



Department of Political Science

***Racism and the Myth of Racial Democracy in the
Brazilian Political and Educational Systems***

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Table of Contents

Introduction:	3
Chapter 1: Race in Brazil	5
1.1 The Pardo Race and Miscegenation in Brazil:	5
1.2 Race in the Census:	7
1.3 The “Majority Minority” Country	8
1.4 History of Race in Brazil	9
Chapter 2: An Unequal Education	14
2.1 A Segregated Educational System	15
2.2 A Color-Blind Curriculum	20
Chapter 3: An Unrepresentative Democracy	26
3.1 An Unequal Congress	26
3.2 A White Judicial System	31
Conclusions:	35
Reference List:	38
Riassunto	45

Introduction:

Brazil prides itself in being a pluriethnic state that is supposed to respect and accommodate people from all different backgrounds and stories. It is a country that hosts a plethora of ethnic minority communities, such as the largest Japanese population outside of Japan, the second largest Italian community outside of Italy and the largest community of lebanese descent in the world. Brazil is also the second country with the most people of Afro-descent, only behind Nigeria.

With over 50% of the population falling under the category of a racial minority this classifies Brazil as one of the few “Majority Minority” countries in the world, as no single racial group makes up more than 50% of the population . Nonetheless, the reality of the country is much different than the image it attempts to portray internationally and even nationally. Brazil struggles with a blindness towards its own racial biases, and this is highlighted specially by the large acceptance of the theory of “Racial Democracy” formulated by brazilian thinker Gilberto Freyre in his famous and widely taught book *Casa Grande e Senzala*, where he developed a theory that states that unlike other countries such as the United States, Brazil has reached a post-racial society, where discrimination based on skin color or ethnic background is a non-factor anymore, this due to the high levels of miscegenation and the way black people have been integrated into society differently than in other countries.

The aim of this study will be to delve deeper into the failed conception of Racial Democracy in Brazil, specifically addressing the groups Freyre cited in his book; Euro-Brazilians, Afro-Brazilians and to a smaller extent the Indigenous population in Brazil. Together these groups sum up almost 99% of the population of the country, with the remaining 1% being people of Asian descent..

This investigation will take into account more specifically how the structure and functioning of the Educational and Political systems in Brazil affects the way in which these minority groups are treated in society, and how their systematic exclusion from these essential areas of life have reinforced their position in the societal hierarchy. I have chosen these two

spheres as the Educational and Political spheres are two of the most important areas of a social community, being that the first formulates how people think and the second dictates how people should act. It is important to highlight the ways in which not only there has been continuous discrimination not only at a personal level, but also how this is an ingrained systematic oppression in the state level that affects all facets of society, and one that is generally not seen either by the elites or by the oppressed group itself, in virtue of cultural hegemony, taught to the society by media, politics and the education system.

Chapter 1: Race in Brazil

First and foremost, it is essential to delve deeper into the conception of Race and how it works specifically in Brazil, as the conception of race in Brazil works differently than what might be defined in other western states such as in Europe and the United States. Importantly, one must acknowledge the existence of the Pardo racial group, which is composed of people of mixed racial ancestry. Furthermore, race is self-declared in the census, thus, one states what racial group one believes they belong to and the census records it as such. There is also the need to point out a fact mentioned previously in the introduction, that minority racial groups compose over 50% of the Brazilian population, something that is rarely found across the world. These three particularities of race in Brazil are essential to understand how race relations are across Brazil and how racism has ingrained itself in Brazilian society.

1.1 The Pardo Race and Miscegenation in Brazil:

The Pardo racial group is one almost unique to Brazil, the easiest way to define this group would be people of mixed race. Due to the fact that Brazil has large levels of miscegenation, around 40% of the country identifies as Pardo (Senkevics, 2015). Furthermore, not everyone of mixed race chooses to identify themselves as Pardo as the people with lighter skin complexion might identify as white instead despite them having non-white ancestors and darker skinned people might identify themselves as black although they might have white people in their family line as well. An important distinction that one needs to make between Brazil and the USA when it comes to race is that in Brazil the cultural norm of the “One Drop Rule” that is still socially applied in the USA was never found. The “One Drop Rule” that was mostly popularized in the USA around the 20th century was a racial classification that stated that anyone that had even one black ancestor, would be considered black (Fears, 2002). If this were the case in Brazil, most people under the Pardo label would be considered Black and some Indigenous, as it is important to remember that although Pardo people are most commonly mixed race between people with european and african ancestry, it is also people that contain Inidgenous ancestry.

Nonetheless, the miscegenation of Brazil and commencement of this mixed racial group was absolutely not a peaceful process. The beginning of miscegenation of Brazil came through the raping and abuse of slaves by white slaveowners. The numbers in Brazil of incidents of this happening being greater than almost any other country in Latin America, boosted by the fact that Brazil was the last Latin American country to abolish slavery and that it was way more slaves than any other country in the continent (Rossi, 2018).

Furthermore, for a long time Brazil followed the ideology of “Racial Whitening”. This ideology was commonly known in Brazil as “branqueamento” and was a prevailing ideology in the country starting in 1889 (one year after Brazilian slaves were freed with the passing of the “Lei Aurea”) (SANZ and RODRIGUES, 2020). This white supremacist thought sought to solve what was seen as the “Negro Problem” in Brazil, the basic idea behind this would be that black people would be able to progress culturally or genetically by breeding with white people, and that hopefully eventually the black race would disappear from society through this process. People who advocated this claimed they were putting in place Darwin's theory on natural selection in a social setting. They combined this with “Aryanism” which is the belief that the white race was genetically superior to all other races and cultures. The basic concept behind it would be that by mixing white people with black people, the white gene would prevail due to its superiority and whiten the people that would've otherwise been part of a different racial group. This belief remained mainstream in Brazilian society until the mid to late 1910s (ALVES DE SOUZA and FORTUNATO, 2019).

It is important to know the real history behind miscegenation in Brazil because this is a history that many do not seem to know outside the country, but also inside of it. Taking this back to the idea of the Racial Democracy, this was built on the assumption that the origins of the miscegenation in Brazilian society were pure and positive. While the reality behind it is that it was specifically a white supremacist ideology the one that encouraged the mixing of the races in Brazil. This violent process has not gone away completely from Brazilian society, as this process of whitening only happened a couple of generations ago and the lack of widespread knowledge

of the horrors behind it has allowed an incorrect interpretation of miscegenation in Brazil to become the widespread dominant belief.

1.2 Race in the Census:

As is done in most countries, in the Brazilian census one declares what race one believes they fall under in the census. This means that the racial group that you believe you belong to the most is the one in which you are classified under. This makes sense as realistically your ethnic origins are not the thing that will determine how you are viewed in society, but instead your surroundings and defining features. However, this self declaration in Brazil does not show the complete picture of the ethnic breakdown of Brazil.

Brazil can be pointed to as a concrete example of how Race is more of a social construct, that is used to distinguish people based on physical characteristics that are socially significant. This way, race is a sociological term not at all biological, Brazilian society showcases how the understanding of race can vary and change in different societies. As explored previously, a Pardo person would most likely be classified as Black in a country such as the United States, but also most white Brazilians could also be seen as racial minorities in the USA, falling under the category of “Latino” instead, only the people who are of almost complete European heritage (a small subset of the population mostly found in the Southern states of Brazil) could “pass” as a White person in other western countries, and even with that due non-visual factors such as language and customs they might still be treated as a racial minority, due to their ethnic background (Fears, 2002). A great interpretation of this can be seen in the 2019 Brazilian Film “Bacurau”, where a racist north american white person is talking about a racist Brazilian white person, and dialogue ensues when the Brazilians claim to be white:

“How could you be like us? We are white you are not white... you kind of look white but you are not” (Bacurau, 2019)

Within Brazil, it is expected that by the next census (set to be released in 2022 after delays due to COVID-19 and political intervention prevented it from taking place in 2020) the

Pardo group will officially overtake whites as the biggest racial group in Brazil, with the black population also likely to have grown over these past years. This is due to two major factors, the first being purely demographic, with white people having on average less children than black and pardo people. The second one though, is more interesting as it is seen how more people have been adopting the label of Pardo due to the bigger dissemination of its meaning and the further acceptance of this label amongst society. Ana Saboia from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (Also known as the IBGE, the agency that carries out the the declared that carries out the census) "During this decade we have been noticing this increase in people declaring themselves black and pardo," (Castillo, 2011).

Although “Pardo” is an old label found in Brazil since at least the 18th century, a change in the way the census is conducted, in comparison to the 2010 census, might contribute to more people using this label as now the term will be officially defined, this might contribute to people who are unsure of what race they can understand better what this label means. Furthermore, many people that normally might label themselves as pardas, label themselves as white or black due to stereotypes and misunderstandings of the racial groups in the country, with time more people have accepted this mixed label and hopefully this reform in the census will help more people learn about it (Castillo, 2011).

1.3 The “Majority Minority” Country

As previously referred to, as of the last official census Brazil is a country that has the particularity that over half of the population is composed by racial minorities. The number of white Brazilians went under 50% for the first time in the census of 2010, however, the racial split between racial groups has been almost even for decades with the 1991 census showing the White population as less than 52% of the overall population. Also, referring back to the “success” of the embranquecimento movement in Brazil, in the census of 1872 and 1890 Brazil was also a Majority Minority country, with the white population making up only 38.14% and 43.97% of the population respectively, with an exponential jump to 63.47% in the 1940 census. Between 1890 and 1940 Brazil stopped asking about race in the census but the jump between both sets of data is due in part because of the large number of European Immigrants that Brazil took in around this

time and partly due to the process of whitening in the Brazilian population and effects that scientific racism had on Brazilian society. (Senkevics, 2015).

Now, despite there always being a high percentage of people of color in Brazil and since the abolishment of slavery there not being any outright substantial government enforced racially segregating laws such as happened in the United States or South Africa, why are there such disparities in the Brazilian population?

1.4 History of Race in Brazil

In order to understand how racial inequalities prevail in Brazil today and how it has shaped the institutions of the country one must look back to its history. The country received the most slaves out of any country in the America's during colonial period, with around 40% of all enslaved people brought over from Africa to the Americas going to Brazil alone (Figueiredo, 2018). The country was also the last one to abolish slavery in the continent, with the abolishment coming only in 1888 Princess Isabel promulgated the "Lei Aurea". This act followed many acts that were made with the facade of abolitionism, such as the "Lei dos Sexagenarios", this law stated that once an enslaved person reached the age of 60 they would be freed (Abreu Leao, 2019).

This law, alongside most of the "abolitionist" laws created at the time, were laws made "for the Englishman to see" a common Brazilian saying that describes something you pretend to do or badly done. This phrase has its roots traced back to this abolitionist laws, that were made in order to satisfy England that was pressuring Brazil to abolish slavery (Rodrigues, 2014). The political and social elites of the country did not want to abolish the practice, so instead they passed laws that would make it seem as if the nation was progressing in this issue while no real effect was actually happening. The "Lei dos Sexagenarios" is an optimal example of this, as the life expectancy in Brazil at the time was of less than 40 years, for slaves even less, so the number of enslaved people that even reached 60 years of age was negligible.

After the abolition of slavery, there were no government programs to help the people who were just freed to integrate into society, many of them had no option but to stay working for their former masters in order to still have a place where to live in, essentially continuing being slaves. Others did not even have the choice, as the government was promoting at the same time European immigration to Brazil from Europe and many of the landowners chose to employ white europeans (mostly of Italian and Spanish origins) who provided a very cheap labor force, instead of giving the job to former slaves (Abreu Leao, 2019). This lead to many of these former slaves to have to find informal housing spaces, moving into the periphery of major cities and into what was known as “*Bairros Africanos*” or “African Neighbourhoods”, this is what would develop to what we now know as the Favelas, which is a type of slum found in Brazil. Even when former slaves were able to find a spot to live in more near the city center, their housing units would be commonly demolished and the population would be forced to join these favelas in the periphery of the city, Up until today Favelas are composed mostly of Afro-Brazilians, with this group representing around two thirds of people living in Favelas today (Souza, 2014).

As mentioned before, the ideology of Racial Whitening entered Brazil as slavery ended, and as the Brazilian society started to separate itself from the concept of racial purity, Gilberto Freyre wrote his famous book “*Casa Grande e Senzala*” translated into english as “The Masters and the Slaves” which spread across the country the idea that Brazil was a racial democracy and that the mixing of races made the country into a post-racial society (Freyre, 2014). This thought would persist in Brazilian society for decades to come, and come to be one of the cornerstones of the 1964-1985 military dictatorship, with the government ignoring race as an issue and pushing a unified identity amongst Brazilians to prevent resistance to their rule. As the military dictatorship progressed racial democracy was accepted as scripture amongst almost all sectors of Brazilian society. Gabrielle Abreu, a historian and researcher from the Institute Vladimir Herzog (an institute that aims to promote equality, freedom of speech and democracy across Brazil), reinforces this statement:

“There was a deliberate wish in the military dictatorship to present Brazil as a racial paradise, as a place that did not have racism” (Soares, 2022)

According to Mala Htun, this long held acceptance of Brazil as a post-racial state and the unwillingness of governments to see race as an issue led to a lack of Afro-brazilian rights organizations forming in the country and prevented progress to be made in the sense of racial equality in the country and led to the limiting of the groups political power. This would start to change only once the military government fell in 1985, and as the constitution of 1988 was being formed afro-brazilian rights organizations were able to include a clause that would make racism an offense across the country. With the presidencies of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2003) and Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva (2003-2011) more progress started being made in civil rights for the Afro-Brazilian communities, with Lula making race an important issue in his presidential run and affirmative action in some public universities in a couple of states beginning in 2003 (Htun, 2004).

It is important also to highlight how Brazil has had only one Black president, Nilo Peçanha in 1924 but even with this he passed as white in politics and had official portraits of him be whitened in order to show himself as having a lighter skin tone than he actually had, and although there has been progress in Brazilian political society with a greater participation of minorities in Brazilian politics, this demographic is still majorly underrepresented with no openly Pardo or Black president ever been elected to the presidency, and this will most likely continue in the 2022 elections as all major candidates are white. As put by professor and black political activist Abdias do Nascimento:

“The white supremacy in Brazil created very subtle and sophisticated instruments of racial domination to mask this genocidal process. The most effective of them constitutes the myth of racial democracy... the myth of racial democracy maintains the trickster facade that hides the reality of a racism just as violent and destructive as that of the United States of South Africa” (Guimarães, 2006, P.165)

Brazil is also home to over 300 different indigenous tribes, ranging from some that are nearly extinct to others that are composed of thousands of people. These tribes have occupied the land known as Brazil for milenia before white colonizers occupied it and brought with them

african slaves. With the European colonization of the Americas, a genocidal process began, one that continues to a lesser extent up until today. The fact that indigenous people were slaughtered during the colonial period is well known worldwide, with this genocide taken place with the use of guns and diseases, but beyond that it is important to acknowledge how this group has been continuously oppressed and slaughtered throughout Brazilian history.

Seen as one of the greatest infrastructure projects in Brazilian history, the Trans-amazonian highway was completed in 1972 and linked for the first time the north of Brazil in a substantial manner to the rest of the country. This seemingly great achievement completed by the military dictatorship was highly contested by environmental groups and indigenous people, who did not want a high scale highway passing through their lands, but nonetheless the government proceeded to build it. What came as a consequence of the building of this highway was not just acres of native amazonian rainforest being cut down, but also the death of around Eight Thousand indigenous people, including full indigenous cultures that went extinct due to this infrastructure project. Despite this massive genocide taking place only a bit over 50 years ago, this event is out of the public consciousness and the death toll of these indigenous people are not counted in the official numbers of people killed by the dictatorship. The indigenous people were not only murdered by this project, but also enslaved, as it has been widely reported and later confirmed by an investigation of the Amazonian Government that indigenous people were forced to work with little to no pay on the building of the original Trans-Amazonian Avenue (Nogueira, 2017).

This is only one example of the forgotten and underreported genocide of the indigenous people of Brazil in modern history, as there are other examples that could be cited and even examples that are not only in history but also in the present, as Caciques from indigenous communities are murdered by prospectors and their land is burnt down by farmers while the government gives a blind eye to it. This action becomes evermore present as the government starts lowering protected indigenous land and legally opening sacred sites up for exploration by multinationals. The world and Brazil recently has had their eyes on the Amazon due to the deforestation happening in the region and the huge environmental cost of it, but very often the people living there, the indigenous communities that have been there way before any white

person ever stepped in the land known as Brazil, are left out of the conversation. As indigenous activist and journalist Alice Pataxó stated in a social media post:

“The indigenous genocide is real, it just doesn’t become news in Brazil” (@alice_pataxo, 2020)

Chapter 2: An Unequal Education

The Brazilian education system has had a long troubling issue when it comes to its relationship to the minority populations of the country. The Brazilian educational system, just like most around the world, was initially built for the most affluent people in society, with people not from the ruling class rarely ever having access to it. The system of the country was built upon the previous Portuguese system that was in place from colonial times, and as Brazil got its independence through a peaceful manner, establishing its own empire instead of a republic, there was little done to modify it in the first stages of nation-building. As a country that upon independence and through the 19th and much of the 20th century was largely rural and had a low socio-economic standing, little effort was made to educate its citizens, specially as the primary sector dominated the economy with unskilled labor being the building block of society, this unskilled labor being carried out by both free and enslaved people.

After the “Lei Aurea” was promulgated, liberating the enslaved population, and with educational reforms in the 20th century helping advance education across the nation, with more people having access to this right, it would be expected that the afro-brazilian population would also be able to climb the social ladder and benefit from these perks, specially as no actual legislation was put in place in order to exclude this population from accessing this. But just because on paper there was no requirement of whiteness for education, it doesn't mean that it was the same scenario in practice, with non-white children having a far lesser access to education than their white counterparts. Furthermore, the education system itself would go on to promote racist and inaccurate perceptions of these minorities, with the warping of Brazilian history being commonplace in the classroom in order to fit the narrative of Brazil as a racial democracy. Furthermore, due to the exclusion of non-whites from the education system a feedback loop was created in jobs in education, as since there were such a small number of minority students, this would translate with there being a lack of afro-brazilian and indigenous educators in the school system.

2.1 A Segregated Educational System

As previously mentioned, the education system in Brazil was never institutionally segregated, in theory the black, indigenous and white populations all had an equality in their access to education ever since slavery was outlawed. Nonetheless, this never properly translated into the actual composition of Brazilian education. The Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous populations have historically been underrepresented in primary, secondary and higher education in both the public and private sectors, but also subpar funding has gone to majority afro-brazilian schools historically. In higher education there has equally been a problem, with the situation only getting better once Brazil introduced different types of affirmative action programs in public universities in the 21st century, despite this, the racial composition of universities in Brazil still does not reflect the actual racial makeup of the nation and with government taking only small marginal steps towards making this better.

Due to the fact that the Brazilian education system was reserved for people of high social standings for the first century of its existence, almost no minorities were able to access this, due to the reasons highlighted in the previous chapter, social mobility has been extremely low in Brazil thus explaining why most of the people in lower social standing nowadays are descendents from these formerly enslaved people. For most of its history Brazil made no efforts to try to bridge these gaps of education, doing quite the opposite at times and making it harder for minorities to access these rights.

According to the "Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicilios Continua " (PNAD), an institution of the IBGE, over 70% of young people outside of school are black. With this number being translated into the illiteracy rates, where in 2019 the number of white illiterate people above the age of 15 in Brazil was around 3.6% while this percentage went up to 8.9% when dealing with afro-brazilians. It is also important to highlight how this is not purely an economic problem as there are differences in the level of education by people of the same social status. This can be seen by the fact that in subjects such as Mathematics, the percentage of students with an "acceptable" level of knowledge amongst upper class white brazilians is 34.4%, this number

halves to 17.3% amongst afro-brazilians. Between lower social statuses, 15.8% of white students have an adequate level while only 8% of afro-brazilians students have it (Observatório de Educação, 2018).

An explanation for this disparity could be twofold, firstly an educational system that has most of its resources directed into majority white regions (such as the southeast and south) and underfunding for majority black regions (such as the northeast). The government has sent regions with lower quality education more funds and more support in the 21st century, yet most specialists agree that this minimal extra funding they are sending (and much of it which is being lost due to corruption in the system) are not nearly enough to correct the decades of underfunding and the catchup these regions need to make. According to the “Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica” (IDEB), which is a index created by the Brazilian Federal government to track the level of education across Brazil, the 10 states with the worst education in Brazil were all states with predominantly black, pardo or indigenous populations. Meanwhile ,the Top 10 whitest states and Top 10 states with best education almost perfectly match, with 7 of the whitest states appearing also in the top 10 with the best education.

At this point it should not come as a surprise the fact that private schooling in Brazil is not exempt from these inequalities, instead quite the opposite, private schooling is at the forefront of racial inequality in the country. In the city of Sao Paulo, only one in ten students of private schools are afro-brazilians. District by district one can see more accurately how there is a gap in representation, with the affluent neighborhood of Pinheiros having an 11% afro-brazilian student body in total, but afro-brazilians compose less than 3% of the private schooling student body. The worst cases of this inequality can be seen with the top private schools in Sao Paulo, which are also considered some of the best in the nation, these schools; Colegio Dante Alighieri, Objetivo, Mótivo, Santa Cruz and Bandeirantes have a percentage of afro-brazilians students that at most reach 6%, with the least inclusive of these only 0.3%. On average these top schools only have a 3.5% of afro-brazilian representation (Folha de S.Paulo, 2020).

Many of these schools have programs of financial aid in order to increase their diversity and give greater accessibility to people of lesser means. Nonetheless many of these schools host

a hostile environment for these students which receive financial aid, called “bolsistas” in Brazilian Portuguese. Racist attacks have been widely reported in many of these institutions, the case of Fatou Ndiaye, a black 15 year old student who had to change schools after several racist attacks against her in the “Liceu Franco-Brasileiro”, one of the best private schools in Rio de Janeiro. The school chose to not punish the four students responsible for her harassment, with a reminder that racism is a crime in the Brazilian legal system and a clear violation of the student ethics guide of the school. Ndiaye opted to drop out of this school and stayed over a month without studying as she searched for another institution to accept her in the middle of the school year (Barros, 2020).

In higher education the struggle for racial equality has been ongoing as it is for primary and secondary. The origins of higher education in Brazil go back only to 100 years back when the University of Rio de Janeiro was founded in 1920. According to most sources, this university was founded due to a diplomatic obligation to the King of Belgium, who was visiting the country and insisted that he be given a Doctorate *Honoris Causa* in every country he made a visit to (Redação, 2020). As seen by this, the education of Brazilians was in the back burner in the agenda of the rulers of the nation, as the only reason why this first institution was founded was due to a foreign power and not the actual will of the government. This university and the next ones in the country were largely reserved for the elites. In the 1930’s president Getulio Vargas did reforms to the university system in order to regularize private universities but also expand the capabilities of the public institutions, this was justified as a way to bring more people into higher education and help make Brazil a more well rounded country, however although the Vargas administration alongside the Juscelino Kubichek administration after him actually achieved the goal set out of raising the number of people entering Higher Education, at the same time it had the effect of lowering the number of people in primary education, allowing the elites to have even more advantages over the rest of the population (Insper: Ensino Superior em Negócios, Direito e Engenharia, 2019).

Despite this greater access to institutions of higher learning, afro-brazilians were generally left out of the benefits that came with this. As showcased previously, afro-brazilians had a smaller chance of getting quality education, if any, throughout most of Brazilian history.

Thus, it is logical that since these students would not have openings to go more in depth with their studies. Up until 2003, there were no affirmative action in Brazilian universities, and almost no programs to give incentive to lower class and afro-brazilian students to participate in higher education. Public universities are free of charge in Brazil, meaning that technically it should be open to anyone to enter. But an entrance exam is needed to attend almost any university in the country, most commonly the national "ENEM" exam. This posed a big issue, in the sense that people that attended elite private schools would take up almost all spots in the public universities of the country, leaving few spots for the rest (Hermes, 2020). The people that actually did not have the need for a tuition free education, would take up the spots in these universities. Furthermore, the testing locations for entrance exams would generally be far away and inaccessible for many people living in the peripheries of large cities and in rural communities (these communities which are made up mostly of afro-brazilians), this created an accessibility issue for people to even be able to take said exams (BIMBATI, 2021).

2002 was the first time the education department started encouraging diversity within universities in Brazil (in a federal level), with the "Program of Diversity in Universities" which would give students of underprivileged backgrounds more financial aid and more support within universities and in accessing said universities. Nonetheless, this action was seen as insufficient by most equality activists as it would have minimal impact on the institutional problems that lead to the lack of access to universities. Affirmative action at a state level began also in 2002, with Rio de Janeiro implementing it in a limited capacity in its state universities, followed by the University of the State of Bahia (also in 2002) and the Federal University of Brasilia (in 2004) (Brito, 2018).

Affirmative action started being implemented in public universities nationwide in 2012, the system implemented obliged public universities to give at least 50% of the university spots in the university to students who went to public schools, with at least 50% of those spots being reserved for people of lower social standing and at least 50% of those spots (on average) being for black, pardo, indigenous or disabled students. This last percentage might change going state to state as it is applied to the demographic breakdown of each federative region. This has been largely successful in promoting diversity in universities across the country and starting to fix the

large educational inequality across the nation. The participation of black and pardo students in the university system of the country grew by almost 40% in the span between 2011 and 2016. “Cotistas” (being the word given to students that benefited from affirmative action) make up 44% of spots in federal universities across the nation (Brito, 2018). Affirmative Action has been a big success in the country and it showcases how governmental action can make an actual difference in solving inequalities in a country.

Brazil is a country that for a long time believed in the neoliberal idea of “meritocracy”, thus meaning that the people who try the hardest and deserve it will eventually come out on top, over people who do not put in their full effort. But in most countries, and especially in a country as unequal as Brazil this was not the case, meritocracy does not work in a country with such economical and social divisions as Brazil. Since the starting line between people in society is so large, it is basically impossible to resolve this by pure meritocracy, especially as the mechanisms of the state work against solving them. Furthermore, this argument of “meritocracy” is still widespread in society, with challenges against affirmative action being brought to the supreme court as soon as it was approved by parliament, with the court siding with affirmative action and unanimously keeping the law in place. Discrimination against “cotistas” also exist, as studies done in universities show them being judged and treated as lesser than by their peers and even professors at times, as seen with a study done in the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, where 36% of cotistas have reported being discriminated against due to the way they got access to the university. 71% of these stated they were discriminated by students, while 49% of them said the discrimination was done by the professors (Brum, 2021). This means that there is a long way to go to root out the meritocratic mindset of the nation and to make university spaces welcoming to all of the students attending it.

One of the major overlooked consequences of the fact that there is an under-representation of afro-brazilian and indigenous students in Brazilian schools and universities, is that because of that there is also a big gap when it comes to afro-brazilian teachers and professors. One of the major examples of this is the University of Sao Paulo, according to most rankings the best university in Brazil and one of the best in all of Latin America, which has less than 4% of their professors being black (Coelho, 2022). This number is better when

considering all federal universities in the country, but there is still a vast underrepresentation with less than 16% of professors being afro-brazilian (Righetti and Gamba, 2021). The schooling system, specifically private schools across the country, face a similar situation with around 10% of private schools in Sao Paulo having not even one black teacher amongst their realm and in total only around 20% of teachers in said schools being of afro-brazilian background (Folha de S.Paulo, 2020). Furthermore there is a problem with racism against teachers within classrooms, with around 20% of afro-brazilian schoolteachers claiming to have suffered from racist attacks while teaching (Pinho, 2021).

All in all, one of the few ways to break racism in schools is having more black, pardo and indigenous teachers in that environment, however, due to the lack of representation in schools and universities themselves, a vicious cycle is created where there are fewer of these people to be hired in said positions, and even when they are apt to occupy said spaces many times schools still opt for the whiter option.

2.2 A Color-Blind Curriculum

As introduced in the previous chapter, Brazilian history has been one built upon racism and white supremacy. Ranging from the horrors of slavery, attempts of whitening of minority populations, systemic exclusion of minorities from education and many more injustices. Despite the fact that these injustices have shaped modern Brazil and played a major factor in the history of the nation, they are vastly underplayed and left untaught to most Brazilians. In the Brazilian school system it is made to be seen as if after slavery ended the country got rid of racial inequality in its entirety and Brazil has transitioned into a state of racial harmony. Although over the past decade these teachings have become more critical of Brazilian history, during the vast majority of Brazilian history this was not the case and up until today it is still not taught to an adequate historical accuracy.

In January of 2003 Brazil sanctioned for the first time in its history a law that made it obligatory for afro-brazilian culture and history to be taught in schools. This in order for the pupils to learn and respect the legacy of Africa in the country, the afro-brazilian struggle in the

nation and their importance and relevance in Brazilian society and culture. This would be a basis of anti-racist education across a country that for too long had taken the point of view of the colonizer instead of the people affected by them (Madureira, 2020). Furthermore, in 2008, the teaching of indigenous culture and history was added to this piece of legislation. This, on paper, seems like a great leap forward in representation, but as often is with Brazilian history, what is written on paper sounds much better than the actual consequences of it.

Almost 20 years after the passing of the original law, the schooling in Brazil has not caught on to the standards set out in the law. They reduce the whole history of Afro-Brazilians into the slavery times, most of the times showcasing them as subjects of pity rather than their own persons. Afro-Brazilian Doctor in Anthropology from the University of Sao Paulo Marina Mello states:

"School, a place so relevant for socialization and the building of meaning, teaches that blacks are descendents of slaves, not of normal people that were enslaved, kidnapped from their homeland... They are always represented in a humiliating way, from stereotypes of ugliness, rudeness, ignorance, primitiveness and aggressiveness." (Madureira, 2020)

The way that afro-brazilians (and indigenous people) are portrayed in school not only creates an inaccurate image of the role of this community in history, but also creates an antipathy and rejection against them, reinforcing negative stereotypes instead of combating them. This leads to the problem of eurocentricity of Brazilian education, which, since these white figures are portrayed as heroes of the nation, creates a desire for black and specifically pardo students to approximate themselves more to European culture and leave aside their african ancestry. As students are not taught that the different racial groups had equal parts in the formation of the Brazilian culture the non-black students will not learn to appreciate and accept their non white-counterparts as equals, and the non-white students will not learn to appreciate their role in historical, and consequently, contemporary Brazil, with the only exception to this rule being slavery.

It is undeniable that slavery needs to be taught in school, it was a fundamental part of Brazilian history and the formation of the country, and provides a baseline explanation to where these inequalities present in Brazil had their beginnings. The problem that comes with it is that basically the only afro-brazilian representation in the Brazilian system is slavery. The black and pardo people in Brazil cannot see themselves in any other aspect of society because they've been systematically erased from history. Furthermore, the culmination of slavery leads to the Lei Aurea which finally freed the enslaved people of Brazil, a law that is attributed almost exclusively to Princess Isabel, showing the afro-brazilian students that their ancestors had little to no impact on their own liberation. Apart from this narrative being hurtful to these students, it is also just untrue according to most historical accounts. Figures like Zumbi, Francisco José do Nascimento, Luiz Gama and Luiza Mahim are important black figures that paved the way to abolition, yet in most textbooks they are only footnotes in Brazilian history instead of trailblazers for their communities, the figure of hero of the nation is exclusively reserved for people of lighter skin tones. As Kabengele Munanga, professor at the Center of African Studies from the University of Sao Paulo stated in an interview with BBC News Brasil:

“It seems as if blacks have no past, present or future in Brazil. It seems as their story started with slavery, with the before and after of it being purposefully unknown” (Modelli, 2017)

Many of Brazil's most famous and important cultural cornerstones were brought to the country by the enslaved people and indigenous creeds. More specifically from afro-brazilian religions such as Candomblé and Umbanda, two widely misunderstood religions in the country that are associated by the white population to witchcraft and sorcery and widely ostracized due to misinformation spread about them, leading these groups to being the target of most religion-related hate crimes in the country (Puff, 2016).

Some of these traditions for example would be Brazilians on New Year's Eve dress in white, go to the beach, jump seven waves and throw white flowers into the ocean. This is almost exactly a ritual of good luck and prosperity practiced by people who follow Umbanda, which are well known for their all white outfits in their religious ceremonies. Expanding upon this is the fact that carnival was, in its Brazilian conception of today, created by the mixing of african

religions and christianity (Schuabb, 2019). This celebration that is emblematic of the country and that is well known globally is one of the contributions that many black Brazilian scholars wish to be included in the education about African culture in Brazil as it can help to diminish the stigma surrounding this, as well as give afro-brazilian students something to appreciate and to be proud of as contributions to Brazilian society.

As Joel Rufino dos Santos, an acclaimed afro-brazilian historian, writer and professor at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and one of the greatest names in the study of African culture and Afro-Brazilian literature in Brazil, states in his text “O Negro Como Lugar” (The Black as a Place);

“Racial Democracy is, basically, a national pact, supra-ideological, of not considering racial interaction as significant” (Rufino, 1996)

This leads to the way in which the teaching of racial democracy, erasure of black figures and focus on slavery instead of the achievements of the black people of Brazil all accomplish the task of putting afro-brazilians a sort of “racist common sense” as mentioned by Jamaican-British Sociologist Stuart Hall and expanded upon by African-American Sociologist France Winddance Twine in her book “Racism in a Racial Democracy: The Maintenance of White Supremacy in Brazil”.

“Why, then, is common sense so important? Because it is the terrain of conceptions and categories on which the practical consciousness of the popular masses is in fact formed. It is the already formed and “taken for granted” terrain on which more coherent ideologies and philosophies must fight for dominance; the terrain that the new worldviews must take into account, contest and transform, if they are to shape the worldviews of the masses and thus become historically effective.” (France Winddance Twine, 1998, P.3)

Taking this into account, the only way to break this cycle of Racial Hegemony would be through the educational system of the country, where pupils would be able to learn the real history of the country, breaking this racist cycle, but quite the opposite is commonplace, where the education

of the country instead teaches students this “common sense” idea of race in Brazil and where each person fits into society.

In her book, Twine interviews multiple Afro-Brazilians in a small town she renamed Vasalia, near Rio de Janeiro. One of the most telling interviews was when she interviewed a poor Afro Brazilian woman called Eliani, who was adopted by a white family when she was only 2 months old. She worked for this family as a domestic servant for 18 years, never receiving any financial compensation, she went to Vasalia in search of a job and was hired by Moema, a white teacher. Twine asked Eliani to define Racism, to which she answered that she had nothing to say about it, she never really heard the term and that although some white people do not like blacks, she never experienced it, as well as never heard anyone mention it. Another case of this would be Mami, which described how she was well treated by her upper-middle class adoptive white family, despite them never giving her an education and her growing up to be functionally illiterate, different the rest of her family, all of which were white, who did receive adequate education (*France Winddance Twine, 1998, P.41-43*).

Images of afro-brazilians in school textbooks were marketbly absent, with most of the people showcased being white and blue eyed (something extremely rare for actual Brazilian society). According to studies done on school textbooks in the mid 80s, blacks were commonly represented in a “grotesque” manner, associating them with negative stereotypes and socially inferior to their white counterparts (*France Winddance Twine, 1998, P.55*). This negative images that start in primary school and that are carried out throughout the life of the people and reinforced by media do have a direct consequence on the way people see themselves and see their place in society:

"I feel a little bad, you know. It's all right that blue eyes are beautiful . . . and the straight hair too. . . . They think that we are inferior. Consequently we are uglier. . . . And to be inferior is to be uglier. So when I hear comments about how blacks are ugly and whites are beautiful or when I feel what they are thinking, I feel inferior." (*France Winddance Twine, 1998, P.57*)

This declaration, obtained by Twine in an interview with a dark skinned afro-brazilian showcases this perfectly.

All in all, the Brazilian education system does not only have an accessibility problem, where Afro-Brazilian students have a harder time entering the school system, it has a problem where the school system itself works against their interest. By reinforcing stereotypes, distorting history and erasing their cultural legacy the school system reaffirms the place of racial minority students in the social hierarchy. The Brazilian system has gone through reforms and has changed through time, but the racist issues related to the curriculum and the teaching persists, creating a vicious cycle that has ripple effects throughout society.

Chapter 3: An Unrepresentative Democracy

Brazil has a total of 125 afro-brazilian congresspeople (104 Pardo and 21 Black) and only three Indigenous congresspeople. This means that only 25% of congress are either afro-brazilian or indigenous, a group which constitutes over 50% of the population of the nation. In the senate the figure is no better with only 17 out of the 81 representatives being Pardo or Black, and none being indigenous (Zarur, 2019). This lack of representation of racial-minorities in congress is just the first part of the problem, as this ripples down to all aspects of representation in the country, down to local communities and moreover the judicial system. This uneven distribution of power in politics leads to slower action on issues relating to race relations in the country. Can a country which claims to be a “Racial Democracy” not have the various races constituting their society represented in their highest democratic levels? Can a country where over 50% of the population has less than a quarter of the power at a federal level be considered equal?

3.1 An Unequal Congress

The most glaring issue that is visible in Brazil is how clearly the demographic breakdown of congress differs from the people they are representing. This not only with the issue of race but also when it comes to representation in all aspects of society, with white men being the majority in congress despite Brazil having more non-whites than whites and more women than men. Ever since the liberation of the slaves, the afro-brazilian population has always been above 35% of the total population of the country, and ever since the redemocratization process it has been above 40%, yet afro-brazilian representation in congress has never passed 30%.

One area that one can give credit to the Brazilian system is the compulsory voting law, which establishes that every single citizen from the age of 18 to 70 years of age are required to vote, if not they must pay a fee, with voting being optional for people from the ages of 16-17 and above 70. Even though this law has been argued as being anti-democratic, due to the fact that if someone doesn't want to vote they should not have to vote, however this was a way to crack down on voter intimidation and measures made by local governments to keep working people from participating in the electoral process. With this measure in place it made sure that

afro-brazilians and people of lower social standing would have access to the electoral process, as well as making voting more inclusive to illiterate people by assigning a number to every candidate so that these people would not be taken advantage of going into the booth. However, despite these measures taking steps towards the participation of these underserved communities, they did not cut the problem at its origin, it being that entering politics themselves is much harder for indigenous people and afro-brazilians than it ever has been for whites.

In Brazil, just as in most democracies around the world, there are two types of political careers, either the elected or nominated positions. With the elected being directly elected by the people and the nominated being appointed, such as government ministers and judges from the supreme court. The representative problem is found in both areas of government, as well as in local elections in the country. Although the problem locally is not as accentuated it is still present and of grave importance as these politicians have the most direct impact on their communities, with around 44% of “vereadores” (municipal representatives) being afro-brazilians across the country (Velasco, 2020).

Even after being elected, it is much harder for them continuing their campaign and their prospects of reelection remain lower, as retracted by a research done by Osmar Teixeira Gaspar in collaboration with the University of Sao Paulo in relation to the Legislative Assembly of Sao Paulo and Municipal House of Sao Paulo. According to his research the lack of financial infrastructure these politicians have and lower levels of formal education they’ve obtained impose a hurdle to their political career. Furthermore, the political parties generally choose to run candidates with limited appeal:

“What happens is that parties run black candidates with votes only in a determined region, generally where he has lived his entire life. His votes are not even close to elect them, but increase the electoral coefficient of the party, and that way elects other, more traditional, figures” (Gomes, 2017)

According to Teixeira, the choice to run these candidates that have no chance of getting elected is deliberate. As they will increase the party vote share across the area, thus increasing the number of parliamentarians from that party, but since it is spread amongst many candidates of a smaller base, it will only impulse the traditional, generally white, figureheads of the party instead of the underrepresented sector.

The reasons why afro-brazilians are under-represented are twofold, it relates to the historical discrimination that this group has faced and as a direct consequence of the way the political structures of the country are built. Investment from parties into afro-brazilian candidates are significantly lower than to their white counterparts, this means that even though there is a considerable amount of people from marginalized ethnic groups running for office, the political parties do not support these candidacies and shoot them down before they even have the opportunity to launch (Gomes, 2017). The will to maintain the internal structure of the party is far greater than the will to reform it to include outsiders, such as people from underrepresented groups. This relates also to the nepotism in Brazilian politics where, due to historical reasons, most political families are white.

An example of this can be seen with the Arraes-Campos family in the northeastern state of Pernambuco. This family has been in the center of politics in the state for decades, with two governors of the state, three mayors of the capital (Recife) and four federal representatives, this not counting the minor political roles family members had in other government positions. This came to national prominence in the 2020 local elections, when Marília Arraes and Eduardo Campos went to the second round of the mayoral election in Recife, both choices for mayor in the second round were cousins (Cavalcante, 2022). This city where nearly 60% of the population is afro-brazilian has had this white family in the center of their politics for decades now, and since political parties know that the voters are already familiar with that name, they choose to benefit them politically. Other political families that benefit from similar situations can be seen across the country like the Covas family in Sao Paulo and the Sarney family in Maranhao.

The 2020 municipal elections were the first elections in the history of the country where any type of racial quota was introduced. Previously there existed no obligation for a party to run

afro-brazilian candidates. This is different from gender discrimination where the country established that at least 30% and at most 70% of candidatures should go to each gender. This law was introduced much before the racial quota despite the fact that both groups are similarly underrepresented in politics. Brazil, could have followed through will plans such as Chile has recently passed in 2020 which would guarantee Indigenous people a representation in parliament, but instead of using the introduction of quotas as an opportunity towards doing a wide electoral reform, where parties were obliged to run underrepresented groups, they focused on just doing a mild reform to address the gender gap in politics, showing the historic unwillingness of politicians to actually act on race-related issues.

This can be justified by the fact that many of Brazil's top political actors do not believe that there is an issue with representation in the nation and buy into the idea that Brazil is, indeed, a "Racial Democracy".

"Brazil has a diverse culture, unique between nations. We are a mixed race people; whites, Blacks and indigenous built the body and the spirit of a rich and wonderful people... there are those who want to destroy it (the essence of Brazilian people) and put conflict, resentment, hatred and race division on its place, always disguised as fight for equality or social justice (World, 2020)"

This was a statement from Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro, in the opening of the G20 conference in 2020 following anti-racism protests in Brazil and worldwide, with Brazil mobilizing after the viralization of several racist attacks by policemen and employers towards black and pardo people in the country. This statement was followed by an even more direct statement by Vice-President Hamilton Mourao:

"Racism doesn't exist in Brazil. That is something they want to import here... I lived in the United States. There is racism there." (World, 2020)

If this sounds familiar it is because it is the exact ideology behind "Racial Democracy" the idea that racism is extinct in Brazil, unlike the United States and other western nations who still

endure serious issues with racism. When people in the hierarchy of Brazilian politics buy into this idea and reproduce this to a wide audience, it is to stall progress and equality in the political arena, in order to maintain whiteness as the de-facto color of congress and to continue gatekeeping anyone they believe to be politically inconvenient to them.

Political violence is also something not foreign to Brazilian politics, but this has been even more accentuated against afro-brazilian politicians. Several black and pardo politicians and candidates have been threatened or even murdered in the country. One of these cases was Jean Wyllys, a black federal deputy from the state of Rio de Janeiro, who had to flee the nation and abandon his political position due to credible death threats he had been receiving. A research done between 2016 and 2020 called “Political and Electoral Violence in Brazil” shows how the majority of victims of political violence are women, with the biggest target amongst them being afro-brazilian women, which is also one of the smallest groups in all of Brazilian politics (Direitos, 2021). Some of the women who have suffered threats of violence have been Marina Silva, a former Black and Indigenous Senator as well as three time presidential candidate, Erika Hilton, a black and transexual vereadora from Sao Paulo, but the most well known of them all has been the case of Marielle Franco.

Marielle Franco was a well-known black vereadora from Rio de Janeiro, known for her activism in the areas of social rights, receiving the second highest vote share by any woman in the country for a municipal position the year she was elected. She was of note because she represented an intersectionality of various underrepresented groups in politics being a black lesbian woman from the favelas. As her tenure in the chamber advanced she was one of the up and coming figures in Brazilian politics, resonating with a base of black women in Rio de Janeiro and across the nation, until her career came to a grinding halt in 2018, when she and her driver were murdered on the way to a debate organized by her party and attended by young black women. As investigations of her murder led nowhere black activists across the country led the movement “Quem Mandou Matar Marielle?” translated into “Who Ordered Marielle’s Murder”, but four years removed from this incident, no answers have been found (Martins, 2022). One must wonder, if such a high profile case, that garnered international attention and resulted in widespread protests could not be resolved, what violence against black people in politics can be

addressed? The case of Marielle Franco is just one of many cases of political violence against afro-brazilians that discourage their participation and are made to enforce a message that the political establishment already sends to this community: for them to stay out of the decision making bodies of the nation.

3.2 A White Judicial System

Another aspect of the political system that is relevant to discuss is the non-elected position, more specifically judges. The highest judges in the nation are appointed to courts directly by political figures, while judges at more specialized tribunals or local levels are appointed by the President of the local Justice Tribunal. Although the judicial system is supposed to be completely removed from politics, it does reflect the direct interests of the ruling political class and does reflect those ideals, with similar misrepresentation. Only 13% of all judges in the country are afro-brazilian with the National Council of Justice (CNJ) estimating that equality in this camp will only be reached in the year of 2056, making the representation at this level even worse than in the elected political area (Schuquel, 2021). It makes sense that the institutional racism that is found in society is reflected in the judicial system. With the low representation of these communities in the judicial system it perpetuates the supremacist ideals of the court and prevents internal reform from happening and decisions in favor of the afro-brazilian community to take place in the legal system, a legal system that too often discriminates against this group. This lack of representation in the legal system is an intersection between the lack of access to education discussed in the previous chapter and the lack of political representation discussed in this chapter, as equality in any of these areas will make it harder to achieve an equal level of representation in the legal system. The importance of afro-brazilians in these positions of power is highlighted by Judge Benedito Gonçalves, the only black judge in the Superior Justice Tribunal:

“Structural racism is crystallized in the peoples culture in a way that, many times, does not even appear to be racism. The presence of structural racism can be found by the few black people that occupy prominent places in institutions. In relation to the institutional dimension of

racism, legal issues can work as a very important element in the anti racist fight, be it in the ideological sense, or the technical juridical sense” (Schuquel, 2021)

Judge Gonçalves knows very well the struggles relating to representation in the Brazilian judiciary as the highest courts of Brazil also represent the highest levels of underrepresentation of afro-brazilians and other suppressed racial groups in the nation. Judge Gonçalves is the only black judge across the five superior courts of the country, these courts combined have a total of 88 ministers, meaning that only 1% of the the highest ministers of the land represent over 50% of the population, with 80% of the highest courts not containing any representation at all (De Souza, 2019). The Supreme Federal Court (STF) is the Supreme Court of Brazil and has big political relevance in the politics of the country, monitoring the actions of the other two branches of governments and interfering in them much more commonly than other Supreme Courts in the world. Whether this interference is a positive or negative thing is a different topic, but the fact is that it happens and those are the powers that the constitution gives to the court.

This court is formed by 11 ministers, which represent the totality of the population and have a critical role in the advancement of civil rights (for example, it was the supreme court of Brazil which criminalized homophobia in the nation). Nonetheless, one of the most oppressed people of the nation, and that form a majority of the population, have gone almost unrepresented in the system. Out of the 168 judges in the court's history only 3 have been afro-brazilian while none of them have been an afro-brazilian woman (Portal, 2022), the same number of black supreme court justices as the United States where the african-american population is less than 15%. Afro-Brazilian women are the highest demographic group in Brazil, while White Men are the smallest, yet in the Supreme Court of the country the representation for the former group in history has been 0 while for the latter group it has been 96%. This shows the lack of action from governments in Brazilian history to actually try to represent the population in the court system, as a president is the person which chooses who goes to the the three highest courts of the land, over the course of history, in governments ranging from right wing to left wing, from conservative to progressive, almost no action was taken by the elected officials of the nation to actually represent their electorate in the body that is going to enforce the rule of the land. The

exclusion of black and indigenous people, specially women, was put best by Luciana Maranhao, a judge in the Pernambuco Court of Justice;

“There is the erasure of black history, culture and ancestry, the proof of this being that I, Luciana, make part of the tiniest percentage of black female justices in the Brazilian judiciary. That reality reflects a distorted perception of the racial hierarchy that impacts society and limits the spaces of power to few, being excluded black and indigenous people, specially, the women” (Nacaratte, 2020)

In Brazil's legal system it states that no person shall be persecuted due to their religious beliefs or race. This was set in the writing of the most recent constitution and reaffirmed by the supreme court in multiple instances. Yet, the question of “what is and isn't a religion?” comes up. The afro-brazilian religions of Umbanda and Candomblé are both organized thoughts that rally around a similar belief and worship entities that are not human, they use these beliefs to understand how the world and the universe functions, therefore they would fall under the definition of a religion, however, it seems that this is not so clear in the Brazilian judicial system as there have been various cases where afro-brazilian religions have not been treated on equal standing as other beliefs in the nation. Nonetheless, in 2014 a federal judge in Brazil concluded that “afro-brazilian religious manifestations” are not a religion, and thus a request to take down 15 offensive videos against the umbanda and candomblé religions that were deemed to be at risk of instigating violence against these groups was denied. After some backlash the judge decided to revert his opinion and change his verdict, nonetheless this case proves the lack of legal protection that these minority groups have within the Brazilian state (Brisolla, 2014).

A second example of the judicial system working against afro-brazilians and their religious beliefs would be one that took place in 2020, when a judge decided to remove the custody of a child from her mom and give it to the grandmother, this due to the fact that the daughter was put through a typical Candomblé ritual, that is sometimes compared to the Catholic baptism, and one of the requirements of this would be shaving the girls head. Due to the mother having her daughter undergo this ritual the judge stated that she was not a fit mother and that the child would be under better care with her grandparents (Bassette, 2020). The act did not put the

livelihood, physical or mental health of the child under any distress, yet the judge made this decision. This clear double standard that allows parents from different religions make their children go through rituals and other religious activities yet punishing this one who had her daughter undergo a common practice for their religion is clearly unconstitutional in Brazilian law, as stated in Article 5 of the Brazilian Constitution of 1988, which guarantees your freedom to openly practice your religion, yet it seems like there is a pattern of the legal system ignoring these articles of the constitution and nothing being done about it.

Conclusions:

Brazil is a vast, multicultural nation that contains people of all different diverse backgrounds. It is a country where when looking from outside in there seems to be a peaceful cohabitation of these people and when looking at its laws and constitution the government treats and takes care of its minorities with respect and attention. The Brazilian constitution is a progressive document which guarantees multiple rights to its people and protects groups in risk of discrimination from this, something that has been reinforced by the Supreme Court multiple times such as the decisions that lead to the criminalization of hate crimes in cases of race and sexuality. But the reality is not what is written on the paper, it is what is lived by the people.

Taking it back to a common expression that has been previously mentioned: “For the englishmen to see”, an expression with origins dating back to slavery and the reluctance of the governing class to make actual substantial progress in the nation, and encoding meaningless laws just to improve the image of the government and nation. During this analysis I’ve attempted to showcase how the Brazilian state is doing the same thing to the Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous communities nowadays as it did in all of its past, moving the goalpost for real change further down the line instead of implementing change that needs to be done in order to actually convert Brazil into an egalitarian society.

Racial Democracy is not, has never been and unfortunately is not on track to being a reality in the near future of Brazil. Despite how much we would like to believe this myth, the evidence overwhelmingly points to the fact that this is just a juvenile fairytale understanding of the function of this country, one that is easily observable and that should not require a 30 page document to see. After all, a country where over half the people are non-white yet three-quarters of congress is white can’t possibly reflect a healthy democratic system where people see themselves in government. Brazil is a country with a racist past built upon slavery, a racist ideal of “whitening”, unofficial segregation and the genocide of indigenous people. These problems prevail up until today and show their faces in the educational system by virtue of inequalities of access and an inaccurate curriculum. These inequalities reflect on the political system and the

judiciary which suffer from a severe lack of representation and unequal treatment towards these racial groups. But what makes a deep analysis of this issue necessary is that the Brazilian institutions have been able to successfully craft a narrative around the country of Brazil that is completely disconnected from the actual material conditions of the people in the country, but that has stuck with the population due to the reinforcement of it in the countries education system, political messaging and media.

The genuine multiculturalism that makes up the fabric of what the country is indeed what makes it unique and it has an effect on all areas of Brazilian culture and society. The arguments in favor of an interpretation of Brazil as a Racial Democracy stem from the fact that unlike many other nations one can see the influence of wildly diverse cultures in the traditions of Brazil and cultural cornerstones of the country. Brazilian culture is one based on the mixing of cultures and the “Brazilianization” of customs. In the outside world Brazil is known for its Carnival, which as explained in Chapter 2 came from the combination of African and European culture in the country. A second example of this culture fusion can be Bossa Nova music, a rhythm that took over the world in 1950s and 1960s and originated the internationally famous song “Girl From Ipanema”, which had its beginnings as the fusion of Jazz music and the afro-brazilian rhythms of Samba. Capoeira is a martial art and dance that was created by enslaved Africans in Brazil and later developed further by their afro-brazilian descendants, but the word “Capoeira” comes from the indigenous language Tupi.

It is impossible to think about Brazil without associating it with the cultural practices that either originated, were adopted by or were mixed with Indigenous and Afro-Brazilian beliefs and cultures. Yet these communities are up until this day systematically oppressed in all aspects of Brazilian society, starting at a young age with Education and culminating in the political representation of these groups of people. However, as stated by Djamila Ribeiro in her book “Who is Afraid of Black Feminism”:

*“The simplest way of dismissing a person is to tell their story and putting them in second place”
(Djamila Ribeiro, 2019)*

The dismissal of the influence of Afro-Brazilians and Indigenous people in the construction of the country is something that has been happening since the inception of the country when black and indigenous people were not officially part of the population. Brazil is a country built by black people in the land of indigenous people, but white people are the only ones who can see themselves in the current politics of the nation and the only ones who are portrayed as heroes in the history of the nation. The history of this country is the history of Afro-Brazilians and Indigenous people, but the institutions instead prefer to view the country through the lens of the White colonizers instead of the Majority Minority. Fortunately, more and more people from within and outside these communities have started to realize the systematic issues that the country faces in terms of race, and have realized that Racial Democracy in Brazil is nothing more than a tale. Black and Indigenous voices have been highlighted evermore in society and, despite recent setbacks, race is a topic that is discussed in Brazil and racism is a topic that people are aware is an issue to be addressed in society.

To finalize this investigation into the deep inequalities found in Brazil, I'll leave some words sung by two of the greatest black musical artists that Brazil has ever had; Dona Ivone Lara and Jorge Ben Jor, that in 1981 got together to record the song "Sorriso Negro" that nowadays is an anthem for Brazilian Black Pride;

"Black is a color of respect

Black is inspiration

Black is silence, its mourning

Black is loneliness

Black who was once a slave

Black is the voice of truth

Black is destiny, is love

Black is also longing ...

Black is the root of freedom"

(Dona Ivone Lara and Jorge Ben Jor, 1981)

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Riassunto

The aim of this research was to look at the Brazil theory of racial democracy through a critical point of view, and disproving it based on two main areas where equality is fundamental in order to achieve an egalitarian society; Education and Politics. In order to adequately analyze this a basis on the history of racism in Brazil and the particularities found in Brazilian society when it comes to race that make it different from other countries.

The first chapter of this investigation was dedicated to exploring the differences found in Brazil compared to other countries and set a basis on how Brazil has historically had grave issues relating to racism, which persist until today. This chapter starts with a brief overview of the “Pardo” racial group in Brazil, which is a mixed-race group and as of the last census the second largest racial group in the country, only after “whites”. This group is set to become the largest one in the next census which is supposed to take place in the second semester of 2022. It is explored in this first part how miscegenation came to be a big part of Brazilian society, and how this was not a peaceful process, with miscegenation beginning with the rape of slaves by their masters and then continuing on with the “embranquacimento” or “whitening” process of Brazil, this being an ideology that believed that white people were superior and thus they should reproduce with black people in order to extinguish them and their culture.

This first chapter then progresses to talk about how Race is done in the census and how Brazilians are open to self-declare their race in the census, even if another person might view them as a different race, this self-declaration has historically brought the number of people that declare themselves as “Pardo” down since many times they would declare themselves as white or black instead. As more and more people discover their racial background and get informed about what “Pardo” actually means, the number of people identifying themselves with this racial group has grown rapidly. Another particularity that is of note for the country is its status as one of the few “Majority Minority” countries in the world, meaning that most of its population comes from minority racial groups, this is important to highlight how, although most of the country is non-white, most of the power structures are set up to the benefit of the white population.

The last part of the chapter brings upon a brief overview of the history of race and racism in the nation and how it led to the inequalities seen in today's society. This part talks about the slave trade in Brazil and how no other country received as many slaves as Brazil and took as long as Brazil to abolish slavery. After the country finally freed the enslaved people they gave no support to them, which made them either stay in nearly enslaved situations in their plantations or escape to the peripheries of major cities looking for jobs, these establishments would later become the infamous "favelas" found all over the country. Around the early 1900s Freyre wrote his book "Casa Grande e Senzala" which would bring upon the theory of "Racial Democracy" in Brazil and would spread across the nation, with this spread being institutionalized in the Military Governments from the 1960s-1980s when the government formed a media campaign to perpetuate this belief inside and outside the nation and made it a core part of the educational curriculum. It is also highlighted how afro-brazilians were definitely not the only group affected by the racist history of the country, as indigenous peoples in Brazil were completely decimated with the arrival of the white man and their genocide continues up until today, with one of the largest instances of indigenous genocide (the construction of the Trans-Amazonian highway which resulted in the death of thousands of indigenous people) being seen as one of the greatest achievements from the military government.

Chapter two delves into the shortcomings of the educational system of Brazil, starting with the inequalities when it comes to the access of education to students from non-white backgrounds. The first part of this chapter highlights the classist and elitist history of education in Brazil from its inception and the influence the Portuguese had on the building up of the underdeveloped Brazilian educational system. It is hard to conceptualize how a country which never had segregation laws can possibly be so unequal, however, Brazil had a de-facto educational segregation throughout its history as majority afro-brazilian areas would get less funding than their white counterparts and there would be a general difficulty of access for non-white students in the schooling system, specially in private schools which still have a vast underrepresentation of non-white students. This was even worse when it came to higher education, where afro-brazilians used to be less than 10% of the student body. With the introduction of affirmative action the situation has drastically changed over the last decade,

nonetheless the effects of this hesitation to implement affirmative action in the nation has had grave effects on the education of these racial groups. It is also important to see how discrimination from within the schooling system has been prevalent and that the lack of representation of non-white teachers continue to be an issue in institutions across the country.

The second part of this chapter delves into specifically how education itself is in the country and how instead of breaking stereotypes and showcasing the importance of these communities it reinforces stereotypes and erases the contribution of afro-brazilians in the construction of the country and its culture. Important figures in black emancipation are not taught in schools while white figures are highlighted, this way it is taught to pupils that black emancipation came from the will of the white people and not the efforts of black people. Here I utilized France Widdance Twins book “Racism in a Racial Democracy” as a major source as her book delves deep into the way afro-brazilians perceive themselves as a consequence of the negative portrayal that they see throughout their lives and education. This book also delves into the “Racist Common Sense” that has been created in the country, where racism is not seen as such and is just seen as normal by most people.

The final chapter goes into the political aspects of inequality in the country, and discusses how it's impossible to have a “Racial Democracy” where the largest racial groups are barely represented. In the first part of the chapter the inequalities in elected positions are addressed and highlighted. Brazil has over 50% of their people being non-white, but white people constitute 75% of the national congress. This is a similar case when it comes to regional legislations where there is also a vast underrepresentation, despite it not being as pronounced as in the national level. Up until 2020 racial quotas were not in place in the Brazilian system, now there is a minimum amount of Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous candidacies that need to be placed by each political party, yet historically these candidatures have been drastically underfunded and set in place in a way where the vote share of the party would increase but almost none of these would individually have enough votes to enter congress, so they would be used to propel the election of their white counterparts. Indigenous people have an even harder time being elected with few indigenous people ever being elected to congress and only one indigenous woman ever making the cut.

Meanwhile establishment politicians such as the president and vice-president make comments that reinforce the status quo and state that Brazil has no representation problem. The largest demographic group of the country are afro-brazilian women, making up around 27% of the population, yet they are less than 3% of congress being the least represented of the main demographic groups. This group is also the target of political violence, as highlighted by the murder of Marielle Franco back in 2018. This black woman was one of the fastest growing political figures in the politics of Rio and was murdered in her car, up until today the investigation into this crime has not found the person who ordered it. This sends a clear message to black people and especially black women, for them to stay out of politics.

The second half of the chapter deals with the supreme court and the judicial branch of the Brazilian government. Although this is not directly elected by the people, many of these positions are appointed by politicians and have widespread influence in Brazilian politics. This branch of government is probably the most unrepresentative of them all, presently only 13% of all judges in the nation are afro-brazilian. In the five highest courts of Brazil there are 88 ministers, and only one of them is afro-brazilian, so 50% of the country represents only 1% of the most important courts in the nation. The inclusion of more afro-brazilians in positions of power like this could improve their position in Brazilian society as the courts have a history of giving rights to their citizens.

The lack of representation and systemic discrimination can be seen by the treatment of afro-brazilian religions in the legal system, where multiple decisions against this community has been made. Over the years afro-brazilian religions have not been treated as proper religions in the legal system, with a case in which a judge stated point-blank that they were just “religious manifestations” and not a religion, therefore they weren’t protected under anti-discrimination laws set out in the brazilian constitution. This decision was later overturned but it showcases the way in which people that partake in these religious practices have the system set up against them.

All in all, this investigation delves into how Brazil's past still haunts its present and the way in which this racist past ensures that Brazil is not a “Racial Democracy” and without strong institutional change will never be. Education is segregated in a way where afro-brazilian and indigenous students have less access to it, and even when they have access to it it showcases their community in a negative light. There is vast underrepresentation in politics and the judicial system leading to active legislation favoring the community being slow and insufficient. As time passes by more and more people are aware of these contradictions in Brazil, where we get so much from these communities yet still marginalize them, so change is being made, however the change being made is not fast enough as every day without change reflects one more day of suffering for millions of Brazilians.