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Looking for a Motherland:

African Cultural Preservation Among Afro-Brazilian Communities

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Based on 33 interviews conducted in three different cities in Brazil (Sao Paulo, Salvador de Bahia, and Rio de Janeiro), this article explored the narratives of identity and social consciousness of Afro-Brazilians. The research aimed to understand how these communities have created a sense of self as well as their position in the Brazilian society. Moreover, it intended to explore their connection to Africa, the land of their ancestors, as we as the impact of the Brazilian Racial Democracy politics on their social and political identities. In a series of interviews and field work, I examined the different narratives and stories of identity, cultural affiliations, and social consciousness told by Afro-Brazilians. In the current political and economic instabilities, race and poverty are becoming major factors that influence the Brazilian social structures and problematized the different groups' sense of selves and construction of meaning-making.

Keywords: Brazil, Afro-Brazilians, Culture, Africa, consciousness

INTRODUCTION

Through the slave trade, the end of colonization, and the rise of democracy, the history of Brazil can be seen in the faces and eyes of the Brazilian people. Their different shades of brown bear witness to the various stages of human mobility which have made Brazil a melting pot of people of African, European, and Middle Eastern descent rich in cultural symbolism. Yet, rather than acknowledging this diversity, the Brazilian government created a raceless, almost colorblind, system that reinforced racist policies while denying cultural and racial recognition to

minorities. Praised both by native-born and foreign observers[1] for its "racial democracy"— an idea that "prejudice and discrimination based on race no longer exist"[2]—the Brazilian government has claimed to have built a country free of racial issues. This image of racial democracy promotes the idea that White and non-White Brazilians have the same rights and privileges.

Unfortunately, Brazilian society is far from being equal for Whites and non-Whites, especially Blacks. Andrews notes that, "Survey research has shown racist attitudes and stereotypes concerning Blacks and Mulattoes to be widely diffused throughout Brazilian society, and Afro-Brazilians report being the victims of subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, racism and discrimination."[3] Its racial democracy has been at the root of racial inequalities, discrimination, and prejudice.

Starting in the late1970s, this racial integrative framework helped create a Brazilian society that promoted racism, discouraged positive self-image among Black Brazilian, and most importantly, "neutraliz[ed] support for antiracism strategies."[4] David Scott Fitzgerald and David Cook-Martin explained that the racial democracy thesis helped the European elites gain and maintain their privilege by legally and politically preventing African and indigenous communities from mobilizing. It was promoting an 'all' homogenous Brazilian society while protection light-skinned people's privileges.[5] Black Brazilian were silenced and marginalized because the country wanted to ignore the racial diversity it has gain since slavery time.

The system created around this myth of racial democracy have had negative effects on cultural distinctions, particularly for Afro-Brazilians who were brought to Brazil through slavery but have rich cultural traditions. It is only through initiatives that promoted Black empowerment,

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[1] George Reid Andrews, "Brazilian Racial Democracy, 1900-90: An American Counterpoint," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Jul., 1996), p. 483.

[2] Carlos Hasenbalg and Suellen Huntington, "Brazilian Racial Democracy: Reality or Myth," *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations 10*, no. 1, Race & Ethnic Relations: Cross-Cultural Perspectives (1982/83), p.135.

[3] Andrews, *Brazilian Racial Democracy*, 483.

[4] Stanley R. Bailey, "Group Dominance and the Myth of Racial Democracy: Antiracism Attitudes in Brazil," *American Sociological Review,* 2004, Vol. 69 (October), p. 728.

[5] David Scott Fitzgerald and David Cook-Martin, "Brazil Selling The Myth of Racial Democracy," in *Culling the Masses*. Ed. David Scott Fitzgerald and David Cook-Martin, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), pp. 259-260.

such as the *Liberation Ideology* promoted by Abdias do Nascimento, that many Afro-Brazilians found a way to navigate Brazilian society. Although the Brazilian Black movements existed alongside slavery, it is during the 1970s and 80s, when Brazil was transitioning back to democracy, that "identity-based Black activism resurged and many Black organizations were created all over the country."[6] Movements such as *Grupo Uniao e Consciencia Negra* and *Movimento Negro Unificado* (MNU), were promoting a Black consciousness ideology "valorization of Afro-Brazilian religious forms, and activist viewpoints that stood in sharp opposition to the dominant racist social institutions of Brazil."[7] For the next several decades, Afro-Brazilian communities would create movements promoting black-identity and social and political initiatives in order to gain recognition and legitimacy in the Brazilian society.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to understand how Afro-Brazilians (i.e., Brazilians of African descent) preserve their African heritage despite the racial discrimination in the Brazilian social fabric. Through interviews, this paper uncovers the stories of how Afro-Brazilians have kept or lost their African traditions and what effect this has had on the understanding of who they are as a group and most importantly their collective self-consciousness rooted in their Blackness. Enslaved Africans helped shape the Brazilian culture through contribution in poetry, literature, music, dance, and movie.[8] As Abdias do Nascimento stated, "The Black, far from being an upstart or a stranger, is the very body and soul of this country [Brazil]…"[9] In Brazil, many cultural traditions were Africanized. Practices such as Carnival began around the same time slavery ended. In Bahia, cultural street celebration "increased [the] participation of Black carnival *blocos* [street] known as *afoxes* [Afro Brazilian

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[6] Bernd Reiter, "A Genealogy of Black Organizing in Brazil," *Government and International Affairs Faculty Publications*. 113, (2009), p. 60.

[7] Allan Charles Dawson, "Manifestations of Afro-Brazilian Blackness," in *In Light of Africa: Globalizing Blackness in Northeast Brazil*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2014), p. 67.

[8] Michel Agier, "Racism, Culture and Black Identity in Brazil," *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Sep., 1995), pp. 254-258.

[9] Abdias Do Nascimento, "Quilombismo: An Afro-Brazilian Political Alternative," *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, Afro-Brazilian Experience and Proposals for Social Change (Dec., 1980), p. 149.

music genre]."[10] Throughout the next century, the African inspired culture, such as capoeira and the Candomble religion, became an essential part of the Brazilian cultural identity.

Consequently, we must understand how contemporary Afro-Brazilians understand their African heritage and reconnect with their historical past. I argue that through their consciousness, Afro-Brazilians have created a deep understanding of their African heritage and created social and political platforms not only to dismantle that idea of racial democracy, but also to advocate for their communities' sense of self and self-determination.

ROAD MAP OF BRAZILIAN RACIAL AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

Brazil has always been an important and interesting case regarding racial issues and the idea of Black consciousness.[11] Despite its cultural diversity and fluid racial categories, many have observed its profound stratification by skin color.[12] Starting in the 1930s, the Brazilian government was promoting a racial democracy, in which "mixity, and racial categories are fluid and ambiguous."[13] This political area created a system in which "people were hostile to challenges to the racial democracy thesis and reluctant to admit to racism."[14] Therefore, the focus was shifted from racial discourse to socio-economic issues. With this state-sponsored segregation, issues surrounding social and political segregation between Black Brazilians and White in the elite class rooted in racial discriminatory policies and the legacy of slavery.

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[10] Larry N. Crook, "Black Consciousness, samba reggae, and the Re-Africanization of Bahian Carnival Music in Brazil," *The World of Music* 35, no. 2, The Politics and Aesthetics of "World Music" (1993), 92-93.

[11] Here are several studies looking at Afro-Brazilians movements: Russell G. Hamilton, "Gabriela Meets Olodum: Paradoxes of Hybridity, Racial Identity, and Black Consciousness in Contemporary Brazil," *Research in African Literatures* 38, no. 1, (2007); Niani (Dee Brown), "Black Consciousness vs. Racism in Brazil," *The Black Scholar* 11, no. 3, (1980); Bernd Reiter, "What's New in Brazil's 'New Social Movements'?", *American Perspectives* 38, no. 1, (2011).

[12] Ricardo Venture Santos, Peter H. Fry, Simone Monteiro, Marcos Chor Maio, Jose Carlos Rodrigues, Luciana Bastos-Rodrigues, and Sergio D. J. Pena, "Color, Race, and Genomic Ancestry in Brazil Dialogues Between Anthropology and Genetics," *Current Anthropology* 50, no. 6 (2009).

[13] Mala Htun, "'Racial Democracy' to Affirmative Action: Changing State Policy on Race in Brazil," *Latin American Research Review* 39, no. 1 (2004); 61.

[14] Htun, 61.

Consequently, disguised as democracy to create a model of harmony, Brazil ignored the needs of its Black population.

It was only in the 2000s that the "Brazilian state was forced to admit its racism."[15] As a form of affirmative action, quotas were put in place in order to address racial inequalities. According to Htun:

> The president created a national affirmative action program; three ministries introduced quotas for Blacks, women, and handicapped people in hiring; the National Human Rights Program endorsed racial quotas; the foreign ministry introduced a program to increase the number of Black diplomats; and the three states approved laws reserving 40 percent of university admission slots for Afro-Brazilians.[16]

These affirmative action initiatives aimed to rectify some of the wrongdoing implemented by the government after slavery. According to the 1991 national survey conducted by the Diretoria Geral de Estatistica, Black people were disadvantaged at all levels of the Brazilian socio-economic-cultural spheres. In the last four decades, "rapid economic expansion and substantial social and demographic change have neither erased unequal population distribution or unequal regional development."[17]

Interestingly, the racial problem is not limited to the classic Black–White dichotomy. The phenotypes, or color terminology, used in Brazil reflect the complexity of defining race. People are categorized by skin color more than by biological traits.[18] Still, according to the 1991 census, "nearly half of the 147 million population is either *pardo* or *preto* [Black]." This means that a large proportion of Afro-Brazilians are a result of the 3.6 million African slaves brought during the four-century slave trade. Consequently, over a hundred terms are used to identify a person of color.[19] With its racial diversity, the government could no longer ignore its population of African descendants. Ideologies such as the racial democracy that have ignored race, yet promoted skin color, were questioned because they implied that all Brazilians were equal on the basis that there

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[15] Reiter, *A Genealogy of Black Organizing in Brazil*, 60.
[16] Htun, *Racial Democracy to Affirmative Action*, 61.
[17] Peggy A. Lovell, "Race, Gender and Regional Labor Market Inequalities in Brazil," *Review of Social Economy* 58, no. 3 (2000), 279.
[18] Lovell, 281.
[19] Htun, *Racial Democracy*, 64.

were no races in Brazil, only the 'Brazilian race.' Consequently, by creating Black-identity movements and advocating for self-identification, the African-descendants were transforming their nations and changing the way they were positioned by the people in power.

Yet, for many years Brazil kept claiming to be a raceless nation.[20] "Brazilian law has also never been used to encourage racial equality, probably because this would mean acknowledging the existence of racism and racial inequalities."[21] Being Black or mixed in a system that chooses to not see race means that these individuals are not always accepted as an important part of the formation of the Brazilian nation and are deprived of any racial and cultural or symbolic heritage. During the beginning of the 20th century, Brazil focused on their international status by promoting a racial inequality ideology based on Whiteness and scientific racism. This was partially due to the fact that European countries looked down on South American countries that have a large Black and indigenous population. This shift led to social and residential segregations where Black people were both marginalized because of who they were but also relocated in the poorest, overcrowded areas in Brazil.[22]

Reflecting on the structure created during slavery—which some say continues today— many argue that "the dreams and promises of change enthusiastically predicted for Afro-Brazilians in the post-abolition, post-modernist, and post military dictatorship eras remain deferred and unfulfilled."[23] Individuals are constantly reminded of the slavery era through the commercialization of their African heritage and the struggle within their racial and national identification. Above all, Afro-Brazilians are denied of many opportunities that were promised by the government. This denial puts them in the lower circles of representation in their communities or in the government. In his "Proposal for the Future," Abdias do Nascimento, an Afro-Brazilian civil rights activist, scholar, and politician, states that Africans in Brazil needs to "develop their own liberation ideology, based on their own historical experience, not in order to separate themselves from the rest of Brazil, but to prepare to lead the nation, as its majority

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[20] Niyi Afolabi, "'Quilombo' Without Borders: Allegories of Afro-Brazilian Modernist
        Impulse," *Afro-Hispanic Review* 29, no. 2 (2010): 65.
[21] Edward E. Telles, "Residential Segregation by Skin Color in Brazil," *American Sociological
        Review* 57, no. 2 (1992), 187.
[22] Telles, 187-188.
[23] Telles, 65.

population, in a democratic context."[24]

While exploring the idea of Black consciousness and Black people's liberation, as Nascimento puts it, Brazil is often confronted with many of the Afro-religious traditions brought by slaves. These traditions have been incorporated into a broad mainstream identity yet remain stigmatized and marginalized. Afro-Brazilians have played an important part in the nation-building and the cultural understanding of Brazil. African Brazilians are the source of "religion, art, well-being, philosophy, therapeutic knowledge, and civilizing potential . . . The Afro-Brazilian religions are one such set of conceptions and constitute a very important niche of culture preservation and creativity."[25] Their ancestors' traditions built the foundations of what we see today. Through them, the social structure of Brazil is rooted in the slaves' journey to the New World or Americas. They also helped create the mixture of the population including White elites. The resulting racial diversity is said to be "the perception of the formation of Brazilian society through massive miscegenation."[26] Modern Brazil is the result of the mingling of European and African culture. The Candomblé religion is an example of the combination of racial diversity and historical process. In the 16th century, a process of Christianization was imposed, and to retain some of their religious traditions, Africans renamed the Christian Saints using the names of African gods. They mingled both cultures to form a new, more acceptable notion of who they were.

From Identity to Race: The Concepts of Blackness and Whiteness

Since the sixteenth century, racial classification and human differences have created an ideology that promoted biological characteristics to explain racial values and privilege White people. The concept or normative order of Black and White "provided a basis for understanding the world in morally binary terms," and allowed the shaping of racial and social identity as membership.[27] It created boundaries between the in-group (Whites) and the out-groups (Blacks/slaves). Explored and developed in the United States, the idea of Blackness is seen as

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[24] Telles, *Residential Segregation by Skin Color in Brazil*, 65.

[25] R. L. Segato, The Color-Blind Subject of Myth: Or, Where to Find Africa in the Nation," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 27 (1998), 143–144.

[26] Segato, 144.

[27] Korostelina, Karina V., *Social Identity and Conflict: Structures, Dynamics, and Implications*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 88.

"antithetical to the identity Whites have assigned the [dark-skinned] and is a way of being human under regimes of White supremacy."[28] Developed as a comparative identity, which is seen as a connection between various social identities that has an effect on the intergroup and intragroup relations, *Blackness* was created as a tool against hegemonic White power that was imposed by colonialism and slavery.[29]

Colonialism and slavery expanded across the globe and created a racial system that remains influential today. "Colonialism in all its forms and stages has and continues to use race as a construct for the ideological justification of the domination and oppression of 'inferior groups.'"[30] Within the framework of colonialism, Blackness has had national and international boundaries. Shaped as a global, collective chosen trauma for people of color, the legacy of slavery and colonialism crystalized the "shared mental representation of the event[s], which included realistic information, fantasized expectations, intense feelings, and defenses against unacceptable thoughts," and they were then transmitted through generations.[31] Also, colonialism and slavery as collective axiology—a "system of value commitments that offers moral guidance to maintain relations with those within, and outside, a group. It provides a sense of life and world, serves as a criterion for understanding actions and events, and regulates in-group behaviors."[32]—allowed the saliency of the Black identity. This ideology shaped the sense of deprivation that Blacks were and are still experiencing. Believed to be inferior, they had a "feeling of offense resulting from perceptions [and behavior] of positions based on comparisons between the actual status and expectations."[33] Based on that system, racial identity became the most important criterion to define who was superior and who was inferior.

Blackness is an inclusive idea that transcends differences within a particular group, an idea which is shaped by each particular group and nation.[34] Blackness emphasizes collective

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[28] Roderic R. Land, "Toward the Study of Blackness: The Development of a Field of Inquiry," *Counter Points* 131 (2005), 56.
[29] Korostelina, *Social Identity and Conflict,* 60.
[30] Land, *Toward the Study of Blackness*, 55.
[31] Valmik Volkan, *Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism*, (New York: Basic Books, 1998), 48.
[32] Korostelina, *Social Identity and Conflict,* 87.
[33] Korostelina, 133.
[34] Naomi Pabst. "An Unexpected Blackness," *Transition*, no. 100 (2008), 117.

social identity by promoting the "sameness" struggle and creating different "group images, goals, and ideas of self-representation" within Black communities.[35] Consequently, it portrayed the idea of a social identity within the collective or global political actions. Reinforced by the notion of 'Africanism,' the development of the idea of Blackness in the Western world slowly empowered and encouraged Blacks to rediscover their roots: African traditions, culture, language and history. Thus, a Black identity reflected the struggle that Blacks had experienced and the roots that had been taken away. This movement of modernity entitled them to seek freedom, recognition, and resistance to tyranny."[36] This empowerment is crystallized by the notion of metacontrast—that differences within an in-group are smaller than those between in-group and out-group—which unifies Black people.[37] In addition to that, the idea of common ancestry has united and separated Black people worldwide, both in "terms of consciousness and identity."[38] Being Black meant that in some way the person had links to Africa, his or her motherland. Yet, it was not a restrictive notion anymore; it incorporated ideas that are broader than racial identity, such as territorial identity, minority identity, and national identity.

Recently, the idea of Whiteness has been pushed in response to the Black communities' self-awareness. Contrary to Blackness, which can be seen as shaped by a chosen trauma, Whiteness portrays the idea of chosen glory, which is a "mental representation of a historical event that induces feelings of success and triumph."[39] Going back to colonialism, racial identity was molded in North America and Europe with the principle that people should be divided hierarchically with white power and privileges on top of the chain. Based on this Eurocentric idea of White superiority and Black inferiority during colonization, what mattered was to empty "the native's brain of all form and content."[40] People needed to be civilized, yet that did not mean they could be seen as equal. "The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's culture standards. He becomes Whiter as he

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[35] Korostelina, *Social Identity and Conflict,* 22.
[36] Land, *Toward the Study of Blackness*, 56.
[37] Korostelina, *Social Identity and Conflict,* 25.
[38] Jewel Bush, "Related Somehow to Africa." *Transition*, no. 115 (2014), 77.
[39] Volkan, *Bloodlines,* 81.
[40] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. (New York City: Grove Press, 1963), 210.

renounces his Blackness, his jungle."[41] Becoming White was seen as a privilege or aspiration toward which the inferior communities should have been working.

During slavery, Whiteness and Blackness created gaps within the slaves' communities as well as the White communities. The one-drop rule defined who was not White, but mixed-race people were caught in the middle of this struggle for identity. This struggle is ongoing today. Back then, being lighter-skinned, whiter, was a privilege. "Light-complexioned blacks, often the offspring of the White slave owners and enslaved Africans, were given preferential treatment via assignment to housework in stark contrast to darker skinned Blacks, who were usually assigned outdoor, hard-labor tasks."[42] Within the Whiteness ideology, being White meant being part of the privileged, ruling group. Black was synonymous with uncivilized. This stratified ideology was extended to the Black communities. Lighter-skinned people were advantaged whereas dark-skinned people were discriminated against. This idea of whitening the Blackness within is well explored by Frantz Fanon who stated: "laboratories have sterilized their test tubes, checked their scales, and embarked on researches that might make it possible for the miserable Negro to Whiten himself and thus to throw off the burden of that corporal malediction."[43] These notions of Whitening have shaped today's understanding of racial identity. Racial identity has become an "appearance debate." As Frantz Fanon explained, "I am given no chance. I am over determined from without. I am a slave not of the 'idea' others have of me, but my own appearance."[44] People of color do not need words to be seen and treated as different; their simple presence is a reminder of the White-dominant society we all live in. Now more than ever, these ideas are still part of the general understanding of Whiteness.

From Race to Consciousness

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[41] Donna Outerbridge. "Chapter Five: The Fact of Blackness: A Critical review of Bermuda's Colonial Education System," *Counterpoints* 368 (2010), 112–113.

[42] Stephanie I. Coard, Alfiee M. Breland, and Patricia Raskin, "Perceptions of and Preferences for Skin Color, Black Racial Identity, and Self-Esteem Among African Americans," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 31, no. 11 (2001), 2256–2257.

[43] Outerbridge, *The Fact of Blackness*, 112.

[44] Camille Logan, "Body Politics and the Experienced if Blackness within the Field of Eduction," in *Fanon and Education: Thinking Through Pedagogical Possibilities, Fanon and Education: Thinking Through Pedagogical Possibilities,* eds Marlon Simmons. (Peter Lang, Bern: Switzerland, 2010), p. 36.

While talking about 'liberation ideology' and Blackness, the concept of consciousness needs to be explored in order to understand what brings people together and unifies them behind one common goal. In the case of Afro-Brazilians, the concept is even more relevant since it taps into their understanding of historical experience and the creation of a dual racial system in which some Blacks have fought to keep some African roots and others have accepted assimilation and experienced a mixture of cultures and racial identity.

The three notions of consciousness that are important in this case are collective or common, social or individual, and class. Both collective and social consciousnesses were introduced by the French sociologist Emile Durkheim. In *The Division of Labour in Society,* he stated that there are two different consciousness existing within each one of us, "the one comprises only states that are personal to each one of us [individual], characteristic of us as individuals [collective], whilst the other comprises states that are common to the whole of society."[45] Therefore, the collective consciousness is composed of external moral forces that are shaped by human desires and "are expressed in shared beliefs, formal or informal cultural norms and shared values. These shared elements eventually become the basis of ideological grounds for members of a society or organization."[46] Social consciousness is then created when individual emotions are offended. "The wrong done arouses among all who witness it or who know of its existence the same indignation. All are affected by it; consequently, everyone stiffens himself against the attack."[47] By solidarity, those who experience or witness offenses are bound together and break away from the collective, common, consciousness to create a social, individual consciousness. In addition to these two types of consciousness, Karl Marx introduced the socio-economic or class consciousness by exploring the class's interest to be recognized. Consequently, "class consciousness can emerge only when an individual is aware of his politico-economic interests, and in such a way that he recognizes his unity with others and the general nature of class opposition."[48]

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[45] Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society*. ed. Steven Lukes (London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2013), 61.

[46] Ashish Pandey and Rajen K. Gupta, "A Perspective of Collective Consciousness of Business Organizations," *Journal of Business Ethics* 80, no. 4 (2008), 891.

[47] Durkhein, *Division of Labour in Society*, 57.

[48] Oscar Glantz, "Class Consciousness and Political Solidarity," *American Sociological Review*

For Durkheim, we cannot talk about consciousness without talking about solidarity. The two types that he has identified are mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity. Mechanical solidarity goes hand in hand with collective or common consciousness, while organic solidarity emphasizes the differences and thus is often associated with social consciousness. In other words, mechanical solidarity is "characterized with little social complexity and differentiation, and its members are very similar in their actions and beliefs . . . these societies are distinguished by the 'likeness' of their members and the environment in which they exist."[49] In organic societies, the types of societies are "larger and [have] greater social complexity and difference. This greater complexity of society facilitates the weakening of the 'collective consciousness,' which results in individual differences."

Finally, after examining the ideas of consciousness and solidarity that are vital to understanding Brazil, we must explore System Justification Theory in order to simplify the historical behavior of many Blacks or Afro-Brazilians. System Justification Theory can be defined as "the process by which existing social arrangements are legitimized, even at the expense of personal and group interest."[50] Using the System Justification Theory in looking at the Brazilian society, we see that the government decided, despite its large Black and non-White population, to install a political system that was detrimental to them because it was ignoring the racial and social aspects of their basic identities.

After looking at the social, economic, political, cultural, and historical framing of race, Blackness, and African heritage in Brazil, one might wonder if there is still an important sense of connection to Africa today. If so, does this mean that Black culture has allowed individuals to both create a new collectiveness that transcends their social inequalities? With almost half of the population identified as people of color with African descent, Brazil is one of the largest Black countries; however, its racial discourse does not reflect its diversity.

23, no. 4 (1958), p. 376.

[49] John B. Harms, "Reason and Social Change in Durkheim's Thought: The Changing Relationship between Individuals and Society," *The Pacific Sociological Review* 24, no. 4 (1981), 397.

[50] John T. Jost, Mahzarin R. Banji, and Brian A. Nosek, "A Decade of System Justification Theory: Accumulated Evidence of Conscious and Unconscious Bolstering of the Status Quo," *Political Psychology* 25, no. 6 (2004), 883.

METHODS

Using a narrative analysis approach, I aimed to understand Brazil through the stories of Afro-Brazilian communities. I wanted to understand how they see and understand their position in a nation that promotes a 'raceless' political structure. Consequently, I needed to explore their stories of identity, race, and consciousness in order to comprehend their sense of self and meaning-making. To research these communities, it was essential to explore both their African heritage and its importance in their construction of individual and social identities as well as the actions and behaviors dictated by their knowledge of their African descent. In other words, by understanding where their racial identity came from and the historical past that influenced their communities' dynamics, these communities found ways to maintain and promote that heritage.

Through this constructivist approach, I wanted to explore the Afro-Brazilian communities' realities and shed light on their experiences. Their understandings of their personal and group journeys clearly reflect the racial disparities and discrimination in Brazil. Most importantly, I was interested in learning how individuals in these communities have overcome centuries of racial inequalities, yet, remained rooted in African traditions. To have the 'fullness' their stories, I traveled to Brazil and interviewed them.

I conducted 39 interviews over three months. The first four interviews were conducted while I was still in the United States. I conducted thirty-three interviews in three different cities in Brazil: São Paulo (14 interviews), Salvador de Bahia (12 interviews), and Rio de Janeiro (7 interviews). The remaining two interviews were conducted after returning to the United States. Using snowball sampling, 36 participants were identified, because they expressed that they were connected to an Afro-Brazilian community. Twenty-two participants were men, and 14 were women. Twenty-one participants were under the age of 40, and 15 participants were 40 or older. Finally, because of the over 134 different racial identifications used in Brazil, I have decided to use the "Afro-Brazilian" identification for any participants that expressed any connection to Africa. [51]

After conducting the research, I coded the interviews using theme analysis. With an

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[51] Jefferson M. Fish, "What Does the Brazilian Census Tell Us About Race?", 2011. Retrieved from https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/looking-in-the-cultural-mirror/201112/what-does-the-brazilian-census-tell-us-about-race.

analytical lens, several subthemes were identified and clustered together to produce four major themes. Simultaneously, phenomenological analysis was being conducted. Phenomenological analysis was used in order to understand the participant's life experiences and perceptions of self and others.[52] I listened to the interviews and tried to identify the general ideas each participant was expressing. Each major idea was then categorized into identified topics or themes. At the end of the listening sessions, the ideas and categories were structured into generalized themes aiming to build a theoretical framework. This framework was identified within the context of consciousness and solidarity theories.

In terms of objectivity and validity, I collected data using semi-structured identity, observational studies and I attended several meetings and events. These different methods allowed me to gather data from different sources. These other methods were utilized in order to triangulate the data. At the end of each day, I took time to write reflections and took notes of the different interviews conducted in order to avoid fabrication or misinterpretation. Also, I consulted other researchers when needed.

FINDINGS

This research demonstrated that identity and race were socially constructed concepts based on the individual and group understanding of their past and present. In all three cities—São Paulo, Salvador de Bahia, and Rio de Janeiro—I met people who identified themselves as either Afro-Brazilian or having African descent but, using the Black and White racial concepts present in the US, they would be classified as White in Brazil. For these Afro-Brazilians, identity is more than skin color; it is charged with a specific historical past and a connection to their ancestors. Therefore, through the different interviews conducted, I identified four themes that conceptualize their experience and highlight their identity of Afro-Brazilian as being composed of more than skin color, culture, consciousness, religion, and public life.

Cultural Expression

While culture was mentioned 29 times, both positive and negative perceptions of the

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[52] Edward John Noon, "Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis: An Appropriate Methodology for Educational Research?" *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice,* Vol. 6, no. 1 (2018), 75.

cultural evolution of Afro-Brazilians and Brazil were expressed through the different interviews. This theme referred to preserving Afro-Brazilian identity through traditions such as music, dance, food, clothing, languages, and so on. It is a way for these individuals to keep their African identity alive and create a sense of unity. It was also mentioned that some of them have lost or forgotten their African identities and assimilated with the broader Brazilian community.

A positive cultural perception connected the social and structural issues created by the raceless ideology promoted through the Brazilian racial democratic political system. This perception has impacted the collective consciousness of Brazilians regarding multiculturalism. This has allowed Afro-Brazilians to be proud of their African heritage and allowed them to maintain many African cultural performances when celebrating among Black Brazilians. This is seen in their cuisine, music and dance, which have become symbols of their identity. As a participant expressed, "The African culture is very present in several artistic manifestations in contemporary culture, dance, music..." This was also emphasized by another participant, who said, "The connection [to Africa] is based on the cultural manifestations, like music, dance, and food. We have our vocabulary. We have our way to dress, the clothes"

Expressions such as samba and capoeira, which are rooted in the Brazil history of colonialism and slavery, have transcended Afro-Brazilians' historical baggage and infiltrated the national arena, yet preserved an Afrocentric notion of expression centered on the celebration of the African population's struggles. One participant explained how African people helped build today's Brazil by preserving and promoting their African culture even during slavery. Through the centuries, their connection to Africa produced the basis of many Afro-Brazilian cultural practices such as capoeira, samba, and moqueca. Samba was mentioned numerous times as being not only a symbol of Brazilian culture but as being created by Black people, which allowed them to hold onto their heritage and shape the national identity. Cuisine is also important in the shaping and preservation of African cultural heritage. Food such as feijoada, moqueca, and the mixture of rice and beans are some "of the most popular foods in Brazil that [were] brought during the time of slavery," stated one participant.

Despite the widespread impact of African cultural heritage, Brazil rarely acknowledges the contributions of Black people to its culture. As one participant stated, "it's hard to find people that have the African traditions, and it is harder to connect to African culture today."

Another participant said, "we don't know where we come from...we don't have pictures." For them, not knowing is often based on the social marginalization or stigmas that remain from the age of slavery. This lack of knowledge can also be from cultural disconnections that might have happened through the centuries and families, which has led to an almost completed assimilation into mainstream Brazilian culture.

Consciousness – "We all came from Africa"

Consciousness is another theme that was mentioned numerous times during the interviews. The concept of consciousness is understood as a combination of "basic in-group identification with a set of ideas about the group's status and strategies for improving it."[53] These communities have decided to embrace their consciousness. Aware of the diversity both among the Brazilian communities and among their own Black communities, many initiatives have been created to promote this diversity of identities through education, activism, and cultural presentation of their African heritage through clothing and food. Of course, in some cases, this identity is not always accepted or promoted.

This notion of consciousness was used positively by looking at ideas such as diversity, activism, African heritage, positive or empowering racial identity, and educational opportunities. It could also be used negatively in discussing disconnections. The positive consciousness is developed through class consciousness and organic solidarity. These two ideas illuminate the environments that the Afro-Brazilian communities face that are often impacted by the Brazilian political and economic systems. As a participant stated, "we all came from Africa," referring to human origins. Aware of not only their African heritage, this participant emphasized the fact that everyone originates from Africa, which was a source of pride. Another participant stressed it even more when she explained that "if Nigerians were to come here, they would think they were in Africa . . . Bahia is a place where Africans live in the Americas."

One of the ways this consciousness is manifested is through activism. "There are many active Afro-Brazilian women's movements," stated one participant, and "we have Afro-Brazilian organizations." These different types of activism have allowed people to become closer to their roots. "People are slowly changing the way they perceive things regarding beauty standards and

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[53] Dennis Chong and Reuel Rogers, "Racial Solidarity and Political Participation," *Political Behavior* 27, no. 4 (2005), p. 350.

Blackness," explained another participant. In addition to activism, other ways to transmit the heritage have been found. Many families have educated their children and transmitted African beliefs and traditions. "They [Blacks] preserve their culture because of a family-based education," said a third participant. Museums, books, educations and promoting these values and traditions have surfaced. A fourth participant explained, "There is now research about the contributions of Black people in farming and mining. Slaves were always seen as slavery, but with the new research, it humanized them and acknowledged their value." He continued by saying that with the new technology, it is more affordable for women to produce movies, and for Black people to be recognized through the use of cultural performances. Many participants expressed that Afro-Brazilian culture was now present in everyday life.

For many, the pride comes not only from the preservation of African cultures and traditions, but also from the evolution and transformation in the culture of the ancestors to create Afro-Brazilian culture. A participant explained how they had witnessed an evolution in cultures and cultural connections. The traditions once practiced in Africa are not practiced the same in Brazil. The evolution also is observed between generations of Black people and how they take pride in their heritage. Another participant expressed this transformation when he said that even the concept of beauty has changed. "Previously Black women straightened their hair, but now there is the movement to return back to African hair. It now perceived just as another type."

As mentioned previously, consciousness is not also positive. In the case of negative consciousness, the dynamics tend to be within the Afro-Brazilian communities. A participant explained that there are many identities within each identity in Brazil. There are many origins within the Afro-Brazilian communities, such as Nigeria, Angola, Benin, and many more. The differences have left many participants uneasy about the idea of preservation of African cultures. The idea of preservation implied stagnation, which is not true, as mentioned earlier. Indeed, the heritages have shaped their communities, but they have evolved through time and place.

Also, to complicate the situation, "some people see themselves as Black and others as Black with African roots, and others are African Brazilian," a participant said. Consequently, there is a disconnect among the different Afro-Brazilian communities as well as a complex identification about who sees themselves as part of a specific community. This leads to a lack of solidarity among the different Black Brazilian movements, which has been a struggle for

decades. Another participant expressed these complex dynamics by saying, "I prefer to be a Black in movement than work in the Black movements."

Religion

Like culture, religion is seen as a manifestation of African heritage transmitted by slaves to today's Black communities. Like the other themes, religion has been used as a positive affirmation of cultural identity for Afro-Brazilian communities and seemed to be one of the ways that African heritage has been preserved, promoted, and transformed. Since the time of slavery, many religious traditions have been implemented and mixed with Christian practices and blended to become part of Brazilian culture. Yet, despite the strong symbols inspired by the African religions, the participants explain that there is an increase in religious discrimination and persecution among the Black community toward outsiders but even more between Christian denominations and traditional African religious practices.

One participant explained how the Candomblé religion became part of the recognized Afro-Brazilian culture. He narrated that slaves brought it, but they had to replace their African gods' names with Catholic ones to avoid persecution. Eventually, Candomblé became legal and helped unify the different religious beliefs of many Afro-Brazilians. A different participant emphasized this evolution by saying, "now, it is more accepted." Afro-Brazilians have preserved this part of their heritage "by opening it to the Brazilian as a whole. Now, all the African religions are very strong and are no longer conceived as an African Black religion, but as a popular religion. It's opened to every kind of people," as a third participant stated. The different religious beliefs have become part of the Brazilian mainstream.

Though religions have created awareness around African heritage and brought Afro-Brazilians together, religions have also created tensions among the different intergroups. In certain groups, religion has been used to discriminate against others. Not only have some groups segregated themselves, but outsider groups have been discriminated against. A participant expressed her concerns about the teaching methods that some religious leaders have taken. "Teachers should be more open-minded. Their students grow up in this way, and teachers should keep this in mind," she stated. In addition to creating religious tensions, many individuals are facing discrimination from followers of Christian religions, particularly from Evangelicals. She said, "there is prejudice from other religions against Afro-religions. If you accuse someone of

doing Macumba [Afro-Brazilian religion that is characterized by a marked syncretism of traditional African religions, European culture, Brazilian Spiritualism, and Roman Catholicism],[54] they are accusing the person of doing black magic . . . also politicians [Evangelical] spread intolerance, which is what makes tolerance difficult. One leader who is a church leader and politician is fascist." Another participant stated, "Brazil can be very racist. They don't accept those Black religions."

Public Spheres

Finally, the last theme explored in this research is the idea of public spheres. Public spheres represent the political interactions and the challenges these communities have faced to be recognized. From being socially and politically marginalized to talking about reparations, these communities have been engaged in their communities as well as in Brazilian civil society. Again, there is a positive and a negative aspect to this theme. In the context of Brazilian racial democracy, some people rationalize the *status quo*, while others actively fight against it and try to find ways to gain recognition and legitimacy. One participant highlighted the different actions undertaken that led to positive results. Initiatives such as affirmative action have created diversity quota by integrating people of color in schools, curricula, work places, and politics. Another participant stated, "There are federal government programs that bring African culture to people and connect them to African traditions." A third said, "we have a recent law . . . that says that the schools have to teach African history and Afro-Brazilian history in their curriculum. But this law is not applied." With the work of people like Carlinhos Brown—who created an NGO that tries to get Black youth to learn music and integrate them into society—the Afro-Brazilian and Black communities as a whole have had small representations. Many of the representations have been focused in Bahia and Rio de Janeiro, which are two regions that have the most Afro-Brazilian population.

The public sphere has also been interpreted as negative through the lenses of class-consciousness and mechanical solidarity. The Afro-Brazilian communities are well aware of the political, economic, and cultural challenges, yet aspire to keep the social or common cohesions. Consequently, many issues remain the same. As one participant highlighted, "Many African

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[54] Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Macumba: Religion." Retrieved from
https://www.britannica.com/topic/Macumba.

practices are still prohibited [and] are seen as bad." Another said, "The African culture in Brazil is very well developed. It's a contradiction because [Black] people are poor and have little influence." Likewise, another participant stated, "Only Black people are trying to preserve their Afro-connections. Which tend to be in ghettos since it is only among Black people." A fourth participant spoke strongly about inequality in Brazil. She analyzed the Black movements and their humanistic agenda and continued by calling out the killing of young Black men as genocide against Black people, which has been documented by the Black movements, by "making list of names of those killed." Finally, many believed that politicians use African heritage to "gain points." A participant stated, "Lula [Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, former President of Brazil] established relationships with every African country . . . doing that had nothing to do with Black issues . . . with Black legacies." It was a political move to gain recognition and votes from the Afro-Brazilian communities.

DISCUSSION

This research has demonstrated that the Black population in Brazil has been a driving force in changing Brazil for better. Like many before them, Today's Afro-Brazilians have had to overcome the social and political inequalities built into the Brazilian system. In order for them to do that, they first had to [re]discover their identity by understanding what it meant to be an 'Afro-Brazilian.' By accepting their heritage and confronting the legacy of racism created around skin color, they have embraced and promoted their African heritage. These communities have shown the path to civic engagement and social justice. This research has also shown that Black people in Brazil have kept direct or indirect cultural attachments to their ancestors' motherlands by preserving some of the traditions and cultures brought or developed by enslaved Africans. Most importantly, they have helped shape today's national and cultural Brazilian identity.

Every theme explored in this analysis had a positive and negative side. Many participants expressed the complexity of Brazilian racial identities and manifestations of African culture. Though their country calls itself a racial democracy, Black Brazilians disagreed and highlighted the social, political, and cultural challenges that they face. This led many Afro-Brazilians to choose how they would identify themselves and how they will connect, if they choose to do so, to their African heritage. Many of the participants identified as Black, but there are many

different shades of Blackness. Some decided to hold on to their African heritages, but many had no knowledge of their heritage or culture. For many, African cultural manifestations have become a big part of Brazilian culture to the point that they are Brazilian and no longer African.

Due to the whitening policies and discriminatory initiatives promoted by the Brazilian governments, Afro-Brazilians communities were forced to create a Black identity separated from the White/Brazilian identity. This is seen through the strong African cultural heritage, which is manifested through their food, music, dance, and religious practices. Candomblé, among other religions, has emphasized this Afrocentrism that is central to the identity of many Black Brazilians. Candomblé and other African religious traditions have, in some sense, united the different religions, while creating tensions with other Christian religions such as Evangelicals. This unity allowed the different religions to be recognized and celebrated, but discrimination and marginalization came along with this recognition. Christian religions have persecuted them and pushed many of these practices in the shadow and tried to prohibit them. Dances like samba and martial arts like capoeira are also identified not only as part of a legacy of struggle that Blacks have experienced during slavery, but also as vestiges of Brazil's African roots.

This Black identity has also shaped their civic and political engagements. Authors such as Bernd Reiter explained that the Afro-Brazilians were forced to mobilize against the racial and discriminatory system that has been at the root of the Brazilian racial democracy ideology.[55] Movements such as the MNU demonstrated that the Black communities were consciousness of their position in the society and wanted to change the narratives around their skin color. Also, due to the same whitening and discriminatory system, Black people have experienced economic hardship more that the White/Brazilian communities. This has led many of them to create organizations and initiatives to better themselves and their communities. This has also strengthened their Black identity, which has been marginalized by the White/Brazilian preferential treatments.

Through this research, I have demonstrated the importance of the Black identity and how it has been utilized in order to create a sense of consciousness in Afro-Brazilian communities in Brazil. Identifying how African cultures influenced Brazilian society highlights the Afro-

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[55] Reiter, *A Genealogy of Black Organizing in Brazil*, 48-62.

Brazilian contributions to today's Brazil. Both positive and negative attachments in the different themes identified, *cultural expressions, consciousness, religion, and public spheres*, showed that Black people in Brazil have tried to better themselves and showed that Brazil would be the same without their African ancestors and societal contributions. African cultural heritages are a fundamental core in the creation of the Brazilian society. In other words, through this study the participants shed light on their cultural and social situations and what makes them hold onto these vestiges of a faraway past that is nonetheless still present in their skin color and in their racial and social identities.

CONCLUSION

This research is important because it shows the construction of the Brazilian culture and society through the lens of the most marginalized communities. Ignored and excluded for centuries, the Black Brazilians were omitted from the broader narratives of the Brazilian history. Many attempts were made to whiten Brazilian but only few attempts were made to create a more inclusive narrative of the Black influences in Brazil. Therefore, in time when Brazil is experiencing a rise of Whiteness with the 2018 presidential candidate, it is essential to acknowledge the struggles and contributions of Afro-Brazilians. Brazil is going through turmoil, which requires more work on consciousness and resistance.

This research also opens the door to analyze today's situation ins Brazil while reflecting on the past and how the government threated its minorities. Resistance has always been part of Brazil. In the 1970s and 1980s, Black movements helped changed Brazilian racial democracy philosophy, but what about today's Black communities? How do they understand their Black identity and how does it influence their behaviors? These are the questions this research addressed. Future research will have to tackle the meaning of resistance in today's society and how it will look like in the future. If presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro were to win the election, many in the Black communities might want or need to be part of the next wave of Black-consciousness movements.

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