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Jerry Dávila's *Hotel Trópico* is a masterful study of international relations through the lens of intercultural relations and is perhaps the most persuasive scholarship to demonstrate concretely the ways in which cultural factors can impact the direction of a nation-state's foreign policy. Two of the key themes that underpin Dávila's work are the ideas of "lusotropicalism" and "racial democracy." Lusotropicalism was a term coined by Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre to describe the supposedly distinctive Portuguese mindset which made Portugal a better colonizer than other Europeans. According to Freyre, because of Portugal's warmer climate and closer proximity to the equator, the Portuguese were more adaptable to tropical climates, more open to the mixing of races, and thus had a more humane type of colonialism. For Freyre, and many others, Brazil stood as a shining example of the benevolence of Portuguese colonialism, particularly through its racial democracy, under which Brazilians purportedly lived in complete racial harmony in a society without racial discrimination. According to Dávila, "this set of beliefs was so powerful that it formed the conceptual framework not only of those Brazilians who supported Portuguese colonialism but even of those who shunned Portugal, favored decolonization, and sought ties with independent African nations" (21).

Dávila shows how at various times throughout the Cold War, most notably in 1961 as part of President Janio Quadros's "Independent Foreign Policy" and in 1975 in its involvement in the Angolan civil war, the Brazilian government tried to use its historical ties to Africa in tandem with the ideas of lusotropicalism and racial democracy to help Brazil form relations with African states. According to Dávila, Brazil thought that "Africa was its natural sphere of influence, and racial democracy was its calling card. In turn, Africa would help propel Brazil industrially and bring autonomy from the cold war powers" (51). But this effort was complicated by the fact that the country was run by a conservative military dictatorship from 1964 to 1985, it largely supported Portuguese colonialism when nearly every other country in the developing world, especially in Africa, opposed it, and it eschewed neutrality to remain tied to the Western camp in the Cold War. These factors combined to make Brazil's outreach to Africa a limited success at best.

Despite obstacles along the way, Dávila argues that "the connections between Brazil and Africa endured" due to the fact that "Africa remained an abstraction in Brazil, a canvas on which Brazilian national aspirations and racial values were rendered. This canvas is significant because of the perception that

all Brazilians share an African heritage" (255). While *Brazil and The Challenge of African Decolonization* is a worthwhile read for Africanists and diplomatic historians as an intriguing study of Brazil's bilateral relations with sub-Saharan Africa during the middle of the Cold War, the book is more than that. It is also an impressive blend of the study of race and culture to examine how Brazilian foreign policy became conditioned by how white Brazilian elites perceived their place in the world. By projecting their constructed mythical image of a racially harmonious and discrimination-free Brazil onto Africa, Brazilian diplomats hoped that Afro-Brazilians would accept their government's portrait of national identity and domestic race relations. In reality, the opposite proved true. The few Afro-Brazilians who visited Africa learned of the fallacy of Brazilian racial democracy, and, at the same time, discovered that they were much more "Brazilian" than they were "African."

One interesting historiographical debate which emerges from the pages of *Hotel Trópico* is about the primary reason that Brazil decided to recognize the MPLA government in Angola in 1975 and the main protagonist of that decision. James Hershberg, whose work was not cited by Dávila, writing from an American perspective and as a diplomatic historian using both U.S. and Brazilian government documents, argues that Brasilia's decision for recognition of the MPLA stemmed from the declining Cold War consensus in Latin America and Brazil's cultural affinity for Angola. In short, the Brazilian leadership felt a Lusophonic kinship for Angola and by the mid-1970s no longer felt the need to keep in lock step with Washington's wishes.¹ Dávila, on the other hand, writing from a Brazilian perspective and as an expert of that country's racial and social history, emphasizes Brasilia's economic incentives for recognizing the MPLA government as a way to sustain Brazil's "economic miracle" of the 1970s. These interpretations do not necessarily contradict, but rather complement each other, providing greater nuance to our understanding of Brazilian decision-making. The two historians also seemingly disagree over who was the central force behind this policy, with Dávila focusing on Foreign Minister Antonio Azeredo da Silveira and Hershberg Italo Zappa, the head of the Brazilian Foreign Ministry's Africa and Asia Department, and each author barely mentioning the other in their accounts.

The book's strengths are numerous. Deeply researched, Dávila utilizes a vast array of sources including memoirs, oral histories, and interviews of diplomats

¹ See James G. Hershberg, "High-spirited Confusion: Brazil, the 1961 Belgrade Non-Aligned Conference, and the Limits of an 'Independent Foreign Policy during the High Cold War'" *Cold War History*, 7, no. 3 (August 2007): 373-388 and especially Hershberg, "No Longer Anyone's Sacristan: New Evidence on Brazil's Surprise Recognition of the MPLA Government in Angola" (paper presented at the Southern Africa in the Cold War Era Conference in Lisbon, Portugal, May 2009).

involved in Brazilian relations with Africa; newspapers from three continents; and primary source research in more than fifteen different archives in Brazil and Portugal. The book is also well written and free of unnecessary academic jargon, making it an easy read for undergraduate students (indeed, I intend to assign it for use in future classes).

Unsurprisingly the book is heavily slanted towards the Brazilian viewpoint. While this is to be expected, the scholarship would have been stronger had Dávila made greater use of sources from the United States and especially from Africa. Without this perspective the reader is left wondering how the United States viewed Brasilia's attempt to break out from its shadow to pursue an independent foreign policy in sub-Saharan Africa and what, if anything, Washington did to try to prevent this. More importantly, I would have liked to have known more about how Africans perceived Brazilian attempts to re-orient their foreign policy towards their continent. It would have been particularly illuminating to know how effective Africans felt white Brazilian diplomats were in trying to self-identify themselves as culturally "African." These minor critiques aside, Dávila should be applauded for this scholarly achievement.

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