for an increased police presence in the streets is hardly equivalent to an approval of the work of the Rio de Janeiro Military Police nor does it constitute any indication of high levels of trust in the police, or even a lack of negative judgments

on the behavior of its agents. In fact, from a list of the seven security forces, the Military Police was given the lowest grades, 5.5, on average, enough for a "passing grade", but just scraping by (**Graph 3**).[7]

Graph 3
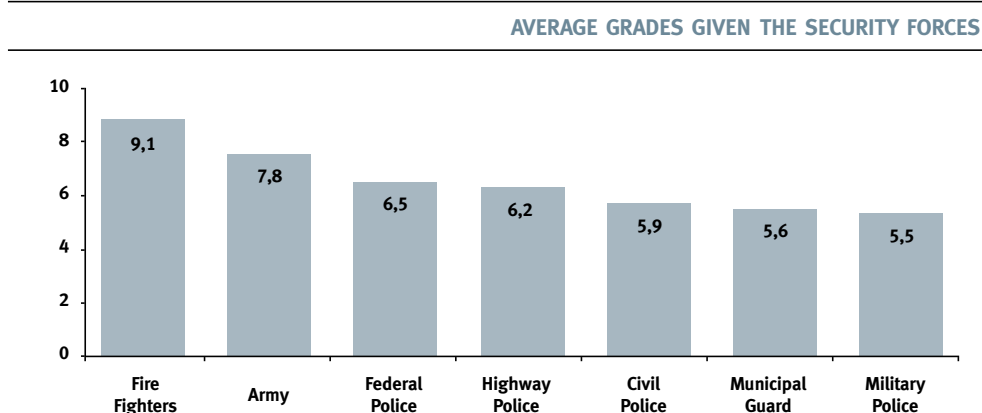
It would be therefore reasonable if, instead of merely repeating the *blitz* operations throughout city streets, the Military Police adopted mechanisms to monitor their results and to carry out cost-benefit evaluations. If the Military Police evaluated the quality of these encounters, they might improve their image, their relations with society, or, conversely, might affirm their failings, inefficiency, disrespect and corruption, and – as we shall see below – their negative performance with regard to certain social groups.

Determining Suspicion

Police stops can be questionable because it is a subjective act.
At times something may look suspect to me but may not to someone else, it'll depend on the point of view.

If we had a criminal detector, it would be a wonderful thing, we would enter [*stop*] a bus, or stop a vehicle,
[*and point out*]: "look, that guy there is the criminal". But there is no such thing; criminals do not have a face.

(MP officers)

Even while approving of the continued existence of the *blitz*, the majority of Rio's citizens considers the police stops, on the whole, as being conducted selectively, or even, openly discriminatory: approximately 60% believe that the police choose whom to stop based on physical appearance, which includes skin color (40.1%) and attire (19.7%). In the opinion of 80% of the *cariocas*, young people are stopped more often than senior citizens, and, in the opinion of approximately 60%, blacks are stopped more frequently than whites, and the poor more often than the affluent. Additionally, 43% of the population classified the Rio Military Police as being *very* racist, and in response to a different question, 30% stated that it is *more* racist than the rest of society.

The general quantitative results, however, do not provide immediate confirmation of these views. When one considers the simple experience of having been stopped by the police at any one time,
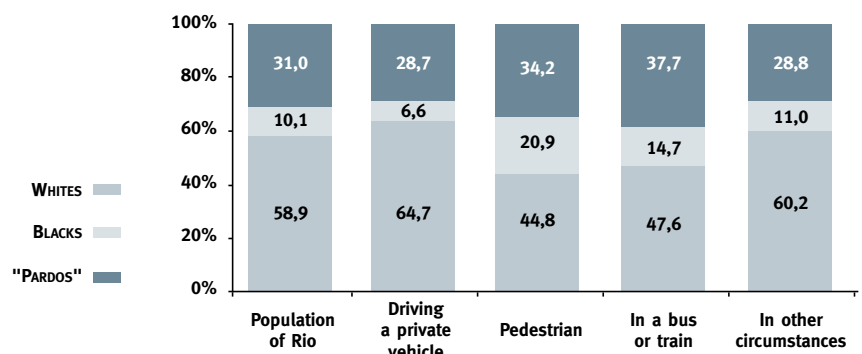
and the number of police stops experienced, there is a consistent correlation with gender and age, but not with race, earnings or education. The significance of these variables will only become clear, as we shall see, when we differentiate the types of police stops and the kinds of treatment given during these stops.

It is important to note that over half of the most recent police stops experienced took place in private vehicles. In other words, the experience that was reported in our survey as most common had already been pre-selected by certain demographic and social conditions such as the minimum driving age, earnings (car owners), and, most probably, white race/skin color. By a rough estimate based on data from the 2000 census, only 2% of the *carioca* households headed by "blacks" and 7.4% of those headed by "*pardos*"[8] owned a vehicle for private use. Even with the difficulty in estimating the size and composition of the population that owns and/or drive private vehicles, we know that car ownership is more likely to be found among select race, class or age groups of Rio de Janeiro. Therefore, any comparison that may be drawn between the total number of people stopped by the police (over 50% of the police stops involve vehicles) and the total number of inhabitants will tend to underrepresent in the first group, the youngest part of the population and the poorest segment of the population, in which the majority is made up of black people.

This becomes an impediment to verifying whether there is at work in the Rio *blitz* a mechanism analogous to "racial profiling" of the North American police road stops, where it has been irrefutably found that black drivers are stopped much more often than whites, if we account for their ratio of the total number of drivers in transit during the period observed.[9] Our own data shows, to the contrary, that blacks stopped by the *blitz* are underrepresented in terms of their ratio to the total population of Rio de Janeiro (**Graph 4**)[10]. It is possible however, that if they are a very small part of non-professional drivers about town, they could be in fact be grossly overrepresented among those the Rio Military Police stopped in the twelve months prior to the survey undertaken for this study. Only by adopting careful monitoring would one be able to assess whether race based selection is at work in police action in Rio regarding police stopping vehicles.

Graph 4

DISTRIBUTION OF RIO POPULATION AND OF PEOPLE STOPPED BY POLICE ACCORDING TO RACE AND TYPE OF POLICE STOP LAST EXPERIENCED

	Population of Rio	Driving a private vehicle	Pedestrian	In a bus or train	In other circumstances
"Pardos"	31,0	28,7	34,2	37,7	28,8
Blacks	10,1	6,6	20,9	14,7	11,0
Whites	58,9	64,7	44,8	47,6	60,2

It is clear, then, that the experience of being stopped by the police while driving a private vehicle is not what qualifies as the "typical" experience of suffering racial discrimination by the police, invalidating a direct transference to the local reality of the *racial profiling* experienced so widely in the U.S. by middle class black drivers. The overwhelming poverty of the great majority of blacks in Rio "saves" them from being subjected to this particular form of discrimination. There are however, other circumstances involving police stops in which race plays a major role, along with (in reverse order of what takes place in the *blitz*) gender, age, geographic location in the city, and class. Data from the quantitative survey shows that police pedestrian stops and police stops in public transportation are disproportionately higher among blacks (**Graph 4**, above). Pedestrian stops alone are higher among young people (**Graph 5**), and those with lower levels of education (those with up to four years of schooling or 6.8% of the total population of Rio, represented 11.4% of those stopped by the police on foot). We should also add that a higher incidence of these kinds of public transportation and pedestrian police stops has been recorded in the less affluent regions of the city, the west zone (31%), the suburbs (26%) and the center-northern zone (22%) in contrast with the more affluent southern zone (7%).

Graph 5

DISTRIBUTION OF RIO POPULATION AND OF PEOPLE STOPPED BY POLICE ACCORDING TO AGE GROUP AND TYPE OF POLICE STOP LAST EXPERIENCED
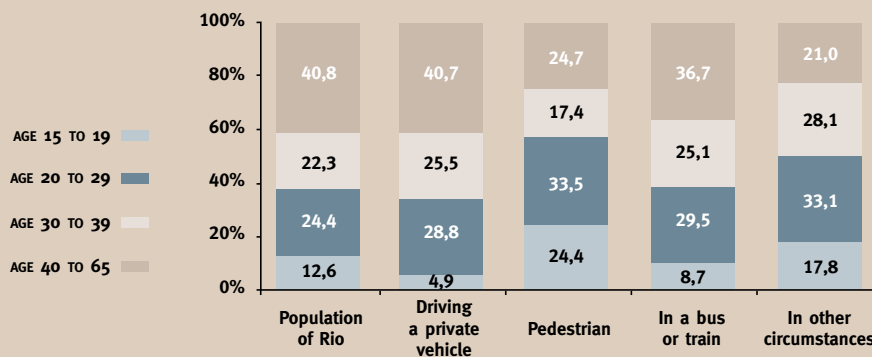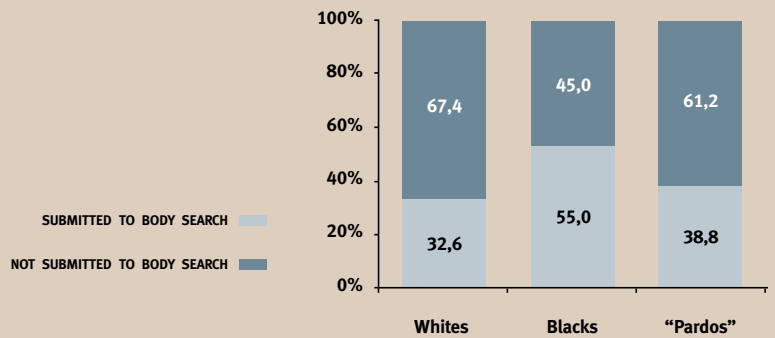

Even clearer signs of selection are found according to race and class when one examines the incidence of body searches, a procedure that is relatively rare in *blitz* stops of private vehicles (occurring in 19% of the cases described) but reported in almost half of police stops enforced on buses or trains, and practically routine in police stops of pedestrians (77% of the cases described). Over half (55%) of the respondents who classified themselves as black, and half of the 15 to 24 year olds stopped by the police, on foot or other circumstances, said that they had been body searched, compared to 33% of the total number of whites stopped by the police, and to 25% of those aged 40 to 65. People earning up to five times the minimum wage were body searched in more than 40% of the police stops, while those whose earnings were above five minimum wages were only searched in 17% of the cases (**Graphs 6 ,7** and **8** show the occurrences of body searches for race/skin color, age group and earnings of those stopped by the police). It is therefore possible, apparently, to corroborate the notion that the police not only stops whites, seniors and middle class citizens less

frequently, (especially in what are deemed the better areas of Rio de Janeiro) but also shows more restraint in conducting body searches – a procedure that is strongly associated with suspicion and considered intrinsically humiliating – when dealing with these groups.
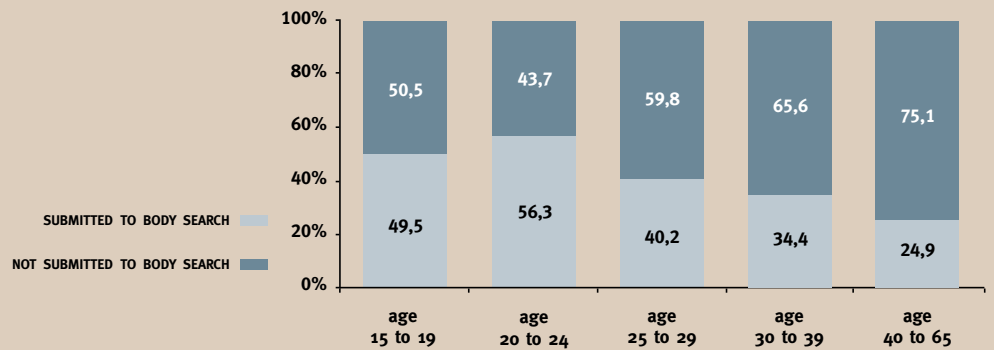
Graph 6

BODY SEARCHES IN THE LATEST POLICE STOP EXPERIENCED, ACCORDING TO RACE OR SKIN COLOR OF PERSON STOPPED
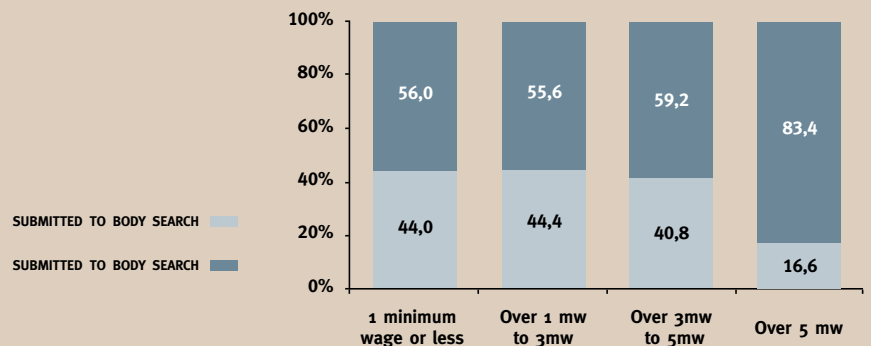
SUBMITTED TO BODY SEARCH

NOT SUBMITTED TO BODY SEARCH

	Whites	Blacks	"Pardos"
Not submitted to body search	67,4	45,0	61,2
Submitted to body search	32,6	55,0	38,8

Graph 7

BODY SEARCHES IN THE LATEST POLICE STOP EXPERIENCED, ACCORDING TO AGE GROUP OF PERSON STOPPED

SUBMITTED TO BODY SEARCH

NOT SUBMITTED TO BODY SEARCH

	age 15 to 19	age 20 to 24	age 25 to 29	age 30 to 39	age 40 to 65
Not submitted to body search	50,5	43,7	59,8	65,6	75,1
Submitted to body search	49,5	56,3	40,2	34,4	24,9

Graph 8

BODY SEARCHES IN THE LATEST POLICE STOP EXPERIENCED, ACCORDING TO WAGE EARNING BRACKET, IN NUMBER OF MINIMUM WAGES, OF THE PERSON STOPPED

SUBMITTED TO BODY SEARCH

SUBMITTED TO BODY SEARCH

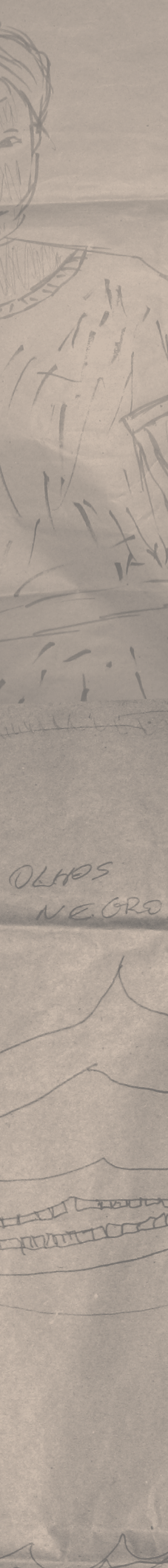|	1 minimum wage or less	Over 1 mw to 3mw	Over 3mw to 5mw	Over 5 mw
Not submitted to body search	56,0	55,6	59,2	83,4
Submitted to body search	44,0	44,4	40,8	16,6

Another important indication is that the probability of being threatened, intimidated, coerced or being the victim of physical or psychological violence during police stops is higher for the young, for blacks and for the poor.[11] These experiences have been reported in relatively small numbers in our survey, but they still lend support to the impression that there is a discriminatory "model" at work during police stops, one evident in the disproportional high incidence of body searches in the same population brackets. This kind of abuse, moreover, seems to have a wider impact on the population, contributing to the general impression (helped by media portrayals) that the police are acting in a discriminatory manner.

We shall return to this topic further on in this paper. A few observations should be made concerning the "official" aims involved in stopping pedestrians by Rio Military Police. As we have seen, even the A-Rep 3 (police vehicle stops), despite being rigorously planned prior to enactment, are not guided by any well established criteria for determining grounds for suspicion, or even by tried and tested crime fighting/prevention results. At most, they aim to increase police visibility in certain regions of the municipality. Can there possibly be any technical justification for stopping pedestrians in the city streets and submitting them to body searches? Are there grounds for suspicion? Is this procedure based on clear-cut guidelines to determine the norms, aims, functions and expected results? Has there been any analysis of its cost-effectiveness and of its effects in reducing violence or increasing the sense of security? Are there any institutional mechanisms for monitoring and control that are able to detect and reduce abuse and discrimination practiced in this form of police action?

Interviews with low and high ranking officers of the Military Police showed no grounds for suspicion nor any crime fighting/prevention justification as a result of the pedestrian stops. Moreover, there is not even an articulated discourse on the criteria for determining grounds of suspicion, a discourse capable of clearly explaining what motivates a police officer to stop and search someone in a bus or on the streets. Police respondents invariably used evasive language and defensive statements, suggesting the prevalence of personal criteria which was either "subjective" or "based on intuition", criteria that has not been regulated by the institution. In other words, the interviews showed the absence of parameters, even conceptual ones, to guide decisions taken with such great leeway for the exercise of police discretion.[12] What we find is less a case of deliberate discrimination guiding public security policies, and more the case of such decisions being relegated to the officer's informal culture, renouncing institutional checks and, consequently, becoming an obstacle to any internal or external discussion of the racial and class stereotypes underlying the daily exercise of suspicion.

Black or Blue? The "color" taboo in the Military Police

Skin color, at first, can be important during a police stop. At first glance, at a preliminary observation,
but the most important thing, is the image you project through your clothing and posture.

Take note, all of this is very conceptual. Firstly, our population is basically mixed, of mixed ancestry.
Take me, for example, would I define myself as black, as *pardo*, or as *moreno*?
It depends quite a bit on what people conceive of as being black or white.

(MP officers)

It is important to stress the paradoxical nature of the Military Police, an institution heavily populated with black men in its ranks,[13] an institution practicing racial discrimination, seen as racist by a good part of the general population, and still defensively evading the issue, as well as any form of criticism or debate, whether originating inside or outside of it. It is a paradox that is understandable to a certain degree, through the logic of uniformity that infuses military culture (as stated by a young member of the focus groups, "*PM não tem cor, tem farda*" ["the military police officer does not have skin color, he has uniform"], meaning that the color of his uniform, witch is blue, matters more to the policeman than the color of his skin), or through traditional Brazilian race relations, their watering down, "*anthropophagic*", nature.[14] However, the boomerang effect of this "blindness", this strategy of denial and shutting off the issue of race and racism, seems to be especially acute within the police, more perhaps than in any other institution. Firstly because by incorporating stereotypes in its daily work, the Military Police accepts the function of explicitly acting out prejudices that the rest of society prefers to conceal, and by not questioning the validity of such a "mission", it is forced to shoulder its burden alone. Secondly, because it is condemned to carry out what the military police officers themselves define as "*enxugamento de gelo*" or "*mopping up ice*": the endless repetition of automatic procedures that have been naturalized and which are devoid of any intelligence (in the police sense of the term), well known to be harmless and inefficient in controlling crime. These are procedures which allow only for gratuitous exercises in subjugation, corrupting the concept of authority, generating a backlash of violence, degrading the image of the institution and damaging the self-esteem of the true professionals of the police.

As stressed by one of our study's consultants, these became strong motivation for a change of attitude in some North American police corps with regards to *racial profiling*:

One of the most interesting turns in the development of the politics of racial profiling in the United States since the late 1990s is the increasingly enthusiastic leadership some police services have provided, advocating data collection, monitoring, and reform of racist practices

and attitudes. Increased legitimacy, better technology and data collection mechanisms, as well as better community relations are squarely within the self-interests of many police officers. Some police jurisdictions have recognized that ending racial profiling leads toward facilitated investigations, lower exposure of the officer to violence, enhanced information and cooperation from the community, and increased self-esteem. After resisting critiques for decades and insisting on unlimited discretion, in 1999 the International Association of Chiefs of Police passed resolutions that support data collection in traffic stops.

Police themselves have begun to realize that ending discriminatory racial profiling is part of the larger challenge of improving their capacity to reduce drug crimes, high-risk behavior, and violence. Police have started to become conscious of the fact that institutional racism embedded in police *discretion* directs resources into the policing of racial hierarchies, and diverts time and resources from policing of real crime. Police officers truly interested in fighting crime have realized that this diversion represents a disastrously irrational misallocation of resources and a professional contradiction.[15]

Finally, this "blindness" to the racial issue also serves to block the debate on the discrimination that victimizes black police officers inside and outside the force – as if its blue uniform and military hierarchy in fact cancelled the other criteria for classification and hierarchy present in society. To think about race and racism, to revoke this "color taboo" along with other corporative prohibitions would allow, in fact, for opening up new roads for democratizing the Military Police (both internally and externally) and for creating new avenues for dialogue and solidarity with the rest of the population.

Youth and the police: self-fulfilling prophecies

Try to improve on your physical appearance, clothes, posture and diction.
Take that cap off your head, comb your hair, wear clothing that is a little nicer and learn to speak.
If he [the young man] has had this positive teaching, he won't be stopped.
He has to (...) have less the biotype of a criminal, a perpetrator, and more the biotype of a citizen.
(MP Officer)

"It was just another [police stop]/left overs of the dictatorship/showing the mindset/
of those who feel they are the authority/in this street tribunal"
(Marcelo Yuka, *Tribunal de Rua*) [*Street Tribunal,* translation]

The specific study carried out with young people showed that, independently of their social background, they consider police officers, and police procedures such as the police stops to be discriminatory, intimidating, humiliating, unfair, and dubious. The quantitative survey carried out with the population of Rio de Janeiro has confirmed, quite consistently, the presence of age based profiling in certain kinds of police stops, showing further that, of all the different groups considered, young people express the worst evaluations of police action. A few examples: over half the interviewees

under 30 said they had little or no trust in the institution; among youth (ages 15 to 19), the average grades given the police were the lowest, with a much higher incidence of failing grades (zero) than in any other age group. Teenagers and subgroups of young people have given the most frequent negative evaluations of the Military Police regarding lack of respect for citizens, violence, corruption and racism, and the efficacy of police stops.

This points to the need for an explicit recognition of the problematic relationship between young people and the police – a problem certainly all the more serious when dealing with black youth from the *comunidades carentes*, or poor neighborhoods. But the difficult relationship between youth and police has considerable impact on the experiences and/or perceptions of *all* young people, independently of race or class. The "war on drugs" policy adopted during the last decades, concentrated on consumers and points of sale, has certainly contributed to the "demonizing" of young people by police officers, and the resulting "satanizing" of the police by young people of various social backgrounds. Doubtlessly there are other factors that merit further research on the negative relations of the police with all segments of young people. More studies ought to be devoted to this specific relationship, as well as new programs to open up a dialogue for peace and against stereotypes and resistance on both sides. These would be welcome tools for breaking the cycle of self-fulfilling prophecies, that hampers the democratization of safety and the creation of a more effective and respectful police.[16]

Gender and Geography: minimum and maximum thresholds for suspicion

"... there is nothing stopping a policeman from searching [a woman's] belongings, had he grounds for suspicion, but yet he won't."

"... in the *morro* [shantytown] everyone is a suspect (...), even when we know there are good people there..."
(MP Officers)

If there is any consensus among police officers, young people and the people of Rio de Janeiro in general, in their shared perceptions and experiences as reflected in our study, it is that there is a low probability that women will be stopped and searched by the police. In the quantitative survey, 84% of the people interviewed, whether they had had any experience being stopped or not, guaranteed that the police stops men more often than women – a perception that is confirmed statistically through the experiences reported: men, who make up 47% or the population of Rio, are 74% of the respondents who reported having been stopped by the police at least once. Women, on the other hand, are 53% of the city population and make up only 26% of the respondents who had been stopped at least once by the police. If we consider the latest police stop experience, and the different types of police stops, we find a narrower gender gap for *blitz* on private vehicles (69% men and 31% women) than for public transportation (73 to 27%), and a very significant difference for police stops
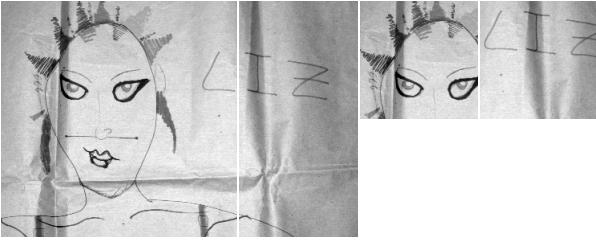
of pedestrians (89 to 11%). Only 12% of the women stopped reported being body searched, contrasting with 46% of the men. Among all of those that had their bodies searched more than 91% were men and less than 9% were women.

It is also interesting to note that when focus groups of young people were asked to draw "typical suspects"[17] the only feminine character depicted was that of a young white woman of middle class background, giving clear signs of being "rebellious" or "deviant". The caption below the drawing is an apt description:

> "Liz wears body piercing, has a scary look in her eyes, she is full of tattoos and will be stopped by the police (...), she is mostly punk (...), and is also a bit of an anarchist (...). The police will probably approach her due to her attitude, because of behavior issues. The police will want to provoke some sort of reaction from her. Once they succeed in obtaining a reaction, they will have the grounds to search her."

We are led to believe when considering the profile described above, in addition to indirect suggestion from other surveys, that women do not become police suspects solely due to the stereotypes that spell "danger" for men, such as race, age, and class. They attract suspicion due to certain "attitudes" or by additional stigma for belonging to a deviant or criminal underworld. While some female categories ("punks", prostitutes, street children, teenage and adult law breakers etc) would be frequently targeted with suspicion, arbitrary action, disrespect and violence,[18] women in general would tend to be excluded from the criteria and practices that lead to categorizing a suspect, at least during routine street policing.

The legal impediment for male police officers to search women and the negligible numbers of female police officers on the front lines of the police action probably accounts significantly toward explaining the phenomenon.[19] However, if we consider how easily rules are broken in name of "the war on crime", it is still surprising that the norm of the Penal Code is systematically obeyed, and that the deference to the "weaker sex" (or the supposition that females are less dangerous) inhibits the Military Police from doing what is not even forbidden by law, such as stopping women and searching their belongings. If the phenomenon is surprising, it could also bring about important clues for the generation of other rules for universal respect. It is a topic, at any rate, that would benefit from more detailed research in the future.

At the other extreme, another consensus points to the *favelas*, their territory and their inhabitants as the target of maximum suspicion and maximum "license" for breaking rules and disrespecting civil rights. The phrase uttered by an Military Police officer – "*no morro, todos são suspeitos*" [in the shantytowns everybody is a suspect] – is a good example of how territory (and its social markers)

weighs on the selective logic of the police, echoing the conviction held by the people of Rio that this is the social category that is the object of greatest discrimination by society and police action. One of the items of the quantitative survey involved ranking a list of 15 social groups according to the degree of prejudice/discrimination they suffered. The list included blacks, homosexuals, seniors, the handicapped etc. Inhabitants of the shantytowns headed the list as the most victimized category, in which 88.4% of the respondents chose the item: *very* discriminated against.

The topic appeared significantly in the focus groups of young people. They distinguished between the motivation and characteristics of the police stop that take place in the zona sul [more affluent] region of the city, and the ones that take place in the periphery or in the favelas: the Military Police would stop young middle class people mainly to find drugs and bribe drug users (or their caregivers), while on the other hand, young people from poor neighborhoods or communities would be seen by police officers as drug dealers or robbers, potential criminals, and therefore warranting intimidation, humiliation and violence. The difference expresses itself not only at the level of perceptions but also in the reality of the situations experienced and reported. Among affluent teenagers and college students there were abundant reports of extortion or attempted extortion, generally carried out with threats of taking subjects down to the police station. Among young black people, many of whom live in poor neighborhoods or favelas, and among those of the zona oeste, in contrast, there was a prevalence of reports of police stops defined as "esculacho", a slang word for humiliation, violence and verbal aggression.

The scope of the present paper does not allow for a thorough discussion of the commonly raised topic of the "two cities" or the "two police forces" (meaning a police force that uses different strategies to police rich and poor areas of town), centered as it was on the context of the police stops, and not addressing the more dramatic aspects of the Military Police's action in the poor areas of the city: confrontations, occupations, household breaking and entry, impromptu executions and permanent intimidation.[20] We could not fail to mention them however, as an extreme expression of what has characterized, with few exceptions, the crime fighting policies as well as the routine logic of the police stops. These are all infused with the prevalence of stereotypes over police intelligence, discriminatory profiles over investigation, racial and class selectivity over well grounded suspicion. Despite the fact that, if we consider the increasing level of criminality in Rio de Janeiro, the failure of this strategy ought to speak for itself, the proposal made by one of the focus groups of young people for the improvement of police performance and of the public security policies of Rio de Janeiro seems to provide our paper with a suitable conclusion:

> "Let us do away with the notion that the *favela* is the only place for the criminal world. So, you want to put an end to drug traffic, and want to put an end to the weapons dealers? Lets really go for the big fish!"

Notes

1. N.T.: "Blitz" refers to stopping vehicles.

2. The focus groups were created by the *ISER*, coordinated by Regina Novaes and Marilena Cunha, who also authored a report on the findings.

3. Denise Britz and José Matias de Lima, from *Science* were responsible for defining the methodology and the sample design, as well as for coordinating field research.

4. Ramos, Silvia (coordinator) *Abordagem policial, estereótipos raciais e percepções da discriminação na cidade do Rio de Janeiro*. Final Report. Rio de Janeiro: CESeC/UCAM, August 2004. To be published in 2005 in the new series "*Segurança e Cidadania*" ed. Civilização Brasileira.

5. On the 12th of June 2000 the nation followed, on live TV, the kidnapping of a bus in the Southern and more affluent region of the city by Sandro do Nascimento, a survivor of the *Candelária* massacre (when 8 street children were killed). After four hours, Sandro gave himself up and left the bus holding a hostage against his body, under the aim of revolvers. A shot fired by an officer of the BOPE (Special Operations Battalion) missed its target causing the hostage's death. Arrested, Dos Santos was later strangled inside the police vehicle intended for his transportation.

6. The responses to the other items of the questionnaire reinforce this negative view: 82% of the interviewees stated that the Rio de Janeiro Military Police has not been efficient in controlling violent emergency situations; over half stated they were afraid, and almost half said they had little or no trust in the police.

7. We asked interviewees to grade each force from 0 to 10, with the understanding that grades equal to or above 5 would be passing and those below 5 fail. The grades for the Rio de Janeiro Military Police and Civil Police obtained by our survey were higher than those reported by other surveys, in which both institutions were given average below 5 (cf. Lemgruber, Julita; Musumeci, Leonarda e Cano, Ignacio. *Quem vigia os vigias? Um estudo sobre controle externo da polícia no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro, Record, 2003, chapter 2).

8. N.T.: "Pardo" is the official category to define a person who is not black but is definitely an African descent person. In the common language in Brazil "pardo" may be "mulatto".

9. Cf Amar, Paul. Táticas e termos da luta contra o racismo institucional nos setores de polícia e de segurança. *In*: Ramos, Silvia (coord). *Abordagem policial, estereótipos raciais e percepções da discriminação na cidade do Rio de Janeiro. Final Report*. Rio de Janeiro: CESeC/UCAM, August 2004.

10. We have not considered the categories "Asian" and "native", since they are negligible in terms of the total population of Rio de Janeiro.

11. This only points towards a trend, since, for greater detail, the sample does not allow for statistically representative data.

12. The lack of clarity in what qualifies as *fundada suspeita* or grounds for suspicion is specially surprising if we consider the high levels of prestige the "art of suspicion" has in the very police culture. See for more on this topic, Muniz, Jaqueline, *Ser policial é, sobretudo, uma razão de ser. Cultura e cotidiano na Polícia Militar do Rio de Janeiro*. Doctoral thesis. Rio de Janeiro, IUPERJ, 1999.

13. According to *PMERJ* data, the ratio of whites in the Military Police corps on race was of 39.2%, much lower than the ratio of whites in the population of the state of Rio de Janeiro (55.4%), in 2002.

14. Cf. Paixão, Marcelo. Antropofagia e racismo: uma crítica ao modelo brasileiro de relações raciais. *In*: Ramos, Silvia (coord). *Abordagem policial, estereótipos raciais e percepções da discriminação na cidade do Rio de Janeiro*. Final Report. Rio de Janeiro: CESeC/UCAM, August 2004.

15. Amar, Paul, *op.cit.*

16. An important point of reference is the work that has been developed at the Minas Gerais State Military Police by the group *Afro Reggae* and the CESEC, attempting to shorten distances and generate solidarity among young people and the police through art and music (see a description of the project "*Juventude, cultura e polícia*", in the section devoted to current projects at the *CESeC* site: www.cesec.ucam.edu.br).

17. Apart from debating and acting out topics raised by the coordinators, the focus groups participants produced collective drawings to depict what they considered to be "suspects", which would be surely stopped and searched by the police. The seven resulting characters were all young, six of which were male and five black.

18. See, for example, Minayo, Cecília *et al., Fala galera: juventude, violência e cidadania na cidade do Rio de Janeiro*. Rio de Janeiro, Garamond, 1999, and Soares, Barbara, *Prisioneiras. Vida e violência atrás das grades*. Rio de Janeiro, Garamond, 2002.

19. The survey coordinated by the *CESeC* on women in the Military Police shows that the Rio de Janeiro Military Police not only has an average ratio of female police officers (4%) that is below the national average (7%), but generally assigns them to internal work, in many cases tasks that are essentially bureaucratic (cf. Soares, Barbara, coord., *Mulheres policiais: Presença feminina nas polícias militares brasileiras*. Rio de Janeiro, CESeC/UnB/UFRGS, August 2004).

20. See more on this topic, Cano, Ignacio, *Letalidade da ação policial no Rio de Janeiro*. Rio de Janeiro, ISER, 1997, and Lemgruber, Musumeci e Cano, *Quem vigia os vigias?*, *op. cit.*

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