

Liv Sovik. *Aqui ninguém é branco.* Rio de Janeiro: Aeroplano, 2009. 176p.

Liv Sovik's *Aqui Ninguém É Branco* is one of the most salient recent contributions to the topic of Brazilian race relations. In the introduction, Sovik recognizes that there is racism in Brazil and affirms that blacks exist in all sectors of Brazilian society, yet questions whether whites truly exist in the country. As far as whiteness is concerned, Sovik explains that it is not simply genetic or a place of speaking, but a question of image. Likewise, she notes that "even though the myth of racial democracy has been unmasked, its central thesis, of genetic mixture of the population as a base of peaceful national conviviality has not been substituted by another that takes in account racial hierarchies" (15). This last observation is the driving force throughout her text.

In the first section of the book, "Theoretical essays," Sovik emphasizes the divergences in racial history and national identity politics between Brazil and the United States. Here, Sovik not only reinterprets the concepts of "affection" and "happiness," but also deems them as characteristic of Brazilian national identity, much like the notion of the "American Dream" in the United States. To defend her thesis, Sovik cites examples of foreigners in Brazil such as Clément Rosset, who considered warmth to be one of the outstanding human traits of the Brazilian people. With regard to the topic of physical appearance, Sovik distinguishes Brazilians from Americans by arguing that the former do not feel white, yet does not provide any sociological data on how Americans view themselves racially. In this context, Sovik refers to the Brazilian press, such as *VEJA* magazine, to establish extra-national comparisons, alleging that there are schools and neighborhoods for blacks in the United States, but not in Brazil. Examining the 1960s in the United States, Sovik makes the case that whereas there is racial violence in the United States, violence is not explicitly racial in Brazil. Nevertheless, Sovik does not clarify what race relations came to be in

the United States after the 1960s, and by the same token, sidesteps the state of Brazilian race relations in the present. Sovik delves, moreover, into the topic of non-Brazilians' contributions in the area of racial studies in Brazil. When speaking of the role of American intellectuals in this area, Sovik often quotes Caetano Veloso, who has stated openly and without providing examples, that many of them are rejected due to their "smugness." Here Sovik acquiesces in Caetano Veloso's exceptionalist view: "when [Caetano] speaks of the topic of race relations, he places the smugness of the north at the top of the list and how the sense of the same discourse in the mouth of an important Brazilian militant would not be the same" (69). In effect, Sovik's defense of Brazil's uniqueness in racial politics is mirrored by her agreement with Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant's criticisms of Michael Hanchard's *Orpheus and Power: The "Movimento Negro" of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo (1945-1988)*. These French sociologists disqualify Hanchard from the debate on Brazilian racial history for ostensibly imposing analytical critiques that stem from the North American experience, and criticize the Ford and Rockefeller foundations for financing the implementation of those same criteria in Brazil.

In the second section of her book, "Musical studies," Sovik approaches issues of race, gender, cosmopolitanism and racial mixture through Brazilian music, discussing the song "Garota de Ipanema," and the life and work of singer Angela Maria, as points of entry and departure. In addition, Sovik analyzes Caetano Veloso's CD *Noites do Norte* (2000), which interprets the topic of Brazilian race relations as presented in Joaquim Nabuco's autobiography *Minha Formação* (1895). As Sovik explains, the title song of the CD, "nostalgia is not for slavery or black submission, but for the friendliness of blacks and the cordiality of whites, in the very often agreeable conviviality, which surpassed the brutality of racial hierarquies" (147). Furthermore, in *Noites do Norte*, Sovik comments on songs such as "Zera a Reza," which underscores both the painful and pleasurable aspects of slave history in Brazil, and "Zumbi," which celebrates Zumbi and expresses the desire to see him come back to life and command all people. Sovik also takes a close look at songs written by other Brazilian composers like "Negros" by Adriana Calcanhotto, and "Lavagem Cerebral" by Gabriel, o Pensador. In both cases, Sovik demonstrates how these artists portray Brazil's people as what Winthrop R. Wright would call *café con leite*.

Although *Aqui Ninguém É Branco* is well written and examines Brazilian songs of varying musical genres, it represents the status quo perspective on Brazilian racial politics, which considers all Brazilians to be racially mixed. In order to sustain her argument, which all too often gives the impression of being endorsed by Caetano Veloso, Sovik focuses on light skinned musical composers who elaborate a *mestiço* vision of the Brazilian racial imaginary, and conveniently avoids not only the many songs and texts composed by (Afro) Brazilians which counter the racially mixed paradigm, like Antônio Candeia Filho's "Dia de Graça" (1970) and Jorge Aragão's "Coisa da Pele" (1986), but also the intellectual production of (Afro) Brazilian writers like Abdias do Nascimento and Nei Lopes, who view Brazilian race relations as segregationist *à brasileira*. All in all, *Aqui Ninguém É Branco* makes an interesting read, yet tends to idealize the state of Brazilian race relations in the name of exceptionalism.

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