

## **CET Brazil Social Justice, Spring 2023 | Anonymous**

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**Who are the intended audience(s) of your Perspective Piece?** "Latinx Women/Black and Brown women who want to study in Brazil."

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### **Being a Latinx Woman in Brazil: Navigating the Complexities of Race**

Before coming to Brazil, I was extremely excited to explore more of the Latin American continent, yet nervous for the interactions I would encounter throughout my study abroad journey. Studying abroad in Brazil was an incredibly valuable opportunity for me. As a Latin American myself, I wanted to learn more about my continent: its beautiful cultures, people, traditions, and history.

My family is from Latin America, specifically from El Salvador. Though I knew my Spanish-speaking skills and familiarity with Latin American culture would help me navigate my time in Brazil a little easier, I was afraid I wouldn't know how to interact with the local culture or people. Brazil is a Portuguese-speaking country with a unique history that sets it apart from the rest of the Spanish-speaking Latin American countries. Most importantly, Brazil has a different understanding of the concept of race. Meaning, someone who may be considered a Person of Color in the United States might be considered white in Brazil depending on hair texture, skin color, and other physical characteristics that distinguish people into different racial categories.

I identify as a Latinx woman of color with dark skin and brown curly hair. In the United States, people would never accurately "guess" what race or ethnicity I was— I was either Black or biracial, or Mexican or Puerto Rican, or anything and everything in between but what I actually was: Salvadorian-Salvadorian American. Considering the racial experiences I had growing up in the United States, I was a little worried about how Brazilians would perceive me and how I would be treated during my study abroad, especially as a woman. Well... I cannot speak on the experiences of Black women or Black femme-identifying people, nor can I say that living in Brazil as a Brown Latinx woman has been the most perfect experience I've had because no country is exempt from patriarchal, racist, or anti-Black constructs.

Brazil understands race through the following main racial categories: Negro, Pardo, and Branco—with Pardo being people with Black and White, or Indigenous and White ancestry. Most of the population in Brazil is racially either Black or White, but many Brazilians don't identify themselves as Black. Instead, a higher percentage of the population identifies themselves as Pardo. This is due to centuries of racism, oppression, and violence against enslaved Black people, but as many foreigners and some Brazilians believe as well, Brazil is the only place in the world where "all races can harmoniously coexist", hence the country's racial democracy. However, this cannot be further from the truth, and the concept of a racial democracy harmfully obscures deeply rooted racial inequalities and exploits the image of biracial and Black women, minimizing them to hypersexualized objects.

During my time in Brazil, I have seen and experienced how people with money and status (status beyond wealth) often discriminate against poor Black and Brown people. Here in Brazil, I am considered to be Pardo to some people, but Black to others. There have definitely been times when I've been followed in a store and when people have dismissed my presence and only addressed my white peers, which can be hard to deal with sometimes. There was even one time earlier on in my study abroad journey in Brazil when this store clerk had asked me to open my bag so she could make sure I hadn't taken anything from the store, which was a little mind-boggling to me because I had only entered the store for 5 minutes.

To preface this, I don't say these things to discourage anyone from studying abroad in Brazil, and in fact, I encourage those who would like to learn more about Latin America to come and enjoy the many wonders Brazil has to offer. I think it's incredibly important to mention my less positive experiences involving race and gender because I want Black and Brown students to understand that some of the things they may have experienced in the U.S. are some things they may also experience here. And it's important to have serious and meaningful conversations regarding the concepts of race, gender, sexuality, class, and all of the struggles that marginalized communities endure, even if it can be difficult to process. But having a strong support system and building a level of trust with your fellow peers and faculty within the program is crucial to help you process your negative experiences.

I understand that sometimes it can be difficult to share racist and misogynistic interactions one encounters with others, especially with those who may not first handily understand what it's like to be from a certain background, in fear that your concerns or feelings may be dismissed as mere "delusions". However, the faculty within the Social Justice program that I'm participating in right now has been more than wonderful with helping me and other students feel supported when facing difficult situations.

As I mentioned before, I cannot speak for the other students in my program, but at least in regard to myself and my experiences, I feel supported and heard whenever I bring up issues that impact my well-being. Beyond the people in my program, I encourage students who go through difficult experiences while studying abroad to reach out to their family and friends back home. Studying abroad in Brazil has been such an eye-opening, beautiful, and emotional journey for me, and despite some of the negative experiences I've gone through during my time here—there have been so many positive and unique learning opportunities I've had the privilege of coming across that counteract those negatives.