



**BRAZIL:** Brazil is the largest country in Latin America. With a population over 208 million, it is the sixth largest country in the world. Brazil is recognized as a rising global player. However, its status has been compromised due to a recent economic downturn and the exposure of widespread political corruption.

**SOCIAL CONTEXT:** Brazil is a racially diverse country that often celebrates its “mestizo” citizens and Afro-Brazilian culture. Population, breakdown by race:

- 47.73% White
- 43.13% Mixed race
- 7.61% Black
- 1.09% Asian

However, it is one of the most economically unequal countries in the world:

- Top 10% of population earns 50% of national income
- 8.5% all people live below poverty line

Brazil is plagued by prejudice and racism that fosters racialized class stratification. This racialized segregation is most evident by examining the nation’s favelas and prisons, which are disproportionately black.

# TEATRO EM COMUNIDADES: Exploring arts empowerment in Rio de Janeiro

Poster presentation by Mary Naoum, University of Michigan School of Social Work

## IMMERSE

**OVERVIEW:** For the past six years, I have facilitated arts workshops in prisons and youth detention centers as a member of the Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP). Through this work and my graduate studies, I have learned extensively about the racialized inequities that exist in U.S. policy and institutions. Recognizing that anti-blackness exist across the globe, I wanted to see how racialized injustice manifests in other parts of the world.

Theatre arts empowerment is rooted in the pedagogy of Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal, two famous Brazilian activist educators. I also wanted to see how “Theatre of the Oppressed” is incorporated into Brazilian theatre education today.

**OUTCOMES:** Over two weeks, I attended various theatre workshops, including:

- Bangu Penitentiary Complex (prison)
- Women’s “semi-prison”
- Complexo do Maré (favela)
- Hospital, elderly home unit
- Forum Theatre with Cecilia Boal

**COMMUNITY PARTNER:** My global field experience was with the Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro (UniRio). At UniRio, I shadowed professors and students in the theatre department. Many theatre students choose to facilitate theatre workshops in favelas, hospitals, or prisons.

## CONNECT

### CLASSROOM:

- **PUBPOL 717: Social Activism**

This course helped me develop a framework for understanding racialized global inequality and how it can manifest in a domestic or international context.

- **PUBPOL 600: Directed Reading**

To better understand race and class inequality in Brazil, I read *Born in Blood & Fire: A Concise History of Latin America* (Chasteen, 2006), *Theatre of the Oppressed* (Boal, 1985), *Favela: Four Decades of Living on the Edge in Rio de Janeiro* (Perlman, 2010), and *Black Women Against the Land Grab: The Fight for Racial Justice in Brazil* (Perry, 2013). I also read articles about the current social and political state of Rio de Janeiro and Brazil more generally.

### SKILLS REFINED:

- Navigating “limit” situations
- Acting with cultural humility
- Facilitating theatre workshops
- Incorporating safe physical touch into group therapeutic practices

## GROW

### LESSONS LEARNED:

- Systemic racism and classism are omnipresent in other formerly colonized nations
- Physical touch and play can be powerful healing and group-building tools

### ADVICE:

- Learn the language!
- Read about the country’s current events before traveling



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