

Racialisation in Brazil

Karina Round

This paper is going to explore the processes of racialisation in Brazil, a country where race is supposed to be irrelevant. Racialisation is the dynamic and complex process through which racial categories, concepts and divisions become embedded into social practices. In 2001 the United Nations World Conference against Racism acknowledged that no country could claim to be free of racism and that racism is a worldwide concern and requires a global response. Brazil is a highly fascinating case study to investigate because of the racial divisions, categories and hierarchies that have become deeply rooted in society. Brazilians envisage themselves living in a truly anti-racist nation, a “racial democracy” and this has been embedded in their minds for decades, as a result many academics have strived to give visibility to racism in Brazil. Looking back to when I was a tourist in Brazil in 2010, I witnessed the renowned Rio Carnival and what I saw was a country in celebration of its mixed cultural heritage, but little did I know the extent to which racism was fixed into Brazilian society. This essay is going to first give a general overview of the situation in Brazil, focusing on Brazil's principal inequalities. It will then be split into four different themes. The first topic will look at the myth of racial democracy and how this has become embedded in Brazilian lives. The second topic will centre on the racial categorisations that exist in the Brazilian system. The third topic focuses on how racism and racial discrimination plays a huge part in educational inequalities and the black population's exclusion from the labour market. Lastly, this essay will look at the indigenous population's marginalised position within Brazil.

The image of racial equality and the myth that Brazilians are living in a racial paradise is founded primarily on Brazil's miscegenation among European, African and Indigenous peoples (Lovell 2000). Brazil has the second largest African-origin population in the world after Nigeria, with a total population of 169 million. 46.2 per cent of the population are black and 0.4 indigenous (UN 2006). However, according to the UNDP (2005), Brazil remains as one of the ten most unequal countries in the world. The richest 20% keep 63.2% of the national income and the poorest 20% keep only 2.4% of it (UNDP: 271). Income inequalities are highly visible in Brazil, with the minority of high earners being predominantly white and at the other end of the continuum the majority of the black population living in poverty (Ciconello 2007). Black people comprise two-thirds of poor people in Brazil, 22.9% of the white population live under the poverty line but this is twice as high for the black population (46.3), (IPEA 2007: 289).

Goldberg (2009) positions racism in Brazil in a particular regional context that of Latin Americanisation, fundamentally involving the promotion of racial mixture. Goldberg states that Latin America has promoted itself as having a “national character distinctly as racial metis (mix)” (p.200). For Goldberg, across Latin America, “racism is the product of ignorance.... and there are easy possibilities of ignoring problems because they aren't identified to begin with” (p.237). Telles (1992) identifies three important features of Brazilian Race relations after the elimination of slavery in 1888: “a color continuum rather than a color line, its racial ideology, and an avoidance by the Brazilian government of legislation that mentions race” (p.186). Racism is embedded in social relations in Brazil and as Ciconello (2007) writes, it is “one of the main structuring factors of social injustices that afflict Brazilian society” (p.1). Therefore looking at racial inequalities is central to understanding the social inequalities that afflict Brazil.

Twine (2005) identifies the many racial and social inequalities in spheres of Brazilian life: “labour market participation and income, social relations, social mobility, racist attitudes, literacy, education, residential and spatial segregation by skin colour, media representations

and popular culture” (p.4). Vieira (1995) argues that the clearest evidence of racism in Brazil is the disadvantaged environments of African-Brazilians throughout the country, signifying a direct connection between colour and poverty. Remarkably, it was not until 1995 that the President Fernando Henrique Cardoso for the first time accepted that racism existed in Brazil (Arocena 2008). Stam (1997) asserts that, “Brazilian racism is a racism that dares not say its name: its most distinctive feature is its non-distinctiveness” (p.54). An opinion poll undertaken by the Perseu Abramo Foundation in 2003 indicated that 87% of all Brazilians admit that racism exists in Brazil, however only 4% actually recognise themselves as racists. (Santos and Silva 2005). This reveals that many individuals prefer to put the blame on other people and not on the everyday social practices of its agents, thus as Ciconello (2007) states, “making it [racism] even more difficult to eliminate” (p.1).

At present, Brazilians are particularly proud of their cultural heritage, especially their renowned Carnivals as they “represent Brazil’s self-image of multiracial harmony and festiveness to the rest of the world” (Telles 2004:36). Brazil strives to promote itself as a truly multi-cultural country, at liberty from racial prejudice and discrimination, however, the reality of race relations is far more multifaceted.

The Myth of Racial Democracy in the lives of Brazilians

Brazil’s long heritage of racial mixing has its roots deep in slavery. The origin of Brazilian racism dates back to the slave-owning ideals of colonial Brazil where racial prejudice was attained from the Portuguese (Vieira 1995). Brazil, the last country to abolish slavery, undertook no proactive measures to assimilate the African and indigenous populations (Nascimento 2007). After slavery, the state encouraged a policy intentionally envisioned to whiten the population through miscegenation as a “generic solution to its backwardness”, by providing incentives for Europeans to relocate to Brazil: “the ideological justification of this policy was that the white ‘race’ was superior, based on the scientific racism, which prevailed in those days” (Telles 2004:24, Ciconello 2007: 8). In the 1930s, the whitening policy (blanqueamiento), “the glorification of racial mixing”, was exchanged for the ideology of miscegenation as a positive value and racial democracy (Nascimento 2007: 55). Telles observes that for non-whites, “whitening through racial mixture and even self-classification continues to offer the possibility of individual improvement, and whites continue to enjoy the privilege of racial status (p.238).

Since the government policy of whitening, Brazil has lived under the myth of racial democracy and it is still ever present in the sub consciousness of Brazilians today. Mixing of races in Brazil was much more recurrent in contrast to other countries; therefore it was applied as a central argument for constructing a mythical social theory which consequently developed into an ideology: racial democracy (Ciconello 2007). The myth of racial democracy makes “power relations between black and white populations invisible” (Ciconello: 2). Thus, many see the inequalities in Brazil as a social problem not a racial. The notion of miscegenation as a positive feature of Brazilian race relations was fully advanced by Gilberto Freyre in the 1930s. For Freyre (1959), the idea of racial democracy captures the belief that through miscegenation in Brazil, “men regard each other as fellow citizens and fellow Christians without regard to color or ethnic differences” (p.7-8). Through ‘cross-breeding’, a brighter future was available for the “dark” Brazilian nation (Freyre 1959). Therefore, miscegenation came to be the force behind racial dynamics and racial democracy in Brazil. Telles (2004) asserts that while scientific theories concerning white supremacy have become discredited, such notions continue to remain deeply fixed in social thinking in Brazil. Led by ideas of racial hierarchy, Brazilians enforce racial categories on their fellow citizens and consequently treat them in a certain way (Telles 2004). Among the discourse of racial democracy, many identify the presence of negative stereotyping “associated with the darker end of the color spectrum embedded in Brazilian culture” (Bailey 2002: 411). Bailey asserts that this can be accredited to the ideology of “whitening”, whilst racial democracy

celebrates miscegenation, whitening orders the result of that miscegenation, inserting “superior value on white features” (p.412).

Focusing on racial hegemony in Brazil, Twine (2005) questions why Afro-Brazilians continue to have confidence in the Brazilian racial democracy. He claims that this faith that they have in the system is a “primary obstacle to the development of a sustained and a vital antiracist movement in Brazil” (p.8). Stam (1997) asserts that they cling to this myth; for blacks and mestizos “it is a standard of hope and promise, a reminder of the way things should be”, for whites “it rationalises their advantages” (p.52). Twine (2005) discusses his research in a small town called Vasalia outside Rio de Janeiro, where he carried out interviews with Afro-Brazilians to investigate their localised attitudes on acts of racism and their experiences of everyday discrimination. Twine found that the local community did not recognise many forms of racial inequality. Afro-Brazilians definitions of racism were limited to the social and sexual spheres and they failed to consider socio-economic and public spheres, especially institutional racism, occupational segregation and electoral representation. Moreover, Vasalians interviewed never identified their skin colour or racism as an influence in their life chances. Twine also significantly found that the practice of *blanqueamiento* was not just a practice enforced by the elites but was actually encompassed by working-class Afro-Brazilians too. White supremacist aesthetic hierarchies operated in Vasalia, with many Afro-Brazilians tending to engage in “practices that generate distance between themselves and dark-skinned Afro-Brazilians”, as well as mixed-race Afro-Brazilians trying to evade discussing black members of their families (p.108). Twine concluded that in general Afro-Brazilians tended not to talk about their experiences of racism, “their silence, although strategic for the purposes of retaining employment and sustaining harmonious relations with the white elite, ultimately sustains white domination” (p.153).

Fernandes (1989) became known as the most influential Brazilian academic critic of racial democracy, he came up with the famous phrase that Brazilians exhibit “the prejudice of having no prejudice”, arguing that race was a prominent factor in influencing an individual’s life chances in Brazil (Fernandes cited in Skidmore 1992: 11). Heringer (1995) contends that visibility must be given to racism in Brazil; no longer can it be depicted as concealed, invisible, or masked. Non-white Brazilians continue to deny racism and defensively hold onto this myth of the Brazilian racial democracy, viewing it as a “normative aspiration” that will one day become a reality (Bailey 2002; Darby 2010:421). Heringer emphasises that racial discrimination is particularly hard to identify in Brazil, as many non-white people do not acknowledge their unfavourable circumstances in Brazilian society. The majority of blacks do not notice racial prejudice because “they live in a society where there is universal poverty” and some blacks may be capable of moving beyond the barriers constraining them in society, to achieve high social status (Heringer: 205). Furthermore, Telles (2004) asserts that many whites in Brazil are living in impoverished conditions and competing with browns and blacks to enter the middle class. Nevertheless, they are more likely to push through “social barriers to high-status positions” (p.222). Heringer highlights the success of the black movement of exposing the racial democracy ideology to Brazil’s population, as well as their continued fight to show the positive values of black identity in order to improve non-whites status in society. Consequently the Brazilian government is now acquiring new public policies to deal with racial prejudice and inequalities in Brazil.

The Racial Categorisations that exist in the Brazilian System

A very ambiguous multi-category system for classifying race by skin colour exists in Brazil, making it challenging to define who is black and who is not (Bianchi et al. 2002). The line separating blackness and whiteness is unclear. The UN Commission on Human Rights (1995) states that “Miscegenation has created so many gradations of skin colour that it has become difficult to classify the Brazilian population according to race and to estimate precisely the size of the various ethnic and racial groups in the population”. Skidmore (1992)

highlights that from 1890 to 1940, racial categories were ignored in censuses in Brazil- a nation which attained more African slaves than any other. The 1980 census identified four racial categories- brancos (whites), pardos (browns), pretos (blacks) and amarelos (yellows) (Stam:1997). Arocena (2008), observing the Census in 2000, remarks that a “question on skin colour as self-defined” was included: “54% of Brazilians defined themselves as white, 39% as mulatto (mixed-race), 6% as black and 1% as others” (p.5). Therefore, it is evident that the majority of the black population perceive that being black is a problem, as the percentage is distinctly higher than that. Overall, there is a strong propensity among Afro-Brazilians to classify themselves as white or brown in censuses, caused by the whitening ideal, which gives higher social status and privileges to skin colour that is lighter (Nascimento 2007; Goldberg 2009). The ideology of whitening produces arrogance among whites, and denial of black identity among blacks and mestizos. Bianchi et al. (2002) notes that many Brazilians who have light skin are able to pass into the white category, thus can avoid experiences of racism. Whiteness can be seen as the understood norm, the ideal, the “invisible, silenced ethnic identity that reigns as a universal value” (Nascimento 2007:229). There exists a racial spectrum in the Brazilian system with different terms for colour of the skin: shades such as dark black (preto), dark (escuro), dark mulatto (mulato escuro), light mulatto (mulato claro), brown (moreno) and bahia-style white (branco de bahia) are commonly used in Brazil (Stam 1997). Stam maintains that “a power structure exists in Brazil that subtly enforces and promotes the idea that white is better” (p.45). Physical appearance (colour, hair, features) and social or cultural indicators (dress, education, accent) are increasingly concentrated on in society. Stam explains that similarly to other Latin American countries, “Brazil is what Chilean Anthropologist Alejandro Lipschutz calls a “pigmentocracy”, a social pyramid where the light skinned dominate the top and where indigenous people, blacks and mestizos dominate the base” (p.47).

Goldberg (2009) asserts that the Moreno (mixed-race) category symbolises “a raceless race..... Classically fracturing racial divisions” (p.230). The uim census has always contained a ‘mixed-race’ category as an option, arguably because of the impact of the ideology of whitening. Critics continue to maintain that the censuses’ favouring of a ternary ‘colour’ classification scheme as an alternative of a binary ‘racial’ scheme contributes to the view of racial dynamics as being fluid and incessant instead of dichotomous, and takes attention away from the significant racial divide in Brazil (Loveman et al. 2011). Moreover, the black movement stresses that middle categories should be taken out from the system, to ensure that Brazilians classify themselves as either black or white. Telles (2004) acknowledges racial classification as “especially ambiguous or fluid”, memberships in specific categories are often not static (p.217). The racial hierarchy is observed as natural by society, as long as individuals internalise that system, racial ascendancy persists without any conflict (Telles 2004). The myth of racial democracy “can coexist within the racial hierarchy as long as non-whites accept their place in the system” (p. 222). The Brazilian idea of colour is linked with a racial ideology that “ranks persons of different colours”, people are racialised and their apparent status rests on their racial or color classification” (Telles: 218).

Telles (2004) emphasises that Brazil’s unequal class hierarchy reinforces the racial hierarchy, impacting on the social distance between white middle/upper classes and poor non-whites. He elaborates on this matter:

“Racial and class hierarchies are encoded in informal rules about social interaction and are considered natural, In which one’s status or position in the hierarchy is assumed to give one greater rights or privileges” (p.222).

In a similar vein to Telles , Twine (1997) identifies the existence of an aesthetic hierarchy, which privileges whiteness, “this valorisation of whiteness has been naturalised in Brazil” (p.57). As a result of this aesthetic hierarchy, many Afro-Brazilians see no positive representations of themselves in the media, whilst the prestigious white skinned, blue or hazel eyed Brazilians signify the most ‘beautiful’ people of Brazil. Overall, it can be seen that

the hierarchical ordering of the population in terms of their closeness to whiteness, is a crucial process of racialisation in Brazil.

Discrimination and Inequalities in Education and the Labour Market

Educational inequalities in Brazil are an increasingly popular topic among academics, especially due to the recent affirmative action policies put in place. Education is seen by many as a primary area for social change in Brazil. Overall education levels are low in Brazil and rates of schooling vary considerably by race (Lovell 2000). The 1991 census revealed that the rate of high school and college completion was three times higher for whites than for pardos and pretos (IBGE 1996, cited in Lovell 2000:282). Data reveals that two of every three black young people (64%) left secondary education early (IPEA 2007: 284). For whites this percentage was 42%. The higher education rates for whites are due to their higher socio-economic background and their attendance at high quality schools compared to blacks who attend inferior, public schools with poor levels of resources (Arias et al. 2004). Telles (2004) asserts that one's geographic location impacts on racial disparity in education. In general, there is a lack of primary schools available in impoverished areas of Brazil, which primarily affect non-whites. Many children from poor Afro-Brazilian families leave education early to help support their family financially, contributing to their twice as high illiteracy rates compared to whites (Nascimento 2007).

In regard to higher education, only 6.6% of all black young people attended University in 2005, for whites this percentage was 19%. It is widely recognised that there are guaranteed places available for white students in universities; Brazilian universities are "spaces shielded against the low-income population, and particularly, against the black population" (Ciconello: 5). Telles (2004) elucidates that the "government disproportionately subsidizes the wealthiest students, most of whom attended private schools until college-to attend high-quality public universities" (p.124). As a consequence, affirmative action policies are now taking place in Brazil where there is a system of quotas to guarantee that a minimum number of Afro-Brazilians and people of colour have places in the university (Twine 2005). In 2003, the State University of Rio De Janeiro was the first educational institution in the country to introduce this policy of affirmative action- declaring 20% of its places set aside for blacks. Affirmative action will hopefully bring about fundamental, positive changes to Brazilian society, as everyday discriminatory social practices continue to persist, informed by white-supremacy thinking.

Discrimination is very subtle in Brazil and therefore is not acknowledged as discriminatory in nature. Telles (2004) describes discriminatory practices as consisting of "a series of informal institutional mechanisms- which create barriers for non-whites and privileges for whites and a web of individual causes- including slights, aggressions, and numerous other informal practices- both of which originate from a culture that naturalizes the racial hierarchy" (Telles: 151). Telles (2004) and Nascimento (2007) examine the presence of racial discrimination in educational practices in Brazil. They both give attention to the system's failure to show the existence, history and culture of Afro-Brazilians, and discuss the impact of the derogatory references in textbooks that pass of a sense of inferiority and negative images of blacks. Consequently, blacks are unable to relate to the education provided. Nascimento (2007) asserts that Brazil's education system has to "overcome this constructed invisibility of African descendants" (p.6). In addition, Telles highlights the lack of suitable role models for black children and the common stereotypes that sustain a low self-esteem among these children. Evidence from studies in relation to the poorer performance of non-white students, points to teachers' higher investment in white students. Bianchi et al (2002) assert that culturally sensitive educational programs that adopt positive identities for non-white children are required, in order to eliminate racial stereotypes present in social practices. UN Commission on Human Rights (1995) significantly states that:

“discrimination experienced by Afro-Brazilians in education is part of the vicious circle of poverty in which many of them are trapped and which takes the following form: material poverty-low level of education, failure at school, lack of training, unemployment or unskilled work, low wages-material poverty”(para.44).

Prominently, educational performance is a key factor for inclusion in the labour market; therefore the black population are entering the labour market with a severe disadvantage. A white employee earns 2.5 times more than a non-white employee (UN 1995). After slavery, the government did not promote a policy to include the population into the labour market, the majority of the black workers consigned to the low-paid subsistence sector for jobs. As Ciconello states, “this is the origin of social exclusion and the informal sector” (p.9). There is a racial division of labour in Brazil that prevents non-whites from entering specific professions (UN 1995). Saboia et al. (2009), identify whites as being more involved in the high earning formal sector in domains of health, education and public administration in senior level and intermediate positions. However, blacks and browns prevail in the “typical activities of the informal sector, such as self-employment and domestic service” because of their lack of schooling and training (p.128). It can be seen that instead of leading the way out of racial discrimination, the government promotes it by its beneficial promotion of whites in senior public positions.

Discrimination is present in job searching, to hiring and even when it comes to promotion. The UN Commission for Human Rights (1995) notes that even if a black person has the same qualifications as a white person, there will be practices of discrimination. By 1950, the term ‘boa aparencia’ (good appearance) and other phrases such as ‘good health’, ‘good teeth’ or ‘presentable’ were also used in job advertising to indirectly exclude non-white individuals from certain jobs (Telles 2004). Telles importantly states that “institutional pressures to maintain a racial hierarchy often structure individual choices” (p.152). Many employers do not intentionally mean to be discriminatory in jobs and have no racist attitudes but the institutional context means that it is highly preferable to hire white workers to create a desirable profile: “the general culture disseminates and accepts the idea of a racial hierarchy, which Brazilians in turn perceive as natural; this provides them with a logic for understanding and legitimizing the racial order (p.152).

Bento (2000) from researching into Sao Paulo’s labour market found that personnel departments of large companies “hire, promote and fire based on racial and gender stereotypes” (Bento cited in Telles 2004:160). Their procedures for decision making was found to be secretive, unclear, and prejudiced, depending on individual decisions. Bento also observed that many non-white workers, especially women who had supervisory positions suffered more discrimination from uncomfortable, distrustful subordinates or clients, they were not granted “the same prestige and recognition as their white status equals” (p.161). Here it can be seen the reversion of the racial hierarchy, where white workers did not agree with the position of black workers. Here, it must be addressed that in Brazil, there is a gender dimension to the discrimination faced by Brazilians. Although all non-white people experience discrimination, in the same way as other countries black females are at more risk of discriminatory practices, subordinating their positions in society. Overall it can be seen that to prevent labour market exclusion of Afro-Brazilians, there must be more effort to equalise access to high quality, adequate education particularly at primary school level, so particular vulnerable individuals do not fall into this cycle of poverty.

The Marginalisation of the Indigenous Population

The indigenous population of Brazil are among the most marginalised and excluded of groups amongst Brazilian society, occupying the bottom level of the hierarchal system. It is estimated that there are around 730,000 indigenous people living in Brazil, 0.4% of the total population (UN 2006). Research of indigenous communities indicates that there exist 225

indigenous peoples in Brazil, speaking 180 different languages (UN 2009). The indigenous population inhabit almost all states in Brazil but the majority remain in the Amazon region. Many academics identify the dilemma the government has in both respecting indigenous culture without encroaching too much into their lives and ensuring they have access to adequate employment and healthcare. UN Human Rights Council (2009) states that “indigenous peoples lack adequate participation in all decisions that affect their lives and communities and that they do not adequately control their territories, in many cases, even when lands are demarcated and registered” (p.9).

The most significant thing for indigenous people in Brazil is control and power over their land. Disagreements over land, territories and resources are common in Brazil with indigenous people consistently suffering invasions and resource extraction on their lands by outsiders. Indigenous tribes need to be acknowledged as owners of their land, to give them real defence against the frequent invaders. There remains a widespread racism towards the indigenous population, “in law they are still considered minors” and their land is being invaded by ranches, or development projects (<http://www.survivalinternational.org/tribes/brazilian>). The 1988 Brazilian Constitution gave indigenous people rights to live in their ancestral lands; however, it did not give them legal right to own the land (<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4954ce5a23.html>). However, pressure from the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has meant that the land titling process is advancing more quickly. Arocena (2008) notes that the state has “declared 12.5% of the country's territory reserved to the indigenous population” (p.7). According to data from the Indigenous Missionary Council, by 1993 there existed 842 indigenous lands in Brazil, but by 2005 only 37% of indigenous land had seen the demarcation procedures completed through registration, others are in the course of being demarcated and another 229 have not been brought to attention by the FUNAI (National Indigenous Foundation). The government has only introduced a few demarcations of new land, and has not adhered to the promised land reforms; as a result conflict around land persists.

The demands of land and resources has led to violence between indigenous people and large landowners and agri-business wanting access to indigenous lands. In the State of Mato Grosso do Sul, tensions have been high between indigenous tribes and non-indigenous occupants over access to the traditional lands, “giving rise to a pattern of violence that is marked by numerous murders of indigenous individuals as well as by criminal prosecution of indigenous individuals for acts of protest” (UN 2009). The Raposa Serra do Sol case is another event where extreme violence occurred between indigenous peoples and non-indigenous farmers over land resources, resulting in the shooting of a number of indigenous people on 5 May 2008. The non-indigenous farmers had invaded their land for rice farming on an industrial scale. The UN Commission on Human Rights (2006) points out the experiences of the Kanela group in Brazil, who were “violently expelled by a private company which allegedly claimed ownership” of their land (p.17). Today, after continually being expelled and moved to other lands, they live in a small, poor quality area of infertile land, with reduced access to food and they have severe health problems. For the last 10 years, they have been demanding FUNAI to allow them to go back to their land but are continuously refused. Additionally, there are the difficult experiences of the Rondonia natives, who are suffering disease and malnutrition as development takes over in the Amazon. Evidence from research points to the lack of consultation with the indigenous population in regards to the planning and carrying out of major development projects such as natural resource extraction and the building of dams which significantly affect their lives. Indigenous people require more responsibility and power over decision making on government policies and issues concerning their communities, when the matter at hand has a deep impact on their lifestyles.

Among the population of indigenous people, a quarter of their children do not have access to schools. Although the government has developed educational programmes for indigenous peoples, challenges persist in meeting the needs of all of the indigenous population of Brazil. UN Human Rights council (2009) highlights that education institutions need to bring improvements to the quality and availability of education to children and youths of indigenous tribes, integrating bilingual programming into the education and cross-cultural curriculums. Investment for infrastructure, teachers, and teaching materials in regard to education must be a top priority for the government, as the Special Rapporteur observed poor conditions of schools and a lack of supplies and teachers in Mato Grosso do Sul (p.24). Additionally, the Special Rapporteur for the UN Human Rights council observed a hostile and suspicious attitude of the media towards indigenous issues and demands made by them.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights report (2009) on discrimination stated that “millions of indigenous people are mired in poverty and lack access to basic services and employment opportunities”. The UN (2006) discusses the poor health services present in indigenous areas where there are a lack of doctors and medicines in neighbouring towns. Provisions are failing to reach remote indigenous communities with high rates of malaria and hepatitis and an infant mortality rate of almost three times the national average. It can clearly be seen the failure of Brazilian governments to perform successfully in protecting and providing support to indigenous communities, as well as giving them full responsibility in decision making over their communities: there remains “historical disrespect for the interests of indigenous peoples and disregard for their welfare and human rights”(UN 2009).

In conclusion, Brazil's racism has its origin from the government policy of whitening, the ideology of racial democracy and the notion of miscegenation; these have become embedded into the lives of Brazilians. Practices in society rank persons of different colours, naturalising the racial hierarchy, rather than people's intentions merely being racist. Racial classifications in Brazil are extremely ambiguous, and racial categories are enforced on individuals in society. High value continues to be placed on light skin colour, whether it is in the media or in the labour market. There are multiple categories along the white-black continuum, and these are affected by class- the unequal class hierarchy reinforces the racial hierarchy in Brazil. As Telles (2004) writes, racialisation in Brazil “occurs on a color gradient where the meanings attached to different skin colours account for different levels of discrimination” (p.218). The colour hierarchy in Brazil is perceived as natural by society, individuals internalise that system and do not question it, and therefore the hidden and silent nature of Brazilian racism persists. These racialisation processes have produced inequalities and discrimination of a subtle nature in education and the labour market, where the non-white population from an early age are trapped in this vicious circle of poverty. For the indigenous population of Brazil, their position remains the worse, with racial hostility continuously directed at them and exclusion from decision making, positioning them at the bottom of the racial hierarchy. Land disagreements continue to affect their quality of life and the government has not been successful in protecting and respecting their culture. For a country with the second largest African-origin population in the world, it is unbelievable that non-white people continue to have subordinate positions in society, and that the majority of them attempt to pass as mixed-race and some even as white. What can be learnt from this case study is that even if a country from the outside looks like it lives in racial harmony, we must dig deep into practices in society where distinctive divisions and hierarchies remain and are naturalised by the population. It is clear the multifaceted nature of racism in Brazil with its wider background of ethnic groups; this is why it proves to be such a remarkable case study.

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