

Lilia Moritz Schwarcz. *Brazilian Authoritarianism: Past and Present*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022. xxii + 297 pages. Hardcover, \$29.95

Brazil is a *sui generis* nation. It is the largest country in the Western Hemisphere, with a continental dimension bordering every country in the region. Brazil is the fifth largest country in the world in terms of population, and it is an economic powerhouse in South America with the ninth-largest economy in the world. Mention Brazil, and images of the Rainforest, the Amazon, Rio's beaches, football or soccer, and the Carnival automatically come to mind. However, not everything is wonderful in paradise. Lilia Moritz Schwarcz's *Brazilian Authoritarianism: Past and Present*, provides a broader overview of Brazil's long fascination with authoritarianism and centuries of racially motivated brutality and exploitation of its poor, Blacks, and the Indigenous population. Lilia Moritz Schwarcz is a professor of anthropology at the University of São Paulo and visiting professor in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Princeton University. She is a prolific writer and scholar.

In this tour de force and must-read book, Schwarcz takes the reader on a journey over five hundred years of history. She meticulously takes the readers from Brazil's colonization to the present day, showing that Brazil's socio-inequalities have their roots in the social construction of the nation. Schwarcz also shows that eight fundamental principles in Brazil's society (Slavery and Racism, Bossism, Patrimonialism, Corruption, Social Inequality, Violence, Race and Gender, and Intolerance) are intrinsically tied to the past and contribute to Brazil's present-day vicissitudes. Schwarcz's primary objective in *Brazilian Authoritarianism: Past and Present* is to identify some of the roots of authoritarianism in Brazil, which flourishes in the present but is nonetheless intimately tied to the country's five hundred years of history (pg. 15).

As Schwarcz argues, the ideal of Brazil's historiographic is usually derived from four assumptions (pg. 11). Though widely accepted and continuously repeated; those four

assumptions are mistaken about Brazil. It does not reflect Brazil's contemporary realities. The first assumption is that Brazil is a "uniquely harmonious country, free of conflict." This first assumption is usually closely associated with the myth of Brazil as a racial democracy. The second assumption is that since Brazil is a racial democracy, it cannot have any form of hierarchy and resolves its conflict in a cordial and considerable matter. Brazil is a very hierarchical society. As the old saying goes, "for my friends everything, for my enemies the law." The Brazilian judicial system is tilted to favor those in power and with the resources, while the poor suffer what they must. The third assumption is that Brazil is a full democracy, free from racial, religious, and gender prejudices. This is the Weberian ideal type. Brazil's feckless democracy is still in the consolidation process after three decades after the military to the barracks. Brazil's democracy is still fragile. The events of January 8, 2023, in which *Bolsonaristas*, voters sympathetic to the former president Jair Bolsonaro, who did not accept the outcomes of the election, stormed the Presidential Palace, the Congress, and the Supreme Court is just one example of Brazil's democratic fragility as it attempts to consolidate. The final assumption is that Brazil is a paradise on earth. The National Geographic view of Brazil is a heaven on earth. Given its abundant natural resources, rainforests, and beauty, as the saying goes in Brazil, "God must be Brazilian." Brazil's reality does not fit the ideal type based on those four assumptions. Instead, patriarchy, bossism, violence, inequality, patrimonialism, and social intolerance influence Brazil's past and present. Schwarcz points out that they "are stubbornly present throughout the country's history and continue to resonate in the present day" (pg. 35).

Slavery and racism have been ingrained in Brazil's DNA. However, a closer examination of how slavery and racism are perpetuated in contemporary Brazil shows that Black and indigenous people disproportionately are victims of a pattern of violence. For example, the

difference between the homicide rates of white men and Black men in Brazil is horrific.

Homicide among white men hovers around 28.3 per 100,000. On the other hand, the homicide rate among Black men is an astonishing 71.7 per 100,000. In other words, “a young black man in Brazil is, on average, two and a half times more likely to be killed than a young White man” (pg. 22). Also, given the fact that Brazil’s police are considered among the most violent in the world, “62 percent of residents in cities with populations greater than a hundred thousand fear abuse at the hands of the police” (pg. 139).

Brazil’s colonial slavery roots and institutionalization of racism with the proclamation of the Republic also contribute to the social inequalities affecting Brazil today. As Schwarcz points out, “inequality is so deeply ingrained in Brazil that it appears under various guises: economic and income inequality, inequality of opportunity, racial inequality, regional inequality, gender inequality, age inequality, and social inequality, which appears in different levels of access to healthcare, education, housing, transportation, and leisure activities” (pg. 111). This discrimination and social inequality pattern are also directly tied to Brazil’s poor education system. Education is one of the primary engines of social mobility, and in Brazil, education is an area of investment the government does not prioritize. Yet, as we know, especially within Western societies, “there is no possibility of social change without access to formal schooling, with social classes otherwise acting like static castes deprived of the capacity to break poverty cycles passed down through the generations” (pg. 18).

One of Brazil’s historical social inequalities still significantly affecting the nation today is women’s rights. As Schwarcz has succinctly pointed out, “the more authoritarian a political regime is, the greater is the tendency to intensify attempts at exercising control over sexualities, bodies, and diversity itself” (pg. 185). Deeply concerning in this regard is Brazil’s high rate of

femicide. Femicide, as Schwarcz defines it, is “the killing of a woman for the simple reason that she is a woman” (pg. 173). Brazil’s society is traditionally Catholic and conservative. Therefore, the concept of *Marianismo* is very influential in females’ roles within Brazilian society.

Marianismo is the view that Brazil’s females were created in the image of the Virgin Mary; therefore, they should be docile, obedient, and the caretakers of the family. They have two forms of behaviors: one for the public and one for the private. Females are also treated as second-class citizens. Therefore, the impunity toward males who assassinate their companions is highly tolerable in Brazil.

For this reason, the number of femicides in Brazil is extremely high. According to available data for 2013 and 2017, in 2013, the rate of femicide was 4.8 for every 100,000 women, and in 2017 it was 4.3 per 100.000. Those statistics translate into one woman being killed every two hours in Brazil (pg. 176). Furthermore, the number of Black females killed is even more staggering than White females. “The number of Black females murdered from 2003 to 2012 grew by 54 percent, from 1,864 cases to 2,875” (pg. 176).

Another important issue Schwarcz discusses is corruption. Corruption is not a novel concept in Brazil. It can be argued that corruption arrived in Brazil in 1808 when “Dom João stepped off his ship in Rio de Janeiro, he received a generous gift from a local slave trafficker: the best house in the city, situated on a handsome and impressive lot of land” (pg. 81). This so-called gift allowed Elias Antônio Lopes “an entry into the world of privileges constituted by the royal court” (Ibid.). Corruption destroys the social fabric of society. It undermines a society’s judicial system. It gives the powerful and well-to-do an advantage over the have-nots. It destroys a country’s reputation internationally. Investors are afraid to invest in a country without enforcing the rule of law. The Brazilian economy losses “from 1 to 4 percent of its gross

domestic product, or more than R\$30 billion, annually to corruption” (pg. 107). Brazilian Supreme Court Justice Luis Roberto Barroso said that “corruption is a violent crime practiced by dangerous individuals...Corruption kills those waiting in line at public hospitals due to a lack of beds...of medication, on roads that are not safe to travel” (pg. 107). Two singular factors explain Brazil’s persistence of corruption: a lack of security audits and, like most of the world, a lack of transparency, contributing to the government’s malfeasance (pg. 107).

As Schwarcz points out in her book, Brazil’s challenges are enormous. Yet, they are not new challenges. On the contrary, those challenges are deeply entrenched in Brazil’s history or what anthropologist Manoel Bomfim called “*males de origem*.” However, those challenges are not excuses for despair and complicity. Instead, Brazil and its government officials must do everything within their reach to change this scenario of impunity, criminality, and patrimonialism that has long characterized Brazil.

Brazil has been described as the nation of the future. Well, the future is here. “Memory is both a cultural product and a practice that inscribes itself on the body [politics] and is passed on as tradition” (pg. 201). Those traditions of Slavery and Racism, Bossism, Patrimonialism, Corruption, Social Inequality, Violence, Race and Gender, and Intolerance are old and outdated for Western and civilized democracies. It is time for Brazil to face the challenges that have long plagued its international image. It is not an easy job. However, Brazil is a competent nation with the human resources to do so. In the final analysis, “it will be necessary to incentivize civic-minded diversity; to combat inequality and social, cultural, and religious intolerance; to expand projects in the area of education and healthcare; to make firm commitments to the shoring up of institutions; to push back against government conduct that attacks and threatens democracy; and to demand constitutional guarantee” (pg. 212).

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