

## **The Reorientation of Fairness in Higher Education**

### **A BRIEF LOOK INTO THE BRAZILIAN QUOTA-SYSTEM AND SOCIAL AND ETHNIC INCLUSION IN ART SCHOOLS IN SWEDEN.**

*Cecilia Torquato, University of Gothenburg*

#### Abstract

What is just and what is unjust when it comes to admissions in higher education?

Merit is most commonly the base of the selection criteria for universities in western societies, relying on grades, tests or work samples (most common in art schools). In this paper I will question the ideal of fairness connected to the idea of merit. What is merit, who defines the agenda for the measurements of merit and what are we *de facto* measuring? A fair idea and ideal can become unfair when disseminated through an unequal system. Considering the University as a place for development of knowledge, of individuals, theories and praxis; is the most merited automatically the most capable? When it comes to selection, more specifically for the art school, should we be looking for who is coming in or for what could come out after years of studies? I will depart from the Brazilian experience with quota system and its outcomes after a period of ten years and relate it to my experience as an educator in a Swedish art school, where admission arrangements are based on work samples and interviews – and the students remain white and from the middle class<sup>1</sup>.

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#### **I. Introduction and background**

##### **THE BRAZILIAN QUOTA SYSTEM AND WHAT IT HAS TO DO WITH SWEDISH ART SCHOOLS**

In 2012, the former Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff signed the "Law of Social Quotas"<sup>2</sup>, a law that required the public universities in Brazil to reserve half of their admission spots for students who attended a Brazilian public school for the whole of their high school years. The intention was to promote the access of blacks, indigenous descendants and people with low income to higher education in an attempt to give underprivileged and historically excluded groups access to qualitative and free higher education.

The University in Rio de Janeiro implemented the quota system earlier, in 2003 and two other universities – both state and federally funded – implemented the system 2004 and 2005, which made them pilot universities.

From its implementation, the law has been hardly criticized by the Brazilian elite – but it has proved to be very efficient to tackle inequality in higher education, and quota-students have been reaching good results. Different studies and statistics<sup>3</sup> have shown that there are fewer dropouts

among students admitted through quotas then among the other students. It has also proved that even if the quota-students' scores are lower in the beginning of the courses; they level with the non-quota students or excel them from the middle to the end of the course. Most difficulties from quota-students have been shown in courses where a good basis for mathematics is demanded (engineering) and expensive and prestigious courses, where quota-students find it difficult to buy the instruments they need (medics). Quota-students who get scholarship also get better results than those with no economical support of any kind.

Public universities in Brazil are free of charge and up to now classified as the most qualitative in the country. The system of admissions for higher education is based on an entrance exam – so before the Law of quotas, only those who scored best got admitted; mainly rich or middle class white students whose parents could afford to pay for private education before university. In a country where the biggest part of the population is poor, where blacks and indigenous people have inherited poverty from slavery and white exploitation, and where public secondary schools and public high schools are poorly resourced and lacks quality, it became extremely unfair. It was a perverted system that privileged the already privileged – and kept status quo under the flag of meritocracy. Talented and skilled blacks, indigenous and people with low income, even though they managed to pass high school, couldn't afford to pay for their tuition in private universities, nor enter the public (tuition free) ones. The affirmative action policy in Brazil can be seen as the result of the struggle of the black movements to correct an unjust system. Its implementation was an effort from the left-wing government in Brazil 2003-2014 to correct the fact that white students with high income, whose parents had money to send them to private schools, occupied all vacancies at public tuition free universities in Brazil.

What do all this have to do with Europe, more specifically with Swedish art schools? Why should we look at this particular case (even though it concerns millions of people) in this particular country? I am interested in looking at the notions of diversity in the white middle class culture I am immersed in, as a teacher in a Swedish art school – and also as a practitioner working with film. This white culture is struggling with diversity, with government demands of programs to promote diversity among students<sup>4</sup> and I see its efforts to implement projects of inclusion in school and after school; projects that might have been ineffective until these days<sup>5</sup> – and as I see it, exclusive, since they don't seem to be getting to the root of the problems. I am not seeing an effort to invite the groups whom it may concern the most to the discussions<sup>6</sup>. What kind of change can we expect without radically changing the rules for admission in art schools? Can the Brazilian model offer a different angle to the subject?

I am a filmmaker and an artist and I have been teaching at an art school in Sweden for the last five years, mostly in the master program. The school I work at, more specifically the department I work within – film – had changed a lot within a few years with some concrete action to reach for students with a foreign background. Holding courses in the segregated periphery of the city where actors and film students work together, starting an exchange program with a film school in Johannesburg, and paying attention to the collegiums own values (what could be interfering) during the selection for the school. So it is a different scenario today then for only four years ago, when the film department admitted its first black student ever. That student had a completely different scenario in the school to tackle, compared to the black students of today; this student struggled a lot with the all-white environment she found herself immersed in.

My motives to write this is that I want to understand the dynamics of exclusion in the cultural sector in Sweden, not only in school, but also after school. I think that changing school might

change what comes after school in the long run. Because it will not be possible to keep the same mechanisms of exclusion as they are today. More non-white students and students with other background in the art academy of today might revolutionize what art is and give us different kinds of collegiums and decision-makers in the future.

I was one of the first film students with a different background than Swedish when I was a bachelor. I remember some exoticizing words during my education concerning my work. Words like “when I first read your script I thought of an exotic film, but your film could have been shot in any big city in the world!”. There was nothing “exotic” in my script, and nothing in the script that differed from the film itself when it was done. The exoticness must have been in the head of the professor who read it. I took those kind of words as a concrete proof that my feeling of being exoticized every time I came up with an idea – even though this idea would carry universal problematics within it – was not only a diffuse feeling, but a reality. Like when my class met producers at the end of the course and all of them asked me if I could make a film about growing up or living in the segregated periphery. Of course I could, if I have had this interest, but I did not grow up there and I never lived there. None of my fellow students got the same kind of question. They just assumed I grew up there; Sweden is a very segregated country.

I have met this a lot of times after school as well. Being expected to produce things concerning the “problematic of being non-white”, according to the white idea of what it is, to have another background.

Can it be that non-white students (and filmmakers, and artists) are welcome to the warm bosom of the culture spheres only when dealing with things the white culture had decided they should work with? The Swedish artist Makude Linde tells the story<sup>7</sup> about how he applied to the art school seven times before he eventually got in. And he got in first when he decided to use “being black” and “racism” as theme for his work, being refused all the times before that.

## ADMISSIONS IN SWEDISH ART SCHOOLS

Admissions for the art schools in Sweden are made based on work samples, texts and interviews, depending on the number of applicants in relation to vacancies. How can teachers and admission jury members, immersed in a culture that sees some outcomes as qualitative and other outcomes as non-qualitative, based on a white middle class perspective, identify the qualities of what is different? If the world-view and outcome from the applicant is based on an embodied experience that radically differs from the experience of the ones making the selection, what kind of strategies and admission criteria do we need to develop to identify those qualities? Will this ever be possible, or is another kind of openness in processes of selection what is really going to make a difference?

Sweden is the country in Europe where inequality in income and the number of socially segregated schools is increasing the most<sup>8</sup>. Even though the intention of The Bologna Declaration<sup>9</sup> might have been to approximate critical thinking and contextual studies to studio practice, is this what is actually happening? Or are the demands of art theory growing in detriment of handcrafts and artistic practice, making the art school even more elitist and unreachable for students with artistic talent but with poor reading skills, coming from a background where the European white middle class rhetorics of art never reaches?

I was born in Sweden but grew up in Brazil. My mother is Swedish and my father Brazilian. In Brazil I am a white privileged person, in Sweden I have the experience of being met as a non-white person, with the expectations (and non-expectations) that follows. However, I am aware of the fact that the color of my skin is white, that my parents have a higher education degree, that I went to great schools and I am a teacher at the Second Cycle of a prestigious art academy in Sweden. I am aware of my privileged position even in this country, besides the feeling of 'going the wrong way in the crowd'<sup>10</sup> when it comes to the Institutional and academic life. This feeling might come from my divided experience of growing up with two completely different cultures and the effort, on a daily basis, to try to put together pieces of these conflicting experiences. In this article I will use this split position to reach for an understanding when it comes to definitions of privilege and exclusion in relation to education and try to formulate a proposal that might be an embryo for a pilot project to broaden recruitment into the art school.

## II. Definitions and some reasoning

### MERITOCRACY AND WHAT'S FAIR

In the article "Affirmative Politics and The List Experiment: The Quota System in The Brazilian University"<sup>11</sup> the authors Mathieu Turgeon, Bruno Sant'Anna Chaves and William Washington Wives narrates how they tested different questioning methods to collect opinions about the quota system implemented in Brazil. Their hypothesis was that whites and wealthy students might hide their real opinion about it in the open questions, in order to avoid the embarrassment of being seen as racist, and to project a favorable image to others. This is called *social desirability bias* – in open questions people tend to answer based on what is socially acceptable. Furthermore, the authors discuss the fact that questions concerning affirmative politics are sensitive and variable to social influence, so they adopted a methodology based on lists that guaranteed privacy to the respondents, to get more accurate answers regarding the quota system. The survey was applied to quota students (blacks, mixed-race, indigenous and low income students), as well as to white middle class students at UNB, one of the first universities in Brazil to implement the system. The results surprised them.

When they applied indirect questioning, 47,9% was favorable to the quota system, but in the open survey, only 27,4% approved it. The authors were expecting a variation, but in the opposite way.

They discovered that the differing factor was not relying on the white wealthy students. Those were openly against the quota system, with a 26,8% of disapproval. The quota students, on the other hand, on a private situation approved the quota system with 68,3%, but in the open survey only 29% declared that they were favorable to the system. It is a huge variation (39,3%). How come? Considering the fact that the quota students were in an environment with a white majority, the authors decided to call this variation for

*The Inhibition Effect*. They speculate and formulate different theories about why the quota-students responded so differently. I will not list their theories, but pick the common factor I see in all of them. As I see, all their theories converge in the fact that quota systems are considered unfair; this sense of *unfairness* is based on the conviction that merit is the most just and democratic decision factor when it comes to admissions.

In the western world we have this idea and ideal that merit should always lead to a reward. If you are good enough, you will get where you want. *And may the best man win.*

Who doesn't want to be the best? And who would like to identify themselves as the 'less qualified' in a group – the 'lucky one' who got a place without merit? But what happens when, besides the merit you have, and besides how much you struggle, you never, ever get rewarded? Are you just not good enough, are you not putting enough effort to what you want to achieve or are you hopelessly outside the system because this system is not as democratic and "based on merit" as we believe it is?

The American sociologist and world-systems analyst Immanuel Wallerstein argues that in praxis, there are not much difference between aristocracy and meritocracy. In his view, although liberals are more present-oriented, the concept of aristocracy is not opposed to liberals *per se*, since 'aristocrats are persons defined by certain external signs of status, derived from past achievements of an ancestor, of titles which accord privileges'<sup>12</sup>.

Wallerstein argues that in theory, the liberal is concerned with the achievement of the current individual, with those who have proved that they are the most competent, but in praxis we can see this idea of merit – meritocracy – as what is defining the legitimation of social hierarchy.

Meritocracy, unlike nobility, is presented as an egalitarian concept because formally it can be made open to everyone to take the tests that accord or define merit. One presumably does not inherit merit. But of course one inherits the advantages that improve considerably the possibility for a child to acquire the skills that are tested. And this being the fact, the results are never really egalitarian, which is the recurrent complaint of those who do poorly in the formal testing, and the allocation of position and status that are its consequence. These then are the complaints both of the democrats and of the 'minorities', meaning by 'minority' here any group (whatever its size), which has been persistently, and historically, treated as a socially inferior group and which is presently at the lower end of the social hierarchy.

*Wallerstein, Immanuel - Liberalism and Democracy- Freres Ennemis? (p. 7)<sup>13</sup>*

The white wealthy students from the survey experiment did not have any problem to declare they were against the quota system because they might not have perceived this as an expression of racism. They might believe they considered the matter under the optic of justice. Knowing that, the quota students couldn't openly defend the system that is helping them to get similar opportunities that are (unfairly) always being given to their white wealthy colleagues. How could they openly defend what is, by the majority in the white context of the Institution, being seen as unfair?

The unfairness of being born to a gender, a skin color, to poverty or having a condition that is always putting you in disadvantage in comparison to the attributes of the economic and social upper classes, or to those in power, is hidden in the discourse and praxis of the modern society.

The post-1945 ascension of the United States to hegemony in the world-system made it ideologically untenable for the United States to maintain formal segregation (...). Ethnicity still needed to be buoyed up by racism, but racism now had to take on a subtler face. Racism took refuge in its seeming opposite, universalism and the derived concept of meritocracy. It is in the debates of the last 20 years that we find this latest contribution of Americanness. Given an ethnic hierarchization, an

examination system inevitably favors disproportionately upper ethnic strata. The extra added plus is that a meritocratic system justifies racist attitudes without the need to verbalize them. Those ethnic strata who perform more poorly do so because they are racially inferior. The evidence seems to be statistical, hence 'scientific'.  
*Aníbal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein - Americanness as a concept, or the Americas in the modern world-system. Seminal essay.*<sup>14</sup>

The interesting thing when results of an exam or test are evidence of qualification is that this proof relies on what is being questioned, solely. Now let's think differently: is the one with the best results *the most capable*?

Let's compare a person 'A', middle class with parents with high-education, living in a home full of books and that always went to good schools. 'A' is not so fond of studying, but is applying for a law university because A's father is a lawyer. 'T' grew up in a low-income family, living in a low-income neighborhood. When 'T' comes back from school, 'T' has to help to take care of younger brothers and sisters. They are four kids. 'T's' mother works as a housekeeper and they barely have any books at home, but 'T' loves to read and have quite good grades at school – even though, the school is not so good. 'A' and 'T' passes the exam to enter university. From the total of 100 points, 'A' made 73 and 'T' made 68. To enter the course, it was needed 70 points. Is 'A' the most merited?

Now imagine a system based on grades to enter the university. 'A' went to a very nice (and expensive) school, to pass the tests and get good grades the pupils have to study a lot. 'A' does not have good grades, but passes school. 'T' went to a school with bad reputation; it is a public school with barely any funds. T's grades are really good, but it is not so hard to pass in that school. 'T's' good grades are the guarantee for a place in the university, 'A's' bad grades do not. Is 'T' the most merited?

Grades and test results do not exist in a vacuum. The question about who has most merit and most capacity is hard to answer. It might be easier to see who is making the greatest effort, but sometimes, having access to books and having been exposed to an intellectual environment can give a person confidence and knowledge enough to make this person a great student and professional without putting a lot of effort to it. So merit and capacity might not be the central question, but what about the access to education and jobs? Do we live in an egalitarian system that guarantees the same access to all persons regardless of economical, ethnical and social background? How attainable (and fair) is it in the society you live, to get an education, a job, or funds for an art project after school?

## THE ART SCHOOL AND SUITABILITY TO THE FIELD

What happens when the admissions for higher education are not based on an entrance exam, but on art samples and the decision of a jury? Marta Edling, Swedish Professor of Art Theory, published in 2012 a studie on Art Schools in Sweden<sup>15</sup>. In her paper she presents the process for admission of the most prestigious art schools in the country, as well as their subject description, and relate them to the art field after school. She compares the admission procedures in an art school to selection processes in the professional field of art, where artists have to submit samples to participate in exhibitions, or apply for scholarships. According to Edling it is the artistic suitability; 'the artistic talent' is crucial for the applicant to be selected to the most distinguished institutions of art education in Sweden. For this reason, the admission is mostly based on an assessment of artistic work samples; the applicants have to

show, through their work and a letter of intent, that they will have the ability to make good use of the education they will get. So even if they don't have basic qualifications for high-education (good grades at college, which is required for other courses), the school can concede dispensation of those requirements. Since grades are not the merit, but the 'artistic quality' of the applicants works samples, this could in theory be a fair process. Students with low income and with different backgrounds should have the same chances as anybody else to get into art schools. Still, the students remain white and middle class.

The latest official survey<sup>16</sup> about higher-education made in Sweden, regarding background of the students, has shown that Art Schools have one of the lowest proportion of university beginners with foreign background<sup>17</sup> among all the faculties. When it comes to class, a report published by The Swedish Arts Grants Committee in 2017<sup>18</sup>, made on behalf of the government, showed that social background seems to influence who becomes artists. In the survey (that describes the development of artists' income over a period of 10 years, from 2004-2014), almost half of the artists – 47 percent – have parents where at least one person has post-secondary education. In the rest of the population in Sweden, this number is 24 percent, which may indicate that becoming an artist is a matter of class.

According to The Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) there is much in common in the prerequisites for the recruitment work of the most prestigious artistic high schools (for all subjects) in Sweden. *'The similarities include the very limited number of places of education and, in general, the very high number of applicants. It is also common for recruitment to take place through local admission with artistic admission. Of particular importance is that the admission requirements are so high that in practice it is usually required that the applicants have completed preparatory education at university level'*<sup>19</sup>. The conclusion in the document is that this can be an explanation to the fact that all artistic colleges have the dominance of applicants with highly educated parents, and/or with high socio-economic backgrounds.

Marta Edling also points out that, although the schools seem to avoid the word *talent* in the application instructions and education descriptions, the admission process and the education cycle seem to rely on the idea of the modern artist as a 'genius'. The concept was originally formulated by Kant and, according to Edling, he says that art cannot be learned, because art follows no rules, and thus cannot be imitated: 'The young genius develops gaining insight into his or her own potential, in the encounter with a more mature artist'<sup>20</sup>. Based on the analyses of the Education Descriptions, Marta points out that the schools seem to have the purpose of assisting the student in the work of creating a kind of *Self* that also helps them to deal with the existing requirements from the field of art.

Back to Wallerstein and the idea of merit – and talent – in the hands of the upper classes.

It should come as no surprise that a key locus of political struggle is the rules of the educational game, defined in its broadest sense. For now we come back to the state. While it is true the state is increasingly barred from awarding pastness, encrusting privilege and legitimating rent (...) the state is by no means out of the picture. Instead of awarding pastness through honorifics, the state can award presentness through meritocracy. Finally, in our professional, salaried, nonpropertied bourgeoisies we can have 'careers open to talent', providing we remember that, since there is too much talent around, someone must decide who is talented and who is not. And this decision, when it is made among narrow ranges of difference, is a political decision.

*The BOURGEOIS(IE) AS CONCEPT AND REALITY- Immanuel Wallerstein<sup>21</sup>*  
(*Race nation class, 1991*) p.150-151

What is not said in Edlings study is that enclosed to the art samples, there are the applicants name, age, and most often their curriculum vitae. Work samples are not sent in with pseudonyms, and most commonly you can get the information if they went to preparatory schools. I have not found studies that show how this information is handled and/or how it influences the decision making of who gets selected to the art school. By law, the admissions board should not grant preferential treatment to any individual or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity or national origin, and there are rules about how to avoid nepotism. Despite this, the attached names and curriculum could in theory influence the choice about who gets into the schools, and this could favor both exclusion (favoritism, nepotism) or inclusion (choosing students according to race or gender to get a more equal class), since the effort to increase diversity through a broader recruitment is written in the law<sup>22</sup>, and most art schools declares their interest to do so<sup>23</sup>. Until now though, statistics has pointed that students with foreign background or working class background are significantly underrepresented at higher level of arts education<sup>24</sup>.

When it comes to admission processes based on art samples, it is crucial and relevant to discuss who is making the selection and how aware those individuals are about their own homogeneity. In many processes of admission what is being seen as qualitative can be a matter of taste. We can also question who is setting the agenda for education and art, what is the discursive practice in the field and who is gaining with the reinforcement of a kind of practice that new students, with a different background, could hypothetically also question and subvert. **The discussion I want to bring up is about awareness.** It's about knowing that white bodies transiting the same kind of rooms, having the same kind of discursive practices and at some extent agreeing about the description of the world, also have a tendency to agree on what 'quality' is. And just quality is one of those terms really hard to define. Artist and filmmakers with a different background than white middleclass had sometimes described the difficulties of getting in to art schools or get funds from art institutions when trying to do something that is not related to the color of their skins or to their background<sup>25</sup>. This could mean "being accepted" into a white institution only if dealing with issues related to "otherness" in a way that fits the white idea of "otherness".

In an interview in the newspaper DN<sup>26</sup> about diversity in Art Schools, Marta Edling points out that schools can claim they are working with diversity and even show good numbers, but an in-depth discussion about the means of diversity and about the contents in art is necessary.

'The admission process is said to be 'blind', but the fact that the group entering the schools is so homogeneous says everything about class and background; about who dares to apply and what kind of art is prized. If we really want another kind of education with different kinds of students, we should seriously ask: are we ready for another kind of art?'

An argument that art schools has brought up about the homogeneity of their student groups is the fact that there are a limited number of applicants with a different background than white middle class applying to the courses they hold<sup>27</sup>. The organization People's Movements for Art Promotion (Konstfrämjandet) published a study (2015)<sup>28</sup> where we can read testimonials from young people living in economic vulnerable areas and with foreign background. The study aimed to understand how young people coming from those areas relate to the established art field. Some of them describe art as something distant and not reachable, as something they could not relate to. 'There is a lot of art being done ABOUT you, but not by someone LIKE YOU'<sup>29</sup>. The study also pointed out that financial vulnerability could be an explanation to why

they not even apply to the course. Art is expensive to produce and is mostly not considered as an alternative, since you cannot 'earn money on it', as some of them declares. Most art schools are making an effort to implement summer courses in economic vulnerable areas and arranging some activities together with their local cultural organizations, which can make some difference in the long run.

## EXPERIMENTING AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Affirmative action can be described as the policy of favoring persons in a disadvantaged group to correct historical and structural discrimination, racism and economical and historical inequalities. The term was first used in USA connected to the 1960's Civil Rights Movement, and 'intended to provide equal opportunities for members of minority groups and women in education and employment.'<sup>30</sup> To fully understand the necessity of implementing such politics, it is also important to understand the context of where it is being applied – and what it is aiming to change.

Affirmative action meets great resistance, mostly among those who detains privilege, and with an embodied experience far from those whom the action is supposed to support. It is a controversial subject, and several consider it to be a violation of the law (the claim is that it favors one person to the detriment of someone else). In Sweden affirmative action at university have been applied to equal gender gaps between the years of 2003-2010. The aim was to equal the number of men and women at school; it was not gender specific, in theory it could favor both female and males. The thing is – it ended up favoring mostly males<sup>31</sup>.

The Admissions for most programs in Sweden are based on grades. For medicine, dentistry and psychology, for example, with a large number of female applicants, high grades are demanded. Women were working hard to get the demanded grades, but because of the clause, the priority was being given to men. On the other hand, programs dominated by men, which demanded lower grades, kept the same, since the women were not even applying. In 2010 the supreme court decided that affirmative action in university applications is not compatible with Swedish law, so universities are not allowed to have gender quotas or ethnic quotas, as that would count as discrimination. This praxis also applies to art schools where grades do not play any active role. The jury ought not to take gender, color, sexual preference etc. into consideration in their work with the admissions.

In the United States affirmative policies were introduced to universities in the 1970s; Brazil started as late as in 2001. In Brazil, radical actions to really educate the most disadvantaged part of the population has been done in two governments. Both times, the sitting president have been removed from charge a couple of years later. The first time was in 1964, with a military coup, when Paulo Freire's method to literate alphabetic adults<sup>32</sup> was systematized by the left-winged government and applied in the whole country two years earlier<sup>33</sup> (the president João Goulart was removed from charge by the coup). The second time happened recently, when the quota system got approved by the Federal Supreme Court.

The discussions about the quota system in Brazil draw my attention during the precedent year of the impeachment of the president Dilma Rousseff (2016) in Brazil, the one who signed the *Law of Social Quotas* back in 2012. The white middle class was furious, but what the access to education of the lower classes since the implementation of social and educational programs in the early 2000 has made was striking. During the years of military dictatorship, a quarter of

Brazilians was illiterate. It was first when it ended, and with the promulgation of the new constitution in 1988 that education got described as a “right” and the Brazilians were guaranteed the right to free primary and secondary education. Despite the protests of the white middle class and the upper classes in Brazil, the Federal Supreme Court in 2012 unanimously decided that affirmative actions are constitutional<sup>34</sup> and essential policies for reducing existing inequalities and discrimination in the country. A few years later the president were removed from office and in the last two years the liberal politicians that took over have ended social programs, have been underfinancing universities and are now starting a privatization process among public universities.

In October 2017 I went to Brazil to make some interviews about the quota system, trying to understand what kind of methods the teachers applied or developed to meet the needs of the new profile of students in their classes. In some way, this reminded me of Sweden, where homogeneous groups suddenly were composed by individuals with very different educational backgrounds (due to immigration), but still with great capability and motivation to acquire great results. The quota students in Brazil were arriving with a background of having studied on underfinanced primary and secondary schools with lack of resources, facing economic difficulties and with parents with no education to give them support. I was also curious about what the quota students themselves had to say about the system, and the university.

In 2016 I wrote the text *Underestimation as hidden (unconscious) discrimination*<sup>35</sup>, about my observations as a former student and a teacher in a Swedish art school. In the text I depart from some concrete examples I have observed, on how students with other background than European have been treated differently – as less capable – ‘with the best of intentions’ by the teachers. It is a study about inclusion being done without the proper tools, about teachers reading culture differences and language confusion as ‘less capability’. In the text I propose some methods to prevent this from happening. Discrimination at art schools and artistic faculties is a complex issue. The problem begins at admission, is coupled with the assembly of colleges and cultural (Eurocentric) values, passing through structural discrimination. Some routines, approaches and conceded behaviors in institutions can enable and be a source of inadvertently or hidden discrimination.

I believe the radical quota project from Brazil is a golden opportunity for other countries struggling with discrimination to look at inclusion in a more profound way, to see how to work with sudden changes in the student groups, how to keep or increase quality in education even when more funds or support from the government is not in place.

I talked to a teacher at CEFET in Rio de Janeiro<sup>36</sup>, The Federal Center for Technological Education. It is an institution that offers undergraduate and post-graduate level courses in addition to its sought-after technical high school courses. The teacher told me about how important it was to create a new structure within the institution to give proper support to the students. Possibilities of education are directly combined with living conditions. The new students had most commonly to travel about 1-2 hours to come to school. Sometimes they had to handle studies and job at the same time, or go home and take care of younger brothers and sisters. It got fundamental to create spaces where they could stay at school after ordinary classes. The need of engagement from teachers is striking: they worked longer days with no pay, and took initiative to give better structure for the new students, reserving rooms for reading and studies and creating study groups where older students got engaged to monitor and give support to the younger. The teacher also told me about engaged quota students that quickly improved their results, grasping the opportunity as the chance of their life.

A quota student<sup>37</sup>, studying Communication/advertising at Federal University in Rio de Janeiro, told me about the important role of scholarship to keep the poorest students at school. There is not much infrastructure in form of student houses and he told me about the level of acceptance among the white students, how it differs from course to course. He described technical courses where the private sector is more involved, like engineering, as more segregated, with a majority of white middle class students. He also told me how he awaked to issues related to race, and joined a group at the university dealing with those questions, among other things, discrimination in the classroom, coming from the teachers. *'Before getting into the university I never thought about myself as a black person'* (he is a quota student based on low-income, but also on race). Brazil is a diverse country, 43.1% of the population identifies themselves as mixed-race, and a big percentage of those defining themselves as white have black ancestors<sup>38</sup>. This makes the quota of race complicated. Who is black, and who is not?

PARENTHESIS: A BRIEF HISTORY OF BRUTALITY AND EXCLUSION								
To understand the need of affirmative action in Brazil, it is important to look back and trace the story of blacks and the indigenous population in the country. Brazil have a brutal history of slavery, 5.8 million Africans were forcibly transported to Brazil <sup>39</sup> , compared to less than 400,000 brought to America. So, affirmative action here is part of an agenda to combat the historical heritage of slavery, colonialism and subsequent racial segregation and racism against the blacks and indigenous population.								
	Spain / Uruguay	Portugal / Brazil	Great Britain	Netherlands	U.S.A.	France	Denmark / Baltic	Totals
1501-1525	6,363	7,000	0	0	0	0	0	13,363
1526-1550	25,375	25,387	0	0	0	0	0	50,762
1551-1575	28,167	31,089	1,685	0	0	66	0	61,007
1576-1600	60,056	90,715	237	1,365	0	0	0	152,373
1601-1625	83,496	267,519	0	1,829	0	0	0	352,844
1626-1650	44,313	201,609	33,695	31,729	824	1,827	1,053	315,050
1651-1675	12,601	244,793	122,367	100,526	0	7,125	653	488,065
1676-1700	5,860	297,272	272,200	85,847	3,327	29,484	25,685	719,675
1701-1725	0	474,447	410,597	73,816	3,277	120,939	5,833	1,088,909
1726-1750	0	536,696	554,042	83,095	34,004	259,095	4,793	1,471,725
1751-1775	4,239	528,693	832,047	132,330	84,580	325,918	17,508	1,925,315
1776-1800	6,415	673,167	748,612	40,773	67,443	433,061	39,199	2,008,670
1801-1825	168,087	1,160,601	283,959	2,669	109,545	135,815	16,316	1,876,992
1826-1850	400,728	1,299,969	0	357	1,850	68,074	0	1,770,978
1851-1875	215,824	9,309	0	0	476	0	0	225,609
Totals	1,061,524	5,848,266	3,259,441	554,336	305,326	1,381,404	111,040	12,521,337

*\*<http://slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates>*

Brazil was the last country in the Western world to abolish slavery, this happened as late as in 1888. After the abolition, Brazil became a Republic and the government subsidized the voyage of millions of Europeans, mostly German, Italian and Polish workers (but even Swedes moved to Brazil). They were provided with citizenship, land grants, and money when they arrived<sup>40</sup>, in an attempt to "civilize" and "whiten" Brazil<sup>41</sup>. Black Brazilians, on the contrary, got nothing and they were denied the rights to lands inhabited by the descendants of runaway slaves.

Indigenous in Brazil are estimated to around 900,000 people, or 0.4% of Brazil's population<sup>42</sup>. When the first Portuguese colonists arrived in what today is known as Brazil, by the year of 1500, the estimative is that it was inhabited by 11 million indigenous. They are still fighting for their rights to land and massacres on indigenous population in Brazil still occurs.

### III Conclusion

(and some proposals to correct discrimination)

Hard work. Perseverance. Talent. Having the right attitude. The idea of fairness connected to merit is also the liberal formula for success. It gets almost religious: 'do the right thing and you will get rewarded'. Trouble begins when a person with almost the same or even more effort don't get anything. How come? For a person struggling, and fighting and winning, it is really hard to believe that 'the losers' are fighting the same way. If you believe in the narrative of meritocracy – that you will get rewarded proportionally to how much you struggle (because it 'happened to you'), and that the chances are equal – why should you believe in someone telling you they also struggle but they get nothing? They must be doing something wrong. The 'winners' can lay back and see the 'losers' as lazy, less intelligent, not talented enough – and gain more power as considering themselves the opposite. For those failing and believing in the same meritocratic myth it can turn to be self-destructive and confusing: one start blaming him- or herself for failing. Even knowing how much one struggles, it comes to a point where it gets hard to deny the narrative of being worth less. This might have a passivizing effect. In order to survive you accept your position, if you are fortunate to get a job you will take it, even if you will be the one (once again) working the most and never earning enough to live. Getting tired enough not to rise.

A study published in the peer-reviewed journal *Child Development*<sup>43</sup> (2017) shows that children and youth belonging to marginalized groups that believes in meritocracy show a 'decline in self-esteem and an increase in risky behaviors during their middle-school years'<sup>44</sup>. Erin Godfrey, the study's lead author and an assistant professor of applied psychology at New York University's Steinhardt School, says that those in an advantaged position in society can feel good about how they 'made it', when believing the system is fair. For those marginalized by society, the same belief leads to a conflict with themselves, when they '*start to understand the systemic and institutionalized nature of that discrimination*'<sup>45</sup>.

The authors of the study ground this examination on *system justification theory*<sup>46</sup>, a social psychology term of art that studies the internalization of inferiority among members of disadvantaged groups. '*It is conceptualized as a response tendency possessed by many, or perhaps most, members of society to see aspects of the overarching social system as good, fair, and legitimate. Consequently, alternatives to the status quo are often derogated or avoided for ideologically defensive reasons. In other words, system justification is an inherently conservative inclination to preserve 'the way things are', sometimes even at the expense of objective social interests* (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004).' Paulo Freire in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968) point out the internalization of the oppressor's opinions causing self-depreciation at the oppressed<sup>47</sup>.

In the doctoral dissertation *How does the job applicants' ethnicity affect the selection process? Norms, preferred competencies and expected fit*<sup>48</sup> the psychologist Sima Wolgast studied different factors that could influence recruiters when recruiting from an ethnic in-group (Swedes) and outgroup (with another background than Swedish). The study demonstrated that the recruiters, who were all Swedes, treated the applicants differently depending on their ethnicity. In the case of an interview with Swedish applicants the questions tended to be related to the skills needed for the job. For the other group, the questions were related to social skills and adaptability. Those whose questions were related to the job (Swedes) were perceived as 'more useful' and to suit the job, in detriment to the other group.

In other part of the study, when the information was systematized and the computer made the selection, most of the outgroup applicants were classified as more competent for the job, while the recruiters, based on the same information, chose the Swedish applicants. In an Interview for the Swedish radio P1, Wolgast says that if you as a person with a foreigner name manage to come to an interview to begin with, there can still be a discriminatory process following you to the end. The most discriminated were those with Arabic names. According to the same interview, the only time persons with Arabic names weren't discriminated were when the recruiters were told from the beginning that if they got caught not going for the most competent, they ought to start the process all over again. Wolgast comes to the conclusion that policies to avoid discrimination and to follow up when discrimination occurs, make difference.

I have never earlier been a strong advocate of affirmative politics – today I realize I did not fully understand how important some radical actions are to really and profoundly change the access of some groups or populations to education and jobs. To keep a great part of the population apart from education can be seen as a strategy from the elites to dominate and have access to cheap handcraft and workers. In countries seen as more developed, in Europe, and more specifically in Sweden where I live, this exclusion happens through segregation, clustering disadvantaged children together at primary and secondary schools in areas with social problems. This strategy will definitely influence their access to higher education in the future.

As a film director, I am concerned about stereotypes and what role film plays in the maintenance of the *status-quo*, for the benefit of a kind of politics' discourse that includes prejudice against other cultures, homophobia and misogyny. As an educator I see the opportunity to contribute to make film students aware of this discourse that is not only reproducing, but also creating the reality it purports to represent. But how can I affect the fact that art studies are still elitist and that the educational system also is part of this maintenance of the status quo?

I have been teaching at the master's level within an art school for more than five years. I have seen the school's efforts to include young people living in disadvantaged areas through summer courses or other events and stimulate them to apply. But I have also realized that there is a certain kind of language, a qualifying, meritorious discourse in the art field. This language is taught in preparatory schools and is an important part of the application process through the applicants' motivation letters and personal interviews. How fair can a selection process based on art samples and text be? I have also noticed that if you want to 'belong', to be part of the cultural elite (at least in Sweden), as a non-white person, the color of your skin or your segregated situation – or things related to those kind of issues – are also your way into the field. You are free to be an artist as long as you accept the niche you are put into. Who is allowed to tell what story?

Suggestion to avoid nepotism and discrimination in the first phase of a selection process for an art school where the selection is made based on art samples:

- Strive for a heterogeneous selection committee, and bring a student/extern representative that differs from you as teachers into the process.
- The use of pseudonyms – when it comes to selection processes in art school, and also when applying for funds in public institutions after school, I have always wondered what would happen if the application was made with pseudonyms. At least at the first phase of selection. If you don't know if I am a woman, a man, black or white, if you don't know my surname, would you then consider my art/film/text differently?

Suggestion to avoid the pitfalls of meritocracy in the subsequent phases of the selection process for an art school (interviews, tests):

- The use of different/various methods to understand the potential for development of the applicant. Look into the combination of samples, and the answers in interviews and eventual what comes out of tests with curiosity, not being locked to a language that you as a teacher already know and recognizes.
- Focus on what the applicant wants to do – not on what already has been done. What can you teach? What can you learn?
- Think equality. If those you are choosing all have the same background, put yourself and your decision in doubt. And if they have the same background then you, put yourself and your decision in doubt once again.

The need for tests, grades or work samples is a natural consequence of the fact that there are more applicants to some of the courses than there are vacancies. Choosing someone will always mean to exclude somebody else, that might not be much to do about this. But to associate those methods to merit and merit to justice without considering the unfairness of the society is to perpetuate an unjust system. There is a confusion going on between the need for selection and how we read the performance of the selected. They might not be genius or the best. They are the ones who are going to study and develop during some years. What can come out of these years of studies?

What draw my attention to the quota program in Brazil was to perceive the huge difference the access of formerly excluded population to higher education has made to elevate the level of discussions about different matters in Brazil. Discussions about race, gender, poverty, intersectionality have only deepened with the participation of those who embody the issues. Newly graduated indigenous doctors do not only have the knowledge to treat diseases that affects all populations, but also a real interest to treat and include the indigenous population in programs involving health care<sup>50</sup>. But much more than that – considering all the fields of knowledge, of human experience and art – we might be missing something when we leave a big part of the world population outside. This is truly the ignorance of a meritocratic and racist system.

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