

**Mauro P. Porto. (2023) *Mirrors of Whiteness: Media, Middle-Class Resentment, and the Rise of the Far Right in Brazil*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 200 pp. (ISBN 9780822947523).**

**Hardcover/Ebook/Kindle.**

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Mauro P. Porto, professor in the Department of Communication at Tulane University, is a political communications scholar who has written on and researched Brazil for over a decade, focusing on media and democratization. In his most recent and noteworthy book, *Mirrors of Whiteness: Media, Middle-Class Resentment, and the Rise of the Far Right in Brazil* (2023), Porto interrogates the role of media in the construction, formation, and mobilization of whiteness by middle-class Brazilians across generations. Through various policies implemented during the Workers' Party– (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT.) administrations (2003-2016), the book examines the historical arrangements of whiteness and middle-class identity in contemporary Brazil. Porto also analyzes the role of Brazil's media in these processes, drawing from two case studies: representations of domestic workers and white subjectivity in the fictional telenovela, *Cheias de Charme*, and coverage of affirmative action for access to higher education in the nonfictional

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newsmagazine, *Veja*. Porto develops and deploys the concept of ‘mirrors of whiteness’ to show that, in both of these cases and beyond, media representations and the construction of meaning through which they are reflected is affected by the work of institutions and individuals. At the same time, while Porto asserts this is true, he utilizes the mirror analogy as an analytical tool that “...goes beyond the mimetic reflections that occur in glass surfaces” (2023, p. 12). In this way, he urges his readers to consider how mirrors function as “spheres of representation” (2023, p. 96) to understand media representations as projecting notions of white superiority in a relational way, that of the dominant white subject and the representation of the ‘other’ (2023, p. 13).

Porto borrows framings that are grounded in anthropology and critical race studies to bring forward the racialized nature of Brazil’s social, spatial, and economic inequalities. He also combines approaches from critical whiteness studies (CWS) with concepts from Karl Marx and Max Weber to frame his class analysis. The ideological framework of whiteness is used to analyze how opinions take shape on new platforms. The author uses a combination of scholarship on class analysis to further examine the historical foundations and more contemporary aspects of middle-class politics, thus pointing to the limits of existing arguments that conflate income stratification and class structure. These framings, which the author borrows and adapts from other scholars, create an ample landscape for him to conduct his study on whiteness in media and the socio-political impacts of the middle class in Brazil.

He also discusses the tensions between Brazilian elites toward nonwhite people and the view of black and mixed-race people as a “social cancer” that will never be “civilized”; and thus, the racial hierarchies that are embedded within these racist assumptions. He builds on the works

of Celia Maria de Azvredo, who suggested that racist ideas “...lie in the material and moral distance between the masses of enslaved and free Black individuals and the small number of political and intellectual elites that had no grasp of their social and cultural conditions” (2023, p. 26). Thus, Porto incorporates fear as a historical dimension to frame his arguments around the resentment of the middle class. Porto’s approach also contributes to CWS and media studies, riding an incoming wave of scholarship on whiteness in Brazil, in particular through his concept of ‘mirrors of whiteness,’ and its potential for analyzing the role of media in reinforcing whiteness.

This book builds on other CWS scholars who question whiteness in Latin America, such as Hugo Ceron-Anaya’s *Privilege at Play: Class, Race, Gender, and Golf in Mexico* (2019) and Jennifer Roth-Gordon’s *Race and the Brazilian Body: Blackness, Whiteness, and Everyday Language in Rio de Janeiro* (2016). Although Porto approaches whiteness through political, historical, and media analysis, and Ceron-Anaya studies whiteness through the very different angle of golf, both engage in ‘studying up’; looking to the elite and upper-middle classes. Porto’s analysis of whiteness also converges with Roth-Gordon’s, in that they both emphasize the intricate ties between race and class that maintain and reinforce the social structures designed by white upper and middle-class people. While Roth-Gordon discusses whiteness and how representations of race are read on bodies and heard in voices, Porto’s incorporation of visual and auditory analysis takes place through media content. Both make a case for representing race and class in research. Porto’s book makes an essential contribution to CWS by showing how the media impacts Brazil’s racial, political, and class nuances, particularly the rise of the far right in Brazil. Because Porto

engages with CWS and scholars such as Patricia de Santana Pinho (2021), who has also written on whiteness and class in Brazil, it is clear that his book intersects with critical scholars in the field while also making significant contributions.

The book explores the nexus between media, middle-class resentment, and the emergence of far-right ideologies in Brazil during a period of increasing backlash against the Workers' Party's administrations between 2003 and 2016. Porto delves into the role of media representations in shaping white identity and fostering dissatisfaction within the middle class. He examines these dynamics as contributing to the rise of the far-right in Brazil while providing valuable insights into the complex interplay of social, economic, and racial factors, shedding light on the formation of political ideologies and their implications for contemporary Brazil. With recent far-right political shifts in Latin America, this book speaks to the infiltration of ideas through media. While this book focuses on Brazil, one can read it and gather insights into how whiteness operates in other countries within Latin America and even the US to give rise to far-right ideologies.

Porto combines approaches from critical whiteness studies (CWS) with the writings of Karl Marx and Max Weber to frame his class analysis. His framework allows an examination of both the historical foundations and the more contemporary aspects of middle-class politics in Brazil, illustrating that class structure is not reducible to income stratification. These framings provide ample landscape for his study of the intersections between media and middle-class whiteness in Brazil. They also demonstrate Porto's contribution to recent literature on class in Brazil that has examined political processes, the PT, and the rise of Bolsonaro. In relation to

literature on class in Brazil, Porto analyzes Brazilian politics as tied to class conflict in Brazilian society (Boito Júnior, 2022). His findings and arguments also dialogue with debates around consumer markets and electoral politics (Kopper, 2022; Scott, 2021).

The introduction lays out the themes and arguments of the book, through which the author also introspectively engages his experience as a witness to the political crises that began in 2013 in Brazil, which later peaked with Bolsonaro's 2018 rise to power. The experience led him to question the role of the Brazilian middle class, including his own friends and family (Porto, 2023, p. 4). Notably, he brings attention to the power of whiteness and how its power lies in its invisibility, which sets the scene to the remainder of his book (2023, p. 5).

What is central to Porto's arguments is his engagement with 'studying up,' looking to the elite and upper-middle class, as well as discussing the boundaries that are created along the lines of class, and what Max Weber calls *mechanisms of social closure* (1922). As a concept, social closure refers to when one group of people secure their own privileged position at the expense of another group via subordination, giving rise to undesirable social categories, which is inherently an exercise of power (2023, p. 33). Thus, in Porto's use of the term, the policies implemented by PT administrators threatened white, middle-class status and identity in Brazil, creating widespread anxieties and social divisions (2023, p. 33).

The book is well organized, thoughtfully crafted across five chapters, and includes an introduction and epilogue. One of the central arguments is that the media has played an essential role in constructing and naturalizing whiteness as an identity for generations of middle-class Brazilians. This contributed to the white middle class' protagonist role in the 'Conservative

Revolt,' which led the country into a process of profound democratic decay. He also points out that media has played a vital role in reinforcing whiteness.

Most importantly, woven throughout the book is the rich socio-political history of Brazil. The author centers on the experience of slavery and how it shaped Brazilian white people, including the middle class. This is central to the book in understanding the legacies of whiteness in Brazil, foregrounding the political and social landscapes that Porto further analyzes.

The first two chapters are essential for laying the groundwork for understanding the historical and current socio-political contours of Brazil's middle class, mechanisms of slavery, and the recent conservative turn. This context supports Porto's theoretical contribution to defining media representations as 'mirrors of whiteness' that allow white middle class Brazilians to "...legitimate their power while softening and often hiding the inequalities and injustices that such power generates" (2023, p. 17). In the third chapter, Porto examines some of the social politics of the PT era (2003-2016) and focuses on the mechanisms of cheap labor for domestic work, access (or lack thereof) to higher education, and control over specific social spaces related to leisure and consumption. Here is where Porto makes another critical contribution to understanding the role of PT-era policies in disrupting social-closure mechanisms, resulting in anxiety, resentment, and ultimately, status panic among the white middle class. In his analysis, this panic becomes essential to understanding how the decline in poverty and inequality levels of the early 2000s were perceived to threaten middle-class Brazilian identity.

In Porto's fourth and fifth chapters, he discusses two case studies, the telenovela, *Cheias de Charme*, and the magazine, *Veja*. Through these, he "...analyzes the role of media

representations in feeding middle-class resentment and in shaping the conservative revolt” (2023, p. 18). This intervention is perhaps the most valuable of his book, and his deployment of mirrors of whiteness here is expertly applied. In the fourth chapter, he discusses the telenovela, *Cheias de Charme*. Porto argues that the more positive interpretations of the show do not account for how its representation is reflected in mirrors of whiteness, thus legitimizing the power of white people. He deploys textual analysis by reading 143 episodes of the show. Porto makes clear that the erotization of maids has a long history in media representations, and more specifically, that of Black maids. Analyzing news coverage of affirmative action in higher education in *Veja* (fifth chapter), Porto illustrates representations of racial quotas for college admission, which added to the anxieties and resentment around racial quotas among magazine readers, thus building status panic among middle-class subjects.

By deliberately splitting *Veja* and *Cheias de Charme* into two chapters, Porto frames the two case studies as two distinct cultural products. Combining the two case studies and respective chapters through comparative analysis could have made for a more robust discussion of mirrors of whiteness as a concept, by comparing the different kinds of media. Similarly, what was not emphasized and deserved further attention was Porto’s distinction between media types, one fiction, and the other nonfiction. This would provide more ample space for cross-media analysis in discussing the critical distinctions and expectations of nonfiction and fiction. The book contributes to scholarship that examines whiteness in Latin America as political, historical, and classed. Porto’s book contributes to CWS by utilizing media analysis as a way of understanding

the rise of the far-right in Brazil, and it is clear that his book intersects with some of the critical scholarship in the field while also making significant contributions.

Overall, the structure and organization of Porto's book are expertly executed, and he informs in a way that is not entirely out of reach for people unfamiliar with Brazil's social and political history, which is complex. While Porto explores one aspect of Brazil's political history, he does so without leaving the reader behind to reckon with the kaleidoscope of Brazilian politics alone. He introduces critical players in a way that does not seem biased, but matter-of-fact, while also ensuring the reader of his reflective positionality. Porto's analytical tool, 'mirrors of whiteness,' will provide future scholars with a way to deepen their understanding of white aesthetics, politics, and performance in Brazilian media. Any student, whether undergraduate or graduate, and scholars within the fields of media and communication, CWS, and Latin American studies interested in learning more about the rise of the far right in Brazil, middle-class attitudes in Brazil, and whiteness in media representations will find this book and Porto's analysis inspiring.



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