

project. Its critical observations are solid and revealing, the writing is lively and engaging, and the reader benefits from a superb bibliography. We should all regard this book as required reading.

Earl E. Fitz  
Vanderbilt University

**Oliveira, Emanuelle K. F. *Writing Identity: The Politics of Contemporary Afro-Brazilian Literature*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2007.**

Emanuelle Oliveira's work is an important contribution to research on Afro-Brazilian writers of today. The focus is on writers affiliated with the *Cadernos Negros* series and Quilombhoje, two components of a literary movement initiated in 1978 and located in São Paulo. *Writing Identity* dwells on the formative years, expansion, and current transition phase of this longest-surviving black writers' series in Brazil. First, the literature is examined in relation to politics and nationhood. Second, theoretical considerations of culture, race and identity form the backdrop for the literary critique. Third, black movement activism in Brazil is central to the study as the inspirational basis for writers. Poetry and short stories by *Cadernos Negros* writers are framed in relation to the Brazilian literary canon, but also on their own terms, as a body of literature with its own devices and strategies.

The study examines and critiques the premise upon which Afro-Brazilian literary discourse is constructed, as well as the mitigating forces that result in its continuing subordination. Concerns of a political and sociological nature need to be addressed in order to understand what causes these writers to remain largely outside the national canon. While Oliveira focuses on the modern era, from the 1970s onward, she does step back in time in order to explain what drives the current situation. Gilberto Freyre's *Casa Grande e Senzala* (1933) and the myth of racial democracy are discussed, as are the dictatorship, Marxist and left-wing

politics, and various strands of social activism, including feminism, black militancy, and the gay-rights movement. Grassroots movements emerged to give voice to multiple identities and help to explain why the Afro-Brazilian literary celebration of negritude as identity creates tensions with visions of nationhood.

The essay describes the advent of a modern black aesthetic that evolved parallel to the national canon during the latter decades of the twentieth century. It emerged as a product of cultural interactions and collaborations within the black community of consciousness, driven by inspired writers such as Jamu Minka, Oswaldo de Camargo, Paulo Colina, and Cuti (Luiz Silva). Collective historical consciousness, African identity, the paradigm of negritude, and the iconic symbols of Zumbi and Palmares created continuity between the Afro-Brazilian consciousness movement and literary production. Identity and militancy influence literature and guide how writers create themes, devise literary strategies, and elaborate perspectives about society.

While lack of capital, limited readership and inaccessibility to mainstream publishing presses are obstacles, for certain literary critics emphasis on black identity and combating racism reduce the overall quality of literariness and compromise canonical inclusion and due recognition. It is an issue at the very heart of race and writing in Brazil and central to the *raison d'être* of these participating writers who debate the topic. To what extent do the identity of blackness, their commitment to battle racial discrimination, and their ongoing demands for equality and justice condemn their writings to exist in perpetual marginality? Oliveira confirms that it is a production found at the intersection of politics and race, on the one hand, and literariness, on the other. Its success in the former endeavor has implications for its place in the latter.

The study presents critics such as Zilá Bernd and Oswaldo de Camargo, who see the political agenda of Afro-Brazilian writing as a problem for its future success as national literature. They envision it as failing to fuse the aesthetic and political agendas, falling short of expectations in the literary

arena. This view is addressed by the writers themselves. Cuti speaks of a political perception of literary creation, pointing to particular literary discourse generated by the writers themselves, who promote appreciation of a specific set of aesthetic values. Márcio Barbosa explores black writing within the context of cultural domination, colonization and racism, seen as instruments of symbolic violence that have annihilated black history and culture. As writers, they dwell on what possibilities there are for navigating politics and literature, thus promoting their own legitimacy by way of self-analysis.

By appropriating and subverting the socially imposed position of the subaltern, these writers affirm themselves as subjects of their discourse, a way of subverting mainstream perceptions about blacks and challenging objectification, exoticism and stereotyping. Oliveira's in-depth analysis of several poems and short stories confirms strategies of a socially driven agenda based on race, class and gender within a style of realism. A class of successful intellectuals and writers has emerged; Oswaldo de Camargo, Eduardo de Oliveira, Cuti (Luiz Silva), and Jamu Minka are a few of them. Miriam Alves, the first female poet to be a part of Quilombhoje, sets the stage for ideological confrontation between her feminist agenda and the male-dominated sphere. Today, her writings, with those of Conceição Evaristo, Esmeralda Ribeiro, and Sônia Fátima da Conceição, among many others, speak to a woman-centered agenda.

Oliveira concludes by recognizing just how invaluable the series and its writers have become in today's Brazil, marked by an expanding consciousness and rise in concerns about the place and value of Afro-Brazilian identity. The advent of affirmative action, the rise of Black Studies, and the incorporation of African and Afro-Brazilian studies into the education and university curricula are the result of endeavors such as *Cadernos Negros* and Quilombhoje, even as questions remain about their future mission and direction.

Dawn Duke  
University of Tennessee Knoxville