



Exploring police officers' narratives about racism in Portugal

Laura Neiva^{1,2,3} 

Abstract

This article examines how police officers in Portugal narrate racism in relation to policing practices, victim descriptions, police databases, and Big Data technologies. Drawing on 34 interviews with members of the Public Security Police (PSP) and the Judiciary Police (PJ), the analysis identifies three interconnected empirical themes: the concentration of policing resources in racialised neighbourhoods; the use of racial identifiers in victim descriptions; and the perceived neutrality of police databases and algorithmic systems. The article argues that officers' narratives may contribute to the reproduction of institutional racism by presenting racialised outcomes as spatially necessary, procedurally neutral, or technologically objective. Critical Race Theory provides the overarching framework for examining how racial power may be reproduced through formally neutral practices, while policing studies situate these processes within professional cultures and institutional routines. Durrheim et al.'s framework is used as a secondary interpretative resource to identify how racism is split, displaced, de-racialised, relativised, or trivialised. The findings show how apparently minor and disconnected practices may interact to reinforce racial disproportionality while preserving an institutional self-image of impartiality. By bringing CRT into dialogue with policing studies and critical research on technology, the article contributes to understanding the subtle mechanisms through which institutional racism may be reproduced in Portuguese and European policing contexts.

Keywords

police, race, institutional racism, narratives, Europe

Introduction

Research on police officers' narratives on racism is scarce (Kammersgaard et al., 2024), and as Parmar et al. (2020: 421) have argued “race matters.” For the purpose of this article, racism is understood as a systemic and institutionalised form of discrimination that extends beyond individual prejudice to encompass practices, policies, and discourses that perpetuate inequalities

¹University of Lusíada, Porto, Portugal; Center for Legal, Economic, International and Environmental Studies (CEJEIA), Porto, Portugal

²Department of Sociology, Institute for Social Sciences (ICS), University of Minho, Braga, Portugal

³Communication and Society Research Centre (CECS), Institute for Social Sciences, University of Minho, Braga, Portugal

Corresponding author:

Laura Neiva, University of Lusíada, Porto, Portugal; Center for Legal, Economic, International and Environmental Studies, Porto, Portugal; Department of Sociology, Institute for Social Sciences, University of Minho, Braga, Portugal; Communication and Society Research Centre, Institute for Social Sciences, University of Minho, Braga, Portugal.

Emails: lauraneiva@ics.uminho.pt; lauraneiva@por.ulusiada.pt

through processes of racialisation and ethnicisation (Sollund, 2005). Subsequently, institutional racism refers to the embedded nature of racial discrimination within the policies and practices of organisations, leading to disproportionate outcomes for minority groups that are perpetuated by institutional norms and structures rather than individual intent alone (Sinhoretto et al., 2022).

Taking the academic silence in Portugal and the “limited” literature in Europe about the topic (Miller et al., 2008) as starting points, this article focuses on the narratives of police officers from two police forces in Portugal about racism. In the specific case of the country, although racism in other fields has been explored (see, e.g. Cabecinhas and Macedo, 2019; Henriques, 2017; Martins and Moura, 2018; Pereira et al., 2023; Raposo et al., 2019), there are no studies on police narratives about it. Though, the article situates its analysis within a national context marked by racism (Teles, 2020), including widely publicised cases of police brutality against Black communities, such as those in Bairro da Jamaica (Rocha, 2021), and Cova da Moura (Raposo et al., 2019). While this previous research has not analysed the narratives of the police officers involved, these examples, as described in the next sections, illustrate the structural issues that underlie racial inequalities in Portugal’s criminal justice system. These issues are not merely the result of individual biases but are embedded in the institutions and practices that govern law enforcement (Maeso, 2019).

While much of the foundational literature on race and policing emerged in the United States (US), where race is a central issue in public discourse and political debate (Lee, 2024), this article does not seek to establish a comparative analysis, but rather to adapt and mobilise these theoretical contributions within the Portuguese context where race and ethnicity are often less prominently discussed (Khan, 2014; Maeso, 2019). This difference in discourse can be partly attributed to dominant narratives in some European contexts that present societies as post-racial or emphasise other axes of inequality, such as class. While these narratives do not negate the existence of racism, they often constrain public debate about processes of racialisation and structural discrimination, making institutional responses to racial inequality more challenging (Maeso, 2019).

To examine how police officers deny, displace, or minimise the racial implications of policing outcomes, the article also draws on Durrheim et al.’s (2005) account of discursive strategies of racism denial. Developed in the context of South African media discourse, this framework is used here as a secondary interpretative resource rather than as the primary theoretical or organisational framework of the analysis. It helps identify how racialised practices may be presented as neutral, necessary, externally determined, or unrelated to race. This interpretative use is supported by research on Portuguese media and public debate, which has identified comparable mechanisms through which racism is denied, displaced, or minimised (Pereira et al., 2023).

Drawing on Critical Race Theory (CRT) and policing studies, this article argues that police officers’ narratives may contribute to the reproduction of institutional racism by normalising racialised explanations while denying racism as a structuring feature of policing. CRT provides the article’s overarching account of how racial power may be reproduced through formally neutral institutional practices, while policing studies situate these processes within police cultures, routines, and professional understandings. Durrheim et al.’s (2005) discursive strategies are mobilised as a secondary analytical resource to examine how officers deny, displace, or minimise the racial implications of policing outcomes.

Empirically, the article examines three recurring themes identified through the analysis: the concentration of policing resources in racialised neighbourhoods; the use of racial identifiers in victim descriptions; and the perceived neutrality of police databases and Big Data technologies. The article shows how officers’ narratives around these themes may legitimise and sustain racialised disproportionality while preserving a professional self-image of impartiality and neutrality.

Critical race theory, institutional racism, and policing

This article brings CRT into dialogue with research on institutional racism and policing. CRT provides the overarching theoretical framework for examining how racial power and inequality may be reproduced through practices that are formally presented as neutral, objective, or professionally necessary. Research on policing complements this perspective by showing how institutional cultures, occupational routines, and everyday decision-making shape interactions between police organisations and racialised communities (Bonnet and Caillault, 2015; Welsh et al., 2021). Together, these bodies of scholarship allow the analysis to move beyond individual prejudice and examine how police narratives may normalise and reproduce racialised institutional outcomes.

CRT is particularly useful for examining how racial power is reproduced through institutional practices and discourses that may appear formally neutral. Rather than understanding racism solely as the result of individual prejudice or explicitly discriminatory intent, CRT draws attention to the ways in which racial inequality may be embedded in routine procedures, professional assumptions, and apparently universal rules. As Crenshaw (1995: xxv) argues, racial power may be produced from within liberal discourses that present themselves as autonomous from organised forms of racial domination. This perspective is central to the present study because police officers' claims of impartiality do not necessarily prevent their narratives or practices from contributing to racialised institutional outcomes.

The article adopts a constructivist understanding of race as a socially and historically produced category rather than as a fixed biological reality. Following Holdaway (1997), race is understood as a social construction through which physical, ethnic, and cultural characteristics are attributed non-neutral meanings within relations of power. However, recognising race as socially constructed does not make its consequences less real. Processes of racialisation shape how individuals, communities, and places are perceived, classified, and treated, producing material inequalities within institutions such as the police and the criminal justice system.

This distinction is important for understanding colour-blind forms of racism. Bonilla-Silva (2006) demonstrates that the denial of the relevance of race may itself contribute to the reproduction of racial inequality when unequal outcomes are explained through apparently non-racial categories. In policing, appeals to crime rates, professional necessity, legal procedure, victim descriptions, or technological objectivity may present decisions as neutral while obscuring the historical and institutional processes through which particular populations and neighbourhoods become disproportionately subject to surveillance and police intervention.

Institutional racism therefore does not depend exclusively on the conscious beliefs or intentions of individual police officers. It may emerge through the cumulative effects of routine decisions, organisational practices, and institutional classifications that systematically disadvantage racialised groups. As Fortner (2022) notes, laws and policies that appear facially neutral may reproduce inequality when implemented within historically racialised systems. This approach makes it possible to examine officers' narratives not primarily as evidence of personal racism, but as accounts through which racialised policing outcomes may be normalised, justified, or disconnected from questions of institutional responsibility.

Research on policing reinforces this institutional perspective by showing that police culture is governed by specific occupational rules, assumptions, and strategies of professional legitimisation (Bruce-Jones, 2015). Police officers may defend their work against allegations of racism by emphasising impartiality, legality, experience, or operational necessity, while downplaying the unequal power relations between law enforcement institutions and minority communities (Gonzalez et al., 2022). These narratives are analytically significant because they help preserve an image of policing as neutral even where police practices contribute to racialised disproportionality.

Bringing CRT, institutional racism, and policing studies together therefore allows the article to examine how racial inequality may be reproduced through everyday police reasoning. CRT provides the broader account of racial power and formally neutral institutions; the concept of institutional racism directs attention to the cumulative effects of organisational practices; and policing studies situate these processes within police culture and professional decision-making. This combined framework guides the analysis of how Portuguese police officers discuss racialised neighbourhoods, victim descriptions, police databases, and Big Data technologies.

Reviewing the academic literature on police officers' narratives about racism

Research on police officers' narratives concerning racism has identified a range of professional strategies through which race and racial inequality are interpreted, denied, or normalised. Holdaway's (1997: 24–25) seminal study examined how racism is recreated and maintained “within a particular work organisation, the police,” and how “the mundane structure and content of the police rank-and-file occupational culture facilitate processes of racialization.” His analysis demonstrates the importance of attending to the everyday realities of police work, since occupational culture shapes how race is understood and reproduced within police organisations. As Bruce-Jones (2015: 36) observes, “policing culture is specific, institutional and governed by logics that are not easily transferable to general social life.” Within this culture, officers may mobilise professional narratives that neutralise criticism concerning race and downplay unequal relations of power between police institutions and minority communities (Gonzalez et al., 2022).

In the United States, Glover (2007: 239) examined how Texas police officers employed rhetorical strategies to portray policing as non-racial. Satzewich and Shaffir (2009) identified comparable accounts among members of the Hamilton Police Service. More recently, Welsh et al. (2021) examined the use of dehumanising discourse, colour-blind frames, and mechanisms of neutralisation and moral disengagement in officers' accounts of race. Their findings show how officers may oppose overt discrimination while simultaneously excusing, justifying, or denying the role of race in police work. In this sense, colour-blind racial attitudes facilitate the denial of racism through subtle and apparently non-racial justifications (Welsh et al., 2021: 1–5).

In the European context, Miller et al. (2008) conducted interviews with police officers in Spain, Bulgaria, Roma, and Hungary to examine ethnic profiling, disproportionality, and institutional racism in police stops. Their study found evidence that ethnic and racial classifications influenced officers' decisions to stop individuals.

Additionally, the police officers' narratives were analysed by two scholars (Mulinari and Keskinen, 2020) who have conducted interviews with 26 Finnish and 7 Swedish police officers. They documented that these professionals also denied racial profiling, by emphasising their work as impartial. Not exclusive to the European context, since it included American border agents with Dutch border agents, Vega and van der Woude (2023: 1–2) analysed how US Border Patrol agents and Dutch Military and Borders police officers used ideologies of legalism (“they attribute their decisions to laws, policies and guidelines, negating that immigrant stereotypes inform their behaviour”), criminalisation (“they inadvertently reveal racialised constructions about immigrant deviance”) and securitisation (“reveals an amorphous sense of danger linked to Muslim Middle Easterners specifically”) to downplay the importance of immigrants' race/ethnicity in their decision making and behaviour.

On the contrary, regarding the specific national context within Europe, Bonnet and Caillault (2015) demonstrated how police officers' narratives on race and racism may be different. On one

hand, in France, the authors found that professionals of police forces, through a discourse that rejects the influence of race in their work, emphasise that this category has no role in police decisions. On the other hand, in the Netherlands and Italy, police officers demonstrated a narrative in which they noted that sometimes categories of race were used in their activities. Dutch and Italian law enforcement professionals, when compared with police officers in France, adhered to relatively more permissive speech standards, since they routinely employed ethnic classifications, openly discussed presumed connections between minority communities and criminal activity, and internally used derogatory language when referring to minorities. This study demonstrated the impact of national context on police officers' narratives about racism within the European context (Bonnet and Caillault, 2015).

One of the distinctive challenges in the European context is the difficulty in recognising and addressing racism due to the different historical and cultural understandings of race. In some European countries, the refusal to officially acknowledge race or ethnicity can hinder the development of effective policies to address racial disparities. Additionally, the fragmented nature of Europe, with its diverse legal systems and cultural attitudes, means that there is no single, unified approach to combating racism across the continent (Juang et al., 2023). Generally, the situation in Europe is distinct from that in the US, shaped by different historical legacies, legal frameworks, and public discourses around race and ethnicity. While both regions grapple with institutional racism, Europe's challenges are deeply intertwined with its colonial past, migration patterns,¹ and national identities (Khan, 2016, 2021). Unlike the US, where race is a central issue in public discourse (Lee, 2024), many European countries have adopted policies of colour-blindness or emphasised universal human rights over specific racial justice frameworks (Garner, 2024). Dominant narratives in many European countries have tended to downplay racism through colour-blind frameworks and appeals to universal human rights. In Portugal, these dynamics are further shaped by historical and ideological formations such as lusotropicalism, which have contributed to the denial and marginalisation of racism as a structural issue (Cabecinhas, 2007; Castelo, 1998; Garner, 2024). This can obscure the realities of racial discrimination and complicate efforts to address systemic inequalities. This distinctiveness is essential for understanding how racial inequalities manifest differently across Europe and the importance of tailoring solutions to these unique contexts.

This body of scholarship provides crucial insight for this article, which aims to explore the narratives of police officers about racism within one European country, specifically within two police forces in Portugal, attending to its national context, but also within the European context since it "remains underexplored" (Kammersgaard et al., 2024: 4).

Mapping the European and Portuguese context

In Europe, the relationship with ethnic minority groups is deeply influenced by the continent's colonial history (Khan, 2016, 2021). Many European countries, including Portugal, have significant populations of ethnic minorities who are descendants of individuals from former colonies (Martins and Moura, 2018). This colonial legacy (Khan, 2016, 2021) has shaped racial dynamics in European societies in historically specific ways, which differ from other national contexts frequently addressed in the policing literature. While much of the critical literature on race and policing has been developed in the United States, this article draws on that scholarship cautiously, attending to the specific historical and institutional configurations of the Portuguese context.

Europe's contemporary demographic landscape has been significantly shaped by waves of migration, particularly in the post-World War II era (Givens, 2022). These migration patterns have

led to the development of ethnically diverse communities within European cities, often in marginalised neighbourhoods. The integration (or lack thereof) of these communities has created complex challenges related to identity, belonging, and systemic discrimination, shaped by Europe's specific historical, political, and institutional trajectories (Givens, 2022).

In many European countries, legal and policy frameworks for addressing race and ethnicity have developed in ways that reflect specific historical, political, and institutional trajectories. Across Europe, approaches to racial equality have often been shaped by a strong emphasis on universalism and human rights, including commitments embedded in instruments such as the European Convention on Human Rights. In some national contexts, policies of “colour-blindness”—such as the official reluctance to recognise race or ethnicity in legal and statistical frameworks—have limited the visibility of racial inequalities and complicated efforts to address discrimination (Garner, 2024).

Although European legal frameworks formally emphasise anti-discrimination, their implementation and effectiveness vary widely across countries (Elias, 2024). Institutional racism in Europe frequently intersects with issues of migration, citizenship, and national identity, shaping how racialised inequalities are produced and contested within criminal justice systems (Osler, 2023). Rather than manifesting through a single dominant pattern, institutional racism in European contexts often operates through practices such as ethnic profiling, unequal application of laws, and the marginalisation of minority communities in public life.

In the specific case of Portugal, racial inequalities in the criminal justice system are deeply rooted in the country's history and socio-political landscape (Maeso, 2019). Ethnic minorities often face systemic discrimination and are disproportionately targeted by law enforcement. Their presence in Portugal is shaped by postcolonial migration patterns and by enduring racial hierarchies produced during the colonial period, which continue to inform contemporary forms of inequality and institutional discrimination (Cabecinhas, 2007; Castelo, 1998; Khan, 2016, 2021). This historical and demographic context has left a legacy of racial discrimination that continues to affect these communities. The migration of people from former colonies to Portugal has led to the establishment of tight-knit ethnic communities in urban areas, which are often subject to higher levels of policing and scrutiny (Henriques, 2017; Martins and Moura, 2018). They are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system in Portugal. These inequalities manifest in various ways, from documented cases of police brutality (Raposo et al., 2019; Rocha, 2021), discrimination in marginalised neighbourhoods (Mester, 2023), and police stops and searches (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2023).

Firstly, data indicates that individuals from these minority groups are more frequently stopped and searched by the police, often without sufficient cause. For instance, research by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2023) shows that people of African descent in Portugal are more likely to be subjected to identity checks, highlighting ongoing issues of racial profiling.

Secondly, as briefly described in the introduction section, an exemplary case of police brutality in Portugal occurred in January 2019 in the Bairro da Jamaica neighbourhood of Lisbon. This predominantly Black neighbourhood became the focus of national attention when a video surfaced showing police officers using excessive force against residents during an operation. The incident sparked widespread outrage and protests, highlighting the racial tensions between law enforcement and marginalised communities (Rocha, 2021). Another case occurred in Cova da Moura, a neighbourhood in Lisbon known for its large Cape Verdean community. In 2015, several young men from the neighbourhood were brutally beaten and detained by police officers. The victims alleged that the attack was racially motivated, and the case garnered significant media attention (Raposo et al., 2019).

Thirdly, marginalised neighbourhoods in Portugal, such as Bairro da Jamaica and Cova da Moura, are often subjected to heightened police scrutiny. These areas are predominantly inhabited by ethnic minorities and have been historically stigmatised as “problematic” due to higher rates of poverty and unemployment. The increased police presence in these neighbourhoods often leads to a disproportionate number of arrests and encounters with law enforcement, reinforcing the cycle of criminalisation and marginalisation (Mester, 2023).

Finally, Portugal’s racial dynamics are influenced by the myth of Lusotropicalism (Cardina, 2016; Castelo, 1998; Pereira, 2022), which complicates the recognition and addressing of institutional racism (Henriques, 2017). For example, Maeso’s (2019: 2034) work highlights how Portuguese institutional narratives, particularly in the parliamentary sphere, deny racism by emphasising other social issues, like poverty. This “State of denial” shapes societal understandings of race, influencing police narratives and institutional responses, and it is not incidental but is rooted in longer postcolonial narratives that have shaped how racism is understood, minimised, or displaced in Portugal. As Maeso (2021) demonstrates, racism against Black and Roma populations remains structurally embedded in Portuguese law and public policies, particularly within the criminal justice system.

In the Portuguese context, the denial of racism has been widely analysed as a historically and socially produced narrative rather than a mere absence of racial conflict (Cabecinhas, 2007). Scholarship has shown how postcolonial imaginaries, particularly the legacy of lusotropicalism, have contributed to the construction of Portugal as a tolerant and non-racist society, thereby obscuring structural and institutional forms of racism (Cabecinhas, 2007; Cabecinhas and Macedo, 2019; Castelo, 1998). As Castelo (1998) demonstrates, lusotropicalism functioned as a political narrative of colonial exceptionalism, later reworked into a national self-image that resists the recognition of racial hierarchies. Complementarily, Cabecinhas’ (2007) work on social representations and memory highlights how colonial violence and racism are routinely minimised, displaced, or rendered invisible in contemporary Portuguese discourse. This framework is crucial for understanding police officers’ narratives analysed in this article, as they are articulated within a broader national context that normalises racial denial while framing racism as external, exaggerated, or incompatible with Portuguese identity.

This broader national context provides a key interpretative framework for analysing how police officers narrate racism, responsibility, and neutrality in their everyday accounts.

Methods

This article draws on a broader research project examining police officers’ expectations regarding Big Data technologies in Portugal. Empirical data was derived from 34 interviews conducted between May 2021 and April 2022² with members of the Judiciary Police (PJ) and Public Security Police (PSP) in Portugal. Both organisations undertake criminal investigation activities, while the PSP is also responsible for urban policing. The final number of participants was informed by theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). All research procedures complied with the relevant ethical requirements and the European General Data Protection Regulation. The interviews were conducted in Portuguese, lasted approximately 90 minutes, and were subsequently transcribed and translated into English for analysis and publication. They were recorded after the consent form was signed by the members of PJ and PSP.

After receiving authorisation from the national directorates of the PSP and PJ, the author conducted all the interviews, at the workplace of the participants, following a script about: (i) the professional and institutional background of the interviewees; (ii) Big Data in policing and

criminal investigations activities in Portugal; and (iii) legal, social, and ethical challenges.³ For this article, only the interviewees' narratives concerning legal, social, and ethical challenges were explored. In this section of the script, a question about an exemplary case that documented how the application of Big Data technologies in policing and criminal investigations activities had produced biased results was asked, and it explored police officers' narratives about it. Specifically, the question asked was the following one: "Some studies have documented several cases in which the application of Big Data technologies has perpetuated racism. For example, a study conducted by Lum and Isaac (2016) showed how PredPol—a predictive policing software that uses Big Data analytics—has the risk of racism. Specifically, through the insertion of data from a drug arrest, Lum and Isaac (2016) demonstrated how this predictive policing tool produced information that was already over-identified in police databases. What is your opinion on this?"

In designing the interview questions, particular attention was paid to the possible effects of the wording and framing of the questions on participants' responses, especially when discussing sensitive topics such as the use of Big Data tools like PredPol and the associated risks of racial bias. While some questions may have initially positioned respondents to either admit or deny the presence of racism in their practices, the interview process was structured to mitigate these effects. Follow-up questions were used to encourage deeper reflection and to allow respondents to explore the complexities of their practices without feeling compelled to take a defensive stance. For example, after discussing the risks of racial bias in predictive policing tools, respondents were asked how they navigate these risks and whether they perceive any challenges in maintaining objectivity. The researcher's role in shaping the interview interaction and the interpretation of participants' accounts was also considered throughout the analysis. This approach helped to facilitate a more nuanced discussion and to capture the subtleties in the police officers' narratives.

The interview material was analysed through qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2004), using an inductive, grounded theory-informed coding process rather than a full grounded theory methodology. The analysis began with open coding, through which participants' responses were examined without imposing Durrheim et al.'s categories as a predetermined coding structure (Charmaz, 2006; Cho and Lee, 2014; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The initial codes were subsequently grouped into three broader empirical themes: the spatial concentration of policing in racialised neighbourhoods; the use of racial identifiers in victim descriptions; and the perceived neutrality of police databases and Big Data technologies.

Only after these empirical themes had been identified were they interpreted through CRT, institutional racism, policing studies, and Durrheim et al.'s (2005) account of discursive strategies of racism denial. Durrheim et al.'s framework therefore functioned as a sensitising and interpretative resource rather than as a predetermined structure imposed on the data. Although Durrheim et al. (2005) also identify the reversal of racism, this mechanism was not sufficiently prominent in the interview material to constitute a separate analytical category.

The analysis focused on recurring narratives that captured central patterns across the interviews. Excerpts were selected because they exemplified broader thematic and discursive patterns identified during coding, rather than because of their numerical frequency alone. To protect participants' anonymity, all quotations are identified by a numerical code.

Figure 1 summarises the relationship between the empirically generated themes, the discursive mechanisms used as interpretative resources, and the broader reproduction of institutional racism.

The thematic categories that emerged are presented in the next section. The focus of the findings is on specific narratives that were identified as particularly representative of the broader patterns observed across the data. Narratives were considered representative when they recurred across multiple interviews, captured core elements of a given thematic category, and illustrated discursive

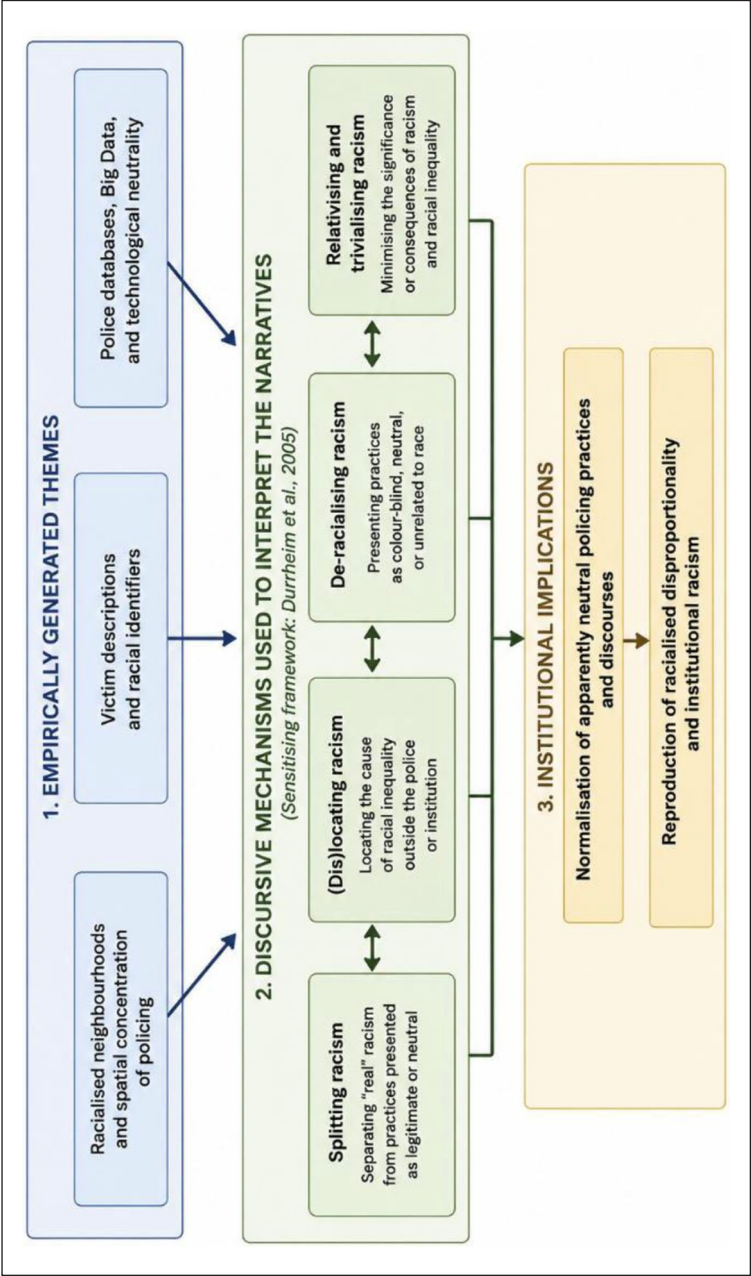


Figure 1. Relationship between empirical themes, discursive mechanisms, and the reproduction of institutional racism.
Source. Author's elaboration (drawing on Durrheim et al., 2005).

patterns that were analytically central to the study's grounded theory-informed coding process. While only a selection of quotes is presented in the manuscript, these quotes exemplify the discourse among participants. In line with qualitative research grounded in grounded theory and qualitative content analysis principles, the analytical significance of excerpts lies not in their frequency, but in their capacity to exemplify recurrent narrative patterns and discursive mechanisms identified across the corpus. To protect the identification of the participants, all the quotations are signed with a number.

Police narratives and the reproduction of institutional racism

The analysis identified a set of recurring discursive strategies through which police officers respond to allegations of racism. Rather than merely reflecting individual opinions, these narratives actively contribute to the reproduction of institutional racism by framing racialised policing outcomes as neutral, necessary, or externally determined. The following sections examine how these strategies operate in officers' accounts.

Racialised space and the concentration of policing

The first empirical theme concerns the spatial concentration of policing in racialised neighbourhoods. Officers frequently explained intensified police attention through apparently neutral references to crime patterns, location, and operational necessity. The following excerpt illustrates how such reasoning may naturalise racialised policing outcomes while displacing responsibility away from police institutions:

That will happen naturally! We did it manually by directing police interventions more frequently to a certain location and individuals. Why? Because that's where things happen! For example, in Cova da Moura, in Amadora, many police interventions are directed there, and everyone knows that there is a lot of crime. Ah, and then there's racism. . . It's not racism. It is what it is. Things are as they are. If Caucasian people lived there it would be the same! We have to do police operations anyway, right? It's the current landscape of the country that creates social conflict. Racism is in vogue! (E2)

The excerpt reveals how racialised space is constructed as a self-evident basis for intensified police intervention. By stating that Cova da Moura is simply a place "where things happen," the officer presents the concentration of policing as an objective response to crime rather than as an institutional practice that may itself contribute to racial disproportionality. The claim that "if Caucasian people lived there it would be the same" reinforces this presentation of policing as neutral and universally applicable.

This narrative combines what Durrheim et al. (2005) describe as splitting and (dis)locating racism. Racism is split into morally reprehensible conduct, on the one hand, and allegedly benign or professionally necessary policing, on the other. At the same time, responsibility is displaced onto the neighbourhood, crime patterns, and the wider social context, allowing the officer to nominally reject racism while defending the institutional practice.

The spatial logic of this account is especially significant. Cova da Moura is constructed as a racialised and dangerous space whose residents become objects of suspicion through their association with place. This resembles what Smith (1986: 316) conceptualises as "ecological contamination," whereby individuals are treated as risky because they reside in areas already marked as problematic (see also Egbert and Leese, 2021: 159). Research on spatial racism in policing similarly shows how minority-dominated neighbourhoods may become shorthand for danger, legitimising heightened surveillance and intervention (Jones et al., 2022).

From a CRT perspective, the apparent neutrality of this reasoning does not remove its racial effects. The focus on place allows racialised outcomes to be explained through crime, geography, and professional necessity rather than through race itself. In this sense, the narrative reflects colour-blind racism, in which institutional practices reproduce racial inequality through ostensibly non-racial explanations (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Comparable forms of professional neutrality and denial have also been identified in European policing research (Kammersgaard et al., 2024; Mulinari and Keskinen, 2020).

The statements “it is what it is” and “racism is in vogue” also situate this account within the broader Portuguese context of racial denial. Rather than engaging with racism as a possible institutional feature of policing, the officer presents it as exaggerated, fashionable, or externally produced by the “current landscape of the country.” This displacement resonates with scholarship showing how Portuguese public discourse has historically minimised structural racism through appeals to social class, national tolerance, colour-blindness, and lusotropicalism (Cabecinhas, 2007; Castelo, 1998; Khan, 2014, 2016, 2021; Maeso, 2019).

The significance of this national context is not that it mechanically determines officers’ responses, but that it provides a culturally available vocabulary through which racialised policing can be narrated as non-racial. The account therefore does more than deny personal prejudice: it disconnects institutional outcomes from institutional responsibility.

Similar strategies have been documented in other policing contexts, where officers attribute racial disparities to crime patterns, social conditions, legal requirements, or other external factors while distancing themselves from racialised practices (Kammersgaard et al., 2024; Satzewich and Shaffir, 2009; Welsh et al., 2021). Such accounts help preserve a professional self-image of neutrality while limiting scrutiny of the institutional processes through which racial disparities are produced.

Taken together, these narratives show how the spatial concentration of policing may be naturalised through apparently neutral references to crime and place. Splitting and (dis)locating racism enable officers to reject racism at the level of personal intent while leaving the institutional production of racial disproportionality largely unexamined. The result is a narrative in which intensified policing appears inevitable, even though repeated intervention in racialised neighbourhoods may reinforce the very patterns used to justify continued police attention.

Victim descriptions and the displacement of responsibility

The second empirical theme concerns the use of racial identifiers in victim descriptions. Officers presented such descriptions as externally supplied information that they were professionally required to follow. This framing allowed racialised police action to be represented as a neutral procedural response rather than as an exercise of institutional judgement.

Of course, if the victim describes the suspect as Black, tall, and robust, we’re not going to approach short Caucasian. Isn’t it worth it. . . If this is politically correct? Approach people just because they have certain characteristics? No, but it has to be. . . (E22)

The excerpt illustrates how responsibility for racialised suspicion is displaced onto the victim’s account. The officer presents the use of race as a direct and unavoidable consequence of the description provided, thereby positioning police action as procedurally necessary rather than interpretative. In this account, the police appear to transmit information rather than actively evaluate, classify, and operationalise it.

Durrheim et al.'s (2005) concept of de-racialising racism helps interpret this manoeuvre. A potentially racialised practice is stripped of racial significance and attributed to a non-racial cause: the victim's description. The institutional role of the police in deciding how descriptions are assessed, prioritised, and translated into intervention is thereby minimised.

The reference to political correctness is also significant. By asking whether approaching individuals on the basis of racialised characteristics is "politically correct," the officer acknowledges the sensitivity of the practice while immediately justifying it through professional necessity. This oscillation permits limited recognition of the racial issue without sustained reflection on its institutional consequences.

From a CRT and institutional racism perspective, the absence of explicit racist intent does not make the practice racially neutral. Victim descriptions enter an institutional process in which officers decide which characteristics are treated as salient, how broadly they are applied, and which individuals become subject to suspicion. When racial identifiers are repeatedly operationalised within already unequal policing environments, they may contribute to disproportionate stops, searches, and surveillance of racialised groups.

This process can also reinforce data-driven feedback loops. Repeated police attention increases the presence of particular groups in police records, and those records may subsequently be treated as evidence that further attention is objectively warranted (Brayne, 2017). The apparent neutrality of the initial description can therefore obscure the cumulative institutional effects produced through its repeated use.

The central issue is therefore not whether officers should disregard all identifying information supplied by victims. Rather, it concerns how institutions assess the reliability, specificity, and potential racial effects of such information. By presenting victim descriptions as self-executing facts, officers may avoid scrutiny of the discretionary decisions through which racialised information becomes police action.

Taken together, these narratives show how victim descriptions may function as a mechanism for displacing institutional responsibility. De-racialising racism allows officers to present racialised intervention as an external procedural requirement, while obscuring the discretionary and cumulative processes through which racial identifiers acquire institutional force. The resulting narrative preserves police neutrality even where repeated reliance on such descriptions may contribute to racial disproportionality.

Police databases, algorithms, and technological neutrality

The third empirical theme concerns police databases, Big Data technologies, and the perceived objectivity of algorithmic decision-making. Officers acknowledged that police databases may contain disproportionate representations of particular racialised groups, but frequently treated these patterns as factual descriptions of reality rather than as possible outcomes of historically unequal policing practices. At the same time, Big Data technologies were presented as potentially capable of correcting human limitations and reducing bias. This is illustrated by the following quotation:

If I insert the Caucasian race, it [Big Data] will only give me Caucasian. Because for those characteristics, the results are those. . . The software is designed to break down precisely those kinds of situations. . . We're not here for specific ethnic groups, it's for everybody. . . The use of information in programs for me is the same. . . (E16)

The excerpt frames racial classification as a technically neutral operation. According to this reasoning, the system merely returns results that correspond to the characteristics entered by the user and applies the same logic to every population. The statement that the technology is "for everybody"

presents equal formal treatment as evidence of neutrality, without addressing whether the data, categories, and policing practices on which the system depends are themselves unequally structured.

Durrheim et al.'s (2005) concepts of relativising and trivialising racism help interpret this account. By comparing the treatment of racialised groups with the hypothetical insertion of "Caucasian" characteristics, the officer universalises the practice and reduces racism to a question of whether the same technical procedure could formally be applied to everyone. The institutional significance of unequal exposure to policing is thereby displaced by an abstract claim of procedural equality.

From a CRT perspective, formal consistency does not necessarily produce substantive equality. A system can apply the same rules to all users and still reproduce racialised outcomes when it relies on classifications and data generated within historically unequal institutional settings. The key issue is therefore not only whether the software processes categories consistently, but how those categories enter police systems and whose behaviour has been disproportionately recorded, classified, and made available for analysis.

These perspectives are another strategy for relativising. As Durrheim et al. (2005: 181) stated in media discourses, "While recognizing racial bias in media reporting, it is possible to deflect attention away from media racism by pointing to other values that the media uphold." In the case of police officers narratives, although acknowledging that data in police databases is "racially coded" (Ferguson, 2018: 513), as showed by the following quotation—"Sometimes the database is more filled with a certain race or ethnicity or whatever. . . it's factual. . ." (E14)—and therefore demonstrate how police databases may have an overrepresentation of certain social groups and categories that are more affected by the criminal justice system, such as ethnic and racial minorities, police officers evoked Big Data technologies as an important tool with capabilities to mitigate these effects of overrepresentation of certain population groups in databases and, consequently, they relativise racism. This tension becomes clearer when officers explicitly acknowledge racial disproportionality within police databases:

With Big Data, this [risk for racism] could even be improved. . . Because the system would make a selection. . . A work that we don't always manage. . . Sometimes the database is more racially, ethnically, or whatever. . . It's factual. . . But that doesn't mean that all Blacks or all Gypsies commit a crime. . . Now I honestly think that this is a problem that could be easily solved by the algorithm because it would do the sorting. . . (E14)

This account simultaneously recognises and neutralises racial disproportionality. The officer acknowledges that the database may be disproportionately populated by particular racial or ethnic groups, but treats this as a factual condition that can be corrected through improved algorithmic sorting. Racism is therefore reframed as a technical imperfection rather than as a possible consequence of institutional practices.

The claim that the problem could be "easily solved by the algorithm" trivialises the historical and organisational processes through which police data are produced. Police databases do not simply record crime in the abstract; they record the outcomes of decisions about where officers are deployed, who is stopped, which conduct is detected, and whose activities become visible to law enforcement. When some neighbourhoods and populations are subjected to greater police attention, they are also more likely to appear in the data used to justify future intervention.

This creates the possibility of a feedback loop in which unequal policing generates unequal data, and unequal data are subsequently treated as objective evidence for continued policing (Brayne, 2017). Algorithmic systems may reproduce or intensify this process by operating at greater speed and scale while giving existing patterns the authority of technological objectivity (Moy, 2019; Ugwu-dike, 2020, 2023).

CRT helps make visible the institutional dimension of this process. The relevant question is not whether individual officers or software developers deliberately intend to discriminate, but whether apparently neutral systems reproduce inequalities embedded in the data and practices on which they rely. By locating the solution primarily in improved technology, officers' narratives divert attention from the institutional conditions that produced the disproportionality in the first place.

The appeal to technological neutrality also performs a form of institutional distancing. Responsibility for racialised outcomes is shifted away from police judgement and towards the apparently autonomous operation of data and software. Yet algorithms do not stand outside policing institutions: their outputs depend on the categories selected, the data collected, and the institutional priorities that shape their use. Presenting technology as an independent corrective mechanism may therefore obscure rather than resolve the racial inequalities embedded in police information systems.

Taken together, these narratives show how technological objectivity can be mobilised to relativise and trivialise institutional racism. Officers acknowledge unequal representation in police databases while interpreting it as a factual or technical problem that algorithms may solve. This account preserves the image of policing as neutral, but leaves largely unexamined how racialised surveillance, data production, and algorithmic analysis may operate as mutually reinforcing institutional processes.

Discussion

This article has shown how police officers' narratives may contribute to the reproduction of institutional racism through three interconnected empirical processes: the spatial concentration of policing in racialised neighbourhoods; the use of racial identifiers in victim descriptions; and the treatment of police databases and Big Data technologies as neutral or objective. Across these themes, officers frequently presented racialised outcomes as necessary, externally determined, or technically produced, thereby preserving a professional self-image of impartiality.

Rather than functioning as the primary structure of the findings, Durrheim et al.'s (2005) framework helps interpret the discursive mechanisms operating within these empirical themes. Splitting and (dis)locating racism were particularly visible in officers' accounts of intensified policing in minority-dominated neighbourhoods; de-racialising racism appeared in the displacement of responsibility onto victim descriptions; and relativising and trivialising racism were evident in appeals to formal equality and technological objectivity. These mechanisms are analytically significant because they allow racialised institutional outcomes to be acknowledged indirectly while racism itself is denied, minimised, or disconnected from police responsibility.

These narratives, drawing on CRT and policing studies were analysed, and by interpreting them, it was possible to understand how their expression by the police officers a signal is of how they protect their work, and themselves from legal or judicial inquiries. First, by splitting racism in "good" and "bad" ways, and (dis)locate it to the current landscape of Portugal. Second, by de-racialising racism through a process of deconstruction of meanings where racist practices are attributed to non-racial causes. Third, relativising, and trivialising racism through narratives supported by the arguments of technologies to solve inequalities, the Caucasian race, and the mediation of the topic into other values. As stated by Vega and van der Woude (2023: 3) these strategies "maintain racial disparities, while adhering to a normative climate that negates the existence of discrimination."

First, the spatial concentration of policing illustrates how institutional racism may be reproduced through apparently non-racial decisions about place and resource allocation. When

neighbourhoods inhabited predominantly by racialised minorities are constructed as self-evidently dangerous, intensified policing can be presented as a neutral response to crime. Yet repeated intervention also increases the visibility of offences, arrests, and police records in those locations, reinforcing the institutional evidence used to justify continued attention.

Second, victim descriptions reveal how racialised information may acquire institutional force while responsibility is displaced away from the police. Officers described racial identifiers as external facts that they were professionally required to follow. However, such information does not translate automatically into police action: institutions determine how descriptions are evaluated, which characteristics are prioritised, and how broadly suspicion is applied. The cumulative use of racial identifiers may therefore contribute to disproportionality even where officers understand their actions as procedurally neutral.

Third, officers' accounts of databases and Big Data technologies demonstrate how technological objectivity may obscure the institutional production of racialised data. Although some participants recognised the unequal representation of particular groups in police databases, they frequently interpreted this as a factual or technical condition that algorithms might correct. This reasoning overlooks how databases are shaped by prior decisions concerning deployment, surveillance, stops, arrests, and recording practices. Consequently, algorithmic tools may reproduce rather than neutralise historically embedded inequalities.

These findings reinforce an understanding of institutional racism that does not depend on proving explicit racist intent among individual officers. Institutional racism may emerge through the cumulative interaction of routine decisions, organisational priorities, classifications, and professional narratives that systematically produce unequal outcomes. Officers may sincerely understand their work as impartial while participating in institutional processes that disproportionately affect racialised communities.

The narratives analysed here are therefore important not because they provide direct evidence of officers' personal beliefs, but because they reveal how unequal outcomes are rendered legitimate, ordinary, and professionally defensible. Claims of neutrality, legality, necessity, and technological objectivity can limit institutional self-examination by locating the source of disproportionality outside police organisations—in neighbourhoods, victims, society, data, or software.

In this respect, Durrheim et al.'s (2005) framework remains useful as an interpretative resource. The strategies identified in officers' accounts do not simply deny racism; they reorganise responsibility and meaning in ways that make racialised outcomes compatible with an institutional identity of fairness and professionalism. This helps explain how institutional racism can persist in contexts where overt racism is formally rejected. These strategies enable them to "deflect critical scrutiny away from the institutional racism" (Gonzalez et al., 2022) and are particularly relevant to inform us how the issues around racism will develop in the criminal justice system in two ways.

These narratives have important institutional consequences. First, they may weaken the capacity of police organisations to identify and address racial disproportionality. If unequal outcomes are consistently explained as products of crime patterns, victim information, or neutral technologies, there is little institutional incentive to examine how deployment practices, discretionary decisions, or data systems contribute to those outcomes.

Second, such narratives may undermine accountability and public trust. Communities subject to repeated surveillance and intervention may perceive a gap between official claims of neutrality and their lived experiences of policing. Where institutions lack mechanisms to examine this gap, allegations of discrimination may be treated as misunderstandings or external criticism rather than as opportunities for organisational reflection and reform.

This study has several limitations. First, the analysis is based on interviews with 34 officers from two Portuguese police organisations and cannot be treated as representative of all police officers or institutions in Portugal. The findings identify recurring narrative patterns within this sample rather than measuring their prevalence across the police population.

Second, the study examines officers' accounts rather than directly observed behaviour. Narratives provide insight into how officers understand, justify, and communicate their practices, but they do not establish how these accounts translate into particular operational decisions. Future research should combine interviews with observational methods, institutional data, and analyses of stops, searches, deployments, and technological systems.

Third, the interviews were conducted within a broader project concerning Big Data technologies, and the discussion of racism emerged through questions about predictive policing and biased data. Although follow-up questions encouraged wider reflection, the framing of the interviews may have shaped the forms of denial, justification, or technological reasoning expressed by participants.

Despite these limitations, the study contributes to understanding how institutional racism may be reproduced through everyday professional reasoning in a European policing context. The Portuguese case is particularly significant because racial inequality is discussed within a national environment shaped by colonial legacies, lusotropicalism, colour-blindness, and the persistent denial of racism as a structural issue. The findings show that these broader narratives are not merely contextual background; they provide interpretative resources through which officers can present racialised outcomes as unrelated to race.

More broadly, the analysis demonstrates the value of bringing CRT into dialogue with policing studies and critical research on technology. The institutional reproduction of racial inequality does not occur through a single practice or explicit policy. It may emerge through the interaction of spatial policing, discretionary interpretation, data production, and technological systems, all sustained by narratives of neutrality. Understanding these interactions is essential for identifying how apparently minor and disconnected practices may collectively generate durable patterns of racial disproportionality.

Conclusion

This article examined how police officers in Portugal narrate racism in relation to policing practices, victim descriptions, police databases, and Big Data technologies. The findings show that racialised outcomes may be normalised through professional accounts that present policing as spatially necessary, procedurally neutral, or technologically objective.

Three interconnected processes were identified. First, the concentration of policing in racialised neighbourhoods was justified through references to crime, place, and operational necessity. Second, racial identifiers in victim descriptions were treated as externally supplied facts, displacing responsibility for their institutional use. Third, unequal representation in police databases was acknowledged but reframed as a technical problem that algorithms might solve. Across these themes, officers' narratives preserved an institutional self-image of impartiality while leaving the production of racial disproportionality largely unexamined.

The article contributes theoretically by bringing CRT, institutional racism, policing studies, and critical research on technology into dialogue within a Portuguese and broader European context. CRT makes visible how formally neutral practices may reproduce racial power; the concept of institutional racism directs attention to the cumulative effects of routine organisational processes; and policing studies situate these dynamics within professional cultures and

forms of institutional legitimisation. Durrheim et al.'s framework complements this analysis by identifying the discursive mechanisms through which racism is split, displaced, de-racialised, relativised, or trivialised.

The findings also challenge the assumption that racial inequality is reproduced only through explicit prejudice or intentional discrimination. Institutional racism may emerge through the interaction of spatial deployment, discretionary interpretation, data production, and technological systems. These processes can reinforce one another while remaining compatible with officers' sincere claims of neutrality and professionalism.

The Portuguese case is especially relevant because police narratives are articulated within a national context shaped by colonial legacies, lusotropicalism, colour-blindness, and the recurrent denial of racism as a structural issue. These narratives provide culturally available ways of interpreting racialised outcomes as external to police institutions, exaggerated, or unrelated to race.

Addressing institutional racism therefore requires more than individual awareness or generic bias training. Police organisations should examine how resources are distributed, how racial identifiers are assessed and operationalised, how databases are produced, and how technological systems reproduce existing patterns of surveillance and intervention. Greater institutional transparency, systematic monitoring of disproportionality, and independent scrutiny of data-driven policing tools are necessary to identify and address racial inequality within law enforcement.

By focusing on officers' narratives, this study does not claim to establish a direct correspondence between discourse and behaviour. It nevertheless shows how professional reasoning can help legitimate institutional practices and constrain recognition of their racial effects. Future research should combine qualitative interviews with observational, statistical, and technological analyses to examine how these narratives interact with everyday policing decisions and institutional outcomes.

Acknowledgements

The author is very grateful to the PJ and PSP in Portugal for authorising this research, and extends appreciation to all the interviewees for their participation and availability. Neiva is also thankful to Professor Helena Machado for all the support in this journey, but also for the valuable feedback and comments in an early stage of the paper. Finally, Laura extends her gratitude to all the members of AIDA social sciences research network, for all the incredible observations and insightful comments.

ORCID iD

Laura Neiva  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1954-7597>

Funding

The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work is supported by national funds through FCT—Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P., under a PhD Research Studentship with the reference 2020.04764.BD (attributed to Laura Neiva); within the scope of the Project. Este trabalho é financiado por fundos nacionais através da FCT - Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P., no âmbito do Projeto com o identificador DOI <10.54499/UID/04053/2025 (<https://doi.org/10.54499/UID/04053/2025>)> This work is financed by national funds through FCT - Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P., under funding UID/00736/2025: Communication and Society Research Centre.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. References to “migration” and “migration patterns” are used here in line with dominant academic and policy vocabularies in the Portuguese context. At the same time, the article recognises that such terms often function to depoliticise racialised inequalities by reframing them as neutral demographic processes, thereby contributing to regimes of denial that obscure discussions of racism.
2. This period of time was particularly marked by debates on social media and news, as well as newspapers in Portugal about racism in policing activities, mainly focused on popular and media accusations of police institutions as racists.
3. The interview process was conducted with a strong awareness of the ethical implications of the questions posed. Efforts were made to ensure that respondents did not feel pressured to respond in a certain way, and care was taken to create a space where they could openly discuss their practices and perceptions. The potential influence of positionality on the responses was considered throughout the analysis, with an understanding that the findings should reflect the complexity of the issues rather than oversimplify them based on initial reactions.

References

- Bonilla-Silva E (2006) *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism And The Persistence Of Racial Inequality In The United States*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Bonnet F and Caillault C (2015) The invader, the enemy within and they-who-must- not-be-named: how police talk about minorities in Italy, the Netherlands and France. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38(7): 1185–1201. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2014.970566>
- Brayne S (2017) Big data surveillance: The case of policing. *American Sociological Review* 82(5): 977–1008. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122417725865>
- Bruce-Jones E (2015) German policing at the intersection: race, gender, migrant status and mental health. *Race & Class* 56(3): 36–49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030639681455622>
- Cabecinhas R (2007) *Preto e Branco: A Naturalização da Discriminação Racial*. Campo das Letras.
- Cabecinhas R and Macedo I (2019) (Anti) racismo, ciência e educação: teorias, políticas e práticas. *Medições* 7(2): 16–36. <https://doi.org/10.60546/mo.v7i2.242>
- Cardina M (2016) Memórias amnésicas? Nação, discurso político e representações do passado colonial. *Configurações. Revista Ciências Sociais* 17: 31–42. <https://doi.org/10.4000/configuracoes.3281>
- Castelo C (1998) *O Modo Português de Estar no Mundo: o Luso-Tropicalismo e a Ideologia Colonial Portuguesa (1933-1961)*. Afrontamento.
- Charmaz K (2006) *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*. SAGE Publications.
- Cho JY and Lee E (2014) Reducing confusion about Grounded Theory and qualitative content analysis: similarities and differences. *The Qualitative Report* 19(32): 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2014.1028>
- Crenshaw K (1995) Race, reform, and retrenchment: Transformation and legitimation in antidiscrimination law. In: Crenshaw K, Gotanda N, Peller G, et al. (eds) *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*. The New Press, pp.357–383.
- Durrheim K, Quayle M, Whitehead K, et al. (2005) Denying racism: discursive strategies used by the South African media. *Critical Arts* 19(1–2): 167–186. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02560040585310111>
- Egbert S and Leese M (2021) *Criminal Futures*. Routledge.
- Elias A (2024) Racism as neglect and denial. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 47(3): 483–505. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2023.2181668>
- European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2023). Black people in the EU face ever more racism. Available at: <https://fra.europa.eu/pt/news/2023/black-people-eu-face-ever-more-racism> (accessed 2 September 2024).
- Ferguson A (2018) Illuminating black data policing. *Ohio State Journal of Criminal Law* 15: 503–538.
- Fortner MJ (2022) Public administration, racial capitalism, and the problem of “interest convergence.” A commentary on critical race theory. *Public Integrity* 25(3): 262–272. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10999922.2022.2113294>

- Garner S (2024) Counter Acts: practices of ‘anti-anti racism’ in the France and the USA. *Frontiers in Sociology* 9: 1394313. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2024.1394313>
- Givens T (2022). Post-war transitions: The conflation of immigration and race. In Terri G (ed.) *The Roots of Racism – The Politics of White Supremacy in The US and Europe*. Bristol University Press, pp.62–74.
- Glaser BG and Strauss AL (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Aldine de Gruyter.
- Glover S (2007) Police discourse on racial profiling. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 23(3): 239–247. <https://doi.org/10.1177/104398620730686>
- Gonzalez S, Simon SJ and Rogers KK (2022) The diversity officer: police officers’ and black women civilians’ epistemologies of race and racism in policing. *Law and Society Review* 56(3): 477–499.
- Henriques JG (2017) *Racismo em Portugal: O Lado Esquecido do Colonialismo*. Rio de Janeiro: Tinta da China.
- Holdaway S (1997) Constructing and sustaining “race” within the police workforce. *The British Journal of Sociology* 48(1): 19–34.
- Jones N, Brown K, Bautista Duran E, et al. (2022) “Other than the projects, you stay professional”: “color-blind” cops and the enactment of spatial racism in routine policing. *City & Community* 22(1): 3–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15356841221123820>
- Juang P, Umaña-Taylor J, Schachner K, et al. (2023) Ethnic-racial identity in Europe: Adapting the identity project intervention in five countries. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology* 20(6): 978–1006. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2022.2131520>
- Kammersgaard T, Sogaard TF, Kolind T, et al. (2024) “Most officers are more or less colorblind”: Police officers’ reflections on the role of race and ethnicity in policing. *Race and Justice* 14(4): 465–489. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21533687221127445>
- Khan S (2014) Narrativizing the other-empire in silence: On Portuguese postimperiality/postcoloniality. *Portuguese Literary and Cultural Studies*: 187–212.
- Khan S (2016) *Portugal a lápis de cor-A Sul de uma pós-colonialidade*. Almedina.
- Khan S (2021) Um narcisismo colonial: Implicações históricas nas tecnologias de vigilância. *Revista Ciências Humanas* 14: 54–62. <https://doi.org/10.32813/2179-1120.2121.v14.n2.a743>
- Lee H (2024) How does structural racism operate (in) the contemporary US criminal justice system?. *Annual Review of Criminology* 7(1): 233–255. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-criminol-022422-015019>
- Lum K and Isaac W (2016) To predict and serve? *Significance* 13(5): 14–19. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1740-9713.2016.00960.x>
- Maeso S (2019) O Estado de negação e o presente-futuro do antirracismo: discursos oficiais sobre racismo, ‘multiracialidade’ e pobreza em Portugal (1985–2016). *Revista Direito e Práxis* 10: 2033–2067. <https://doi.org/10.1590/2179-8966/2019/43883>
- Maeso S (2021) *O Estado do Racismo em Portugal: Racismo Antinegro e Anticiganismo no Direito e nas Políticas Públicas*. Tinta-da-China.
- Martins BS and Moura A (2018) Portugal e década internacional de afrodescendentes: a educação e os tempos da violência colonial. *Educação Em Revista* 34: 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0102-4698192750>
- Mayring P (2004) Qualitative content analysis. In: Flick U, von Kardorff E and Steinke I (eds) *A Companion to Qualitative Research*. Sage, pp.266–269.
- Mester A (2023) Resistance of the flesh: Black lives and racist violence in Portugal. *Migrant Frontiers* 141–156.
- Miller J, Gounev P, Pap AL, et al. (2008) Racism and police stops: Adapting US and British debates to continental Europe. *European Journal of Criminology* 5(2): 161–191.
- Moy L (2019) How police technology aggravates racial inequity: A taxonomy of problems and a path forward. *SSRN Electronic Journal*: 3340898.
- Mulinari L and Keskinen S (2020) Racial profiling in the racial welfare state: Examining the order of policing in the Nordic region. *Theoretical Criminology* 26(3): 377–395. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480620914914>
- Osler A (2023) Education, migration and citizenship in Europe: Untangling policy initiatives for human rights and racial justice. *Global Migration and Civic Education* 31: 64–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2020.1794231>

- Parmar A, Earle R and Phillips C (2020) Race matters in criminology: Introduction to the special issue. *Theoretical Criminology* 24(3): 421–426. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480620930016>
- Pereira P (2022) The (in)tangible legacy of “generic lusotropicalism”: Unexamined links in the textual history of “Portuguese humane colonialism”. *Portuguese Literary and Cultural Studies*: 53–80.
- Pereira A, Santos R and Roque S (2023) Police Violence, Racism and Anti-Racism: opinion struggles in the Portuguese daily newspapers. In: Bhatia M, Poynting S and Tufail W (eds) *Racism, Violence and Harm*. Palgrave Macmillan, pp.35–56.
- Raposo O, Alves A, Varela P, et al. (2019) Negro drama. Racismo, segregação e violência policial nas periferias de Lisboa. *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais* 119: 5–28. <https://doi.org/10.4000/rccs.8937>
- Rocha J (2021) The cycle of attention to political events: racism and police violence in Portugal. *Perspectivas-Journal of Political Science* 24: 56–64.
- Satzewich V and Shaffir W (2009) Racism versus professionalism: claims and counter-claims about racial profiling. *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice* 51(2): 199–226.
- Sinhoretto J, Cedro A and Macedo H (2022) New technologies and racism in ostensive policing in São Paulo. *Dilemas: Revista de Estudos de Conflito e Controle Social* 15(3): 803–826.
- Smith D (1986) The neighborhood context of police behavior. In: Reiss A and Tonry M (eds) *Communities and Crime*. University of Chicago Press, pp.313–342.
- Sollund R (2005) Obstacles and possibilities in police research. *Critical Practice Studies*: 7(2): 43–64. <https://doi.org/10.7146/ocps.v7i2.2103>
- Strauss AL and Corbin J (1990) *Basics of Qualitative Research. Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. Sage Publications.
- Teles B (2020) Violência policial e o debate no Twitter em Portugal: o caso do Bairro da Jamaica. *Intercom: Revista Brasileira de Ciências Da Comunicação* 43: 147–164. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1809-5844202018>
- Ugwudike P (2020) Digital prediction technologies in the justice system: The implications of a ‘race-neutral’ agenda. *Theoretical Criminology* 24(3): 482–501. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480619896006>
- Ugwudike P (2023) Algorithms, policing, and race: insights from decolonial and critical algorithm studies. In: Cunneen C, Deckert A, Porter A, et al. (eds) *The Routledge International Handbook on Decolonizing Justice*. Routledge, pp.146–157.
- Vega II and van der Woude M (2023) Colourblindness across borders: The de-racialized logics of Dutch and American border agents. *Theoretical Criminology* 28(3): 309–327. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13624806231209997>
- Welsh M, Chanin J and Henry S (2021) Complex colorblindness in police processes and practices. *Social Problems* 68(2): 374–392. <https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spaa008>

Author biography

Laura Neiva is an Assistant Professor at Universidade Lusíada — Porto and an Invited Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at the Institute for Social Sciences of the University of Minho. She is a researcher at the Center for Legal, Economic, International and Environmental Studies (CEJEIA — Universidade Lusíada) and at the Communication and Society Research Centre (CECS — University of Minho), as well as a collaborating researcher on the fAlces project (ERC Advanced Grant 101140664). She holds a PhD in Sociology from the University of Minho, where she conducted research funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) on police officers’ expectations regarding the use of Big Data in policing and criminal investigation in Portugal. Her research combines Criminology, Sociology, and Science and Technology Studies, focusing on the ethical, political, and social impacts of digital technologies. She is the author of the book *Big Data in Criminal Investigation: Challenges and Expectations in the European Union* and of several publications on surveillance, security policies, and artificial intelligence.