

Habeeb Akande (2016), *Illuminating the Blackness: Blacks and African Muslims in Brazil*, Rabaah Publishers, England. 287pp. (ISBN 978-0-957485-2-8). Paperback

Shanon Habeeb

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For centuries, the concept of race in Brazil is something that has shaped the society, culture, politics and identity of the country. For many of us, our understanding of Brazil is something we have gathered from imagery and media depictions of the country. Carnival, football, capoeira, are perhaps the first things we associate with the country. The image of Brazil as a 'racial democracy,' however, is perhaps far from reality, with many members of the Afro-Brazilian community still disadvantaged and marginalised in Brazilian society today.

Habeeb Akande's book pieces together a historical account of Brazil's race-relations and the African-Muslim heritage of the country. The book provides readers with an understanding of the origins, concepts and ideologies that have contributed to the Brazilian ideas of race and the significance of skin colour in contemporary Brazil. References are made throughout the book about the significance of Islam within Brazil; from the African Muslims who had first entered Brazil prior to the Portuguese conquests, to the large populations taken from the African continent as slaves during the period of Portuguese colonisation. The book is split into two main sections, the first looking further at 'Race-relations in Brazil,' whilst the second section considers 'Brazil's African Muslim Heritage.' The two sections certainly inform readers of underlying parallels and connections between the "modern day struggle against anti-black racism" (Akande, 2016: 1), and the courageous legacy and heritage which remains from "African Muslim warriors who valiantly fought for the freedom" (ibid, 1). Akande's overall argument reinforces that in order for us to understand modern day Brazil's race relations, it is "important to gain an understanding of its early history during which indigenous and black Africans were enslaved by the Portuguese" (ibid, 2).

Looking at the first section of the book on race relations, Akande provides a chronology of how race and colour have been constructed over time and uses contemporary examples linked to black beauty and affirmative action in Brazil to demonstrate this. Akande draws upon thinkers who have been influential to the understanding of race in Brazil; people like Arthur de Gobineau, Nina Rodrigues, Silvio

Romero, and Gilberto Freyre are just some of the examples that Akande refers to within this race debate. Akande notes ideologies linked to miscegenation and whitening as something that has been central to the Brazilian understanding of race and colour over many centuries up to the current day. The concept of miscegenation (*miscigenação*) dates back to the first Portuguese conquests of Brazil and had become popular during this time. This is certainly linked to the fact that there was an “absence of Portuguese women in Brazil” (ibid, 75), which led to Portuguese men having sexual relations with black and indigenous women in Brazil. These women were “desired for the sensuality but were not considered suitable wives” (ibid, 75). Akande looks further at how these historical relations had shaped the contemporary attitudes towards coloured women in Brazil and makes reference to a popular saying which is still used to categorise women today: “*branca para se casar. Mulata para fornicar. Preta para cozinhar*” (white women for marriage mulattos for fornication and black women to cook) (ibid, 75). Using contemporary examples of interracial marriage and media representations of women, Akande is able to demonstrate and highlight how these ideologies still remain in Brazilian society and has impacted the ideals of women and beauty in Brazil. The history of *miscigenação* within this book also allows readers to identify the values and ideologies behind the objectification of black and coloured women in Brazil and the prejudices they still face within society.

The second half of the book reflects upon historical struggles and prejudices against African Muslims. One of the standout chapters in this section (Chapter 5) focuses on slave revolts. Akande interestingly makes comparisons of historical slave uprisings, focusing on the Zanj Revolt, which took place during the ninth century in the Middle East, and the 1835 Malê revolt which took place in the Northeastern region of Brazil in Bahia. Despite the two uprisings being different in regards to time period and locations, both revolts were led by African Muslim slaves who had been “motivated by racial discrimination [and used] religion as a motivational factor” (ibid, 207). Despite the Zanj slave masters being of Arab descent and the slave masters in Brazil being white, a parallel which Akande identifies in both uprisings is the fight against power and white supremacy. An issue which is still prevalent in today’s world across many societies, it certainly highlights why these revolts are still investigated and acknowledged by many today. Both the Zanj and Malê groups were descendants from Africa and were selected by slave masters and colonisers who “believed in the doctrine of ‘scientific’ racism” (ibid, 211), and the notion that black Africans were ‘inferior’ to Arabs and whites.

Akande expands further on the treatment of black Africans in this context and shows how scientific racism justified the sub-human treatment of slaves. By exploring and explaining scientific racism in this section, Akande provides a clear understanding of how and why racial discrimination is still an issue that remains problematic today.

Hierarchies in multi-cultural and multi-racial societies today still discriminate against various ethnic minority groups, and this section on the revolts and treatment of slaves in Brazil ultimately highlights how racial power relations have been reproduced and justified by various elite groups. By using the examples of the Zanj and Malê revolts, Akande is able to show how and why these revolts still remain influential for many anti-racism campaigns and organisations for both Muslims and non-Muslims. The historical analysis of these revolts also enables readers to learn and understand the processes and events that have helped change and transform society in regards to rights and racism. The section overall provides a good historical account of various figures and events which still have relevance to the struggles and issues which Brazil and various other regions of the world are still facing in regards to racial treatment and profiling.

To conclude, this book certainly provides a sound contribution towards understanding Brazil's race relations and how historical processes and events have managed to shape prejudice, oppression and discrimination that are still prevalent against the brown and black populations in Brazil. Akande also shows how Islam has been a religion which has been influential in helping people unite and form alliances against struggles and oppression both historically as well as in contemporary society in Brazil. And finally, looking to international influences throughout the book – including figures such as Malcom X as well as former Yoruba slaves and Muslim intellectuals from Africa and the Middle East – readers are able to better understand Brazil's cultural connections to other parts of the world.