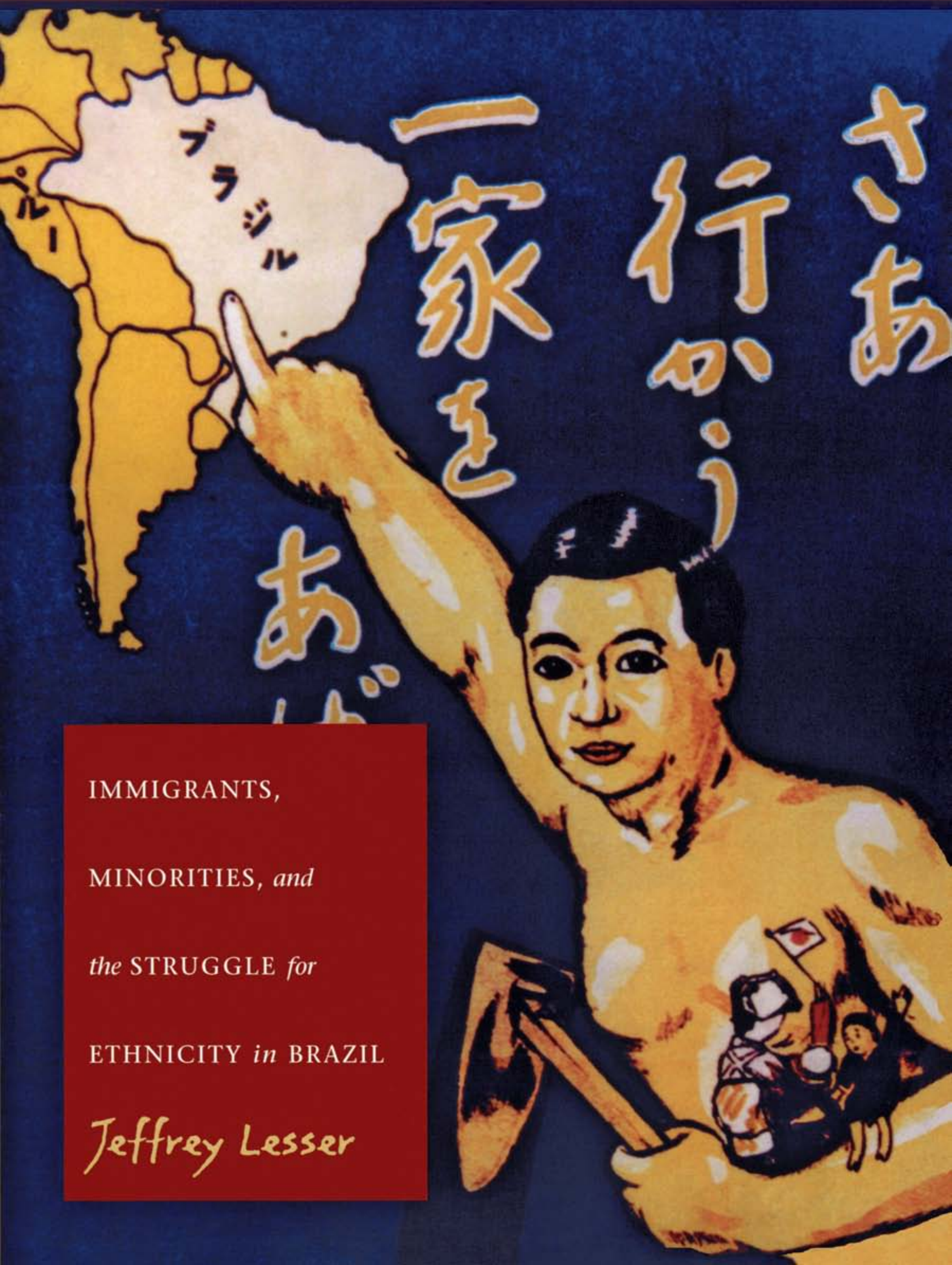
Negotiating National Identity



IMMIGRANTS, MINORITIES, *and* *the* STRUGGLE *for* ETHNICITY *in* BRAZIL

Jeffrey Lesser

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Immigrants, Minorities, and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil

Jeffrey Lesser

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Dedicated to the memories of
my father, William Morris Lesser, ז״ל
and my mentor, Warren Dean, two
people whom I think of every day.

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Preface

In 1935 Margarida Gloria da Faria, a teacher at Rio de Janeiro's Escola General Trompowsky, discovered that one of her students was a "descendant of Arabs." As a faculty member at an institution known for its modern approaches, Faria decided to use the child's presence as a "point of departure" for a study of "the man of the desert." In addition, the teacher decided to make three other groups part of that year's social studies curriculum: Brazilian Indians, Japanese, and Chinese.[1] Why did Margarida Gloria da Faria link these groups? Was it to integrate them into Brazilian society or to guarantee their rejection? Perhaps even she was unsure.

Non-European immigrants have been generally ignored in the historiography, surprising lacunae, given the millions of people involved. Yet research on Middle Easterners and Asians often takes place out of the mainstream of archives, and in these unseen but omnipresent Brazilian worlds terms like "foreigner" and "Brazilian" may be synonyms. For many Brazilians multiple identities were common long before airplanes made international travel a matter of hours rather than weeks or months. This book examines how non-European immigrants and their descendants negotiated their public identities as Brazilians.

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Brazil has experienced a remarkable transformation in access to its libraries and archives in the last decade, and my thanks go to the staffs of the Arquivo Nacional in Rio de Janeiro, the Itamaraty Archives (especially its director, Dona Lucia Monte Alto Silva), the Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea at Rio de Janeiro's Fundação Getúlio Vargas, Lucia at the São Francisco Law School Library, the Museu de Imigração in São Paulo and its director, Midori Kimura Figuti, and the

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Abbreviations

ACENB-SP	Arquivo do Centro de Estudos Nipo-Brasileiros (Archive of the Center for Japanese-Brazilian Studies, São Paulo)
AESP	Archive do Estado de São Paulo (São Paulo State Archive)
AHI-R	Arquivo Histórico Itamaraty, Rio de Janeiro (Archive of the Brazilian Foreign Ministry)
AN-R	Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro (Brazilian National Archive)
APE-RJ	Arquivo Público do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (Public Archive of the State of Rio de Janeiro)
APP,SJ	Arquivos das Polícias Politícas, Setor Japonês (Archives of the Political Police, Japanese Section)
BN-R	Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro (National Library)
BRATAC	Brasil Takushoku Kumiai (Brazil Colonization Corporation)
CIC	Conselho de Imigração e Colonização (Immigration and Colonization Council)
CPDOC-R	Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil, Fundação Getúlio Vargas, Rio de Janeiro (Center for Research and Documentation on the Contemporary History of Brazil)
DEOPS	Departamento Estadual de Ordem Pública e Segurança (State Department of Public Order and Security)
DNI	Departamento Nacional de Imigração (National Department of Immigration)

DNP	Departamento Nacional de Povoamento (National Department of Colonization)
DTCI	Directória de Terras, Colonização e Imigração (Land, Colonization, and Immigration Directorate)
IHGB-R	Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro, Rio de Janeiro (Brazilian Historical and Geographical Institute)
JMFA-MT	Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tokyo (1868–1945, Meiji-Taisho). Microfilmed for the Library of Congress, 1949–1951
KKKK	Kaigai Kogyo Kabushiki Kaisha (Overseas Development Company or Kaiko)
NARC-W	National Archives and Record Center, Washington, D.C.
PRO-L	Public Records Office, London
RIC	*Revista de Imigração e Colonização* (Journal of Immigration and Colonization)
SEPS/CHI-SP	Secretaria do Estado da Promoção Social-Centro Histórico do Imigrante (Archives of the Center for Immigrant History, São Paulo)
SL-UF	Department of Special Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida

1
The Hidden Hyphen

Portuguese, Japanese, Spanish, Italians, Arabs—
Don't Miss The Most Brazilian Soap Opera
on Television
—*Advertisement for the Bandeirantes Television Network*
telenovela Os imigrantes *(1981)*[1]

At the end of an escalator that only goes up, I have a vision of Brazil's ethnic world. The escalator is in a nondescript building in São Paulo's traditional immigrant neighborhood of Bom Retiro. On the ground floor are tiny storefronts, one after another, selling clothes, cloth, handbags, and belts. Pushing through this teeming gallery, I reach the escalator. As I step off, there is a crowd negotiating their identities as Brazilians. In front of me is the little *lanchonete* serving "typical" Brazilian bar food like *esfiha* or *kibe* that might be recognized in the Middle East, or the suggestively named "Beirute" sandwich that would not. To the right is Malcha's, a falafel shop, owned by a woman who left Yemen to settle first in Israel and then in Brazil. Her menu reveals her clientele: it is written in Portuguese, Hebrew, and Korean. On the left side are a group of tiny Korean restaurants that share the rest of the floor with sweatshops that I glimpse through cracked boards. A peek inside suggests that most of the laborers are Bolivian and that most of the owners are Korean. The lingua franca is Portuguese, and

home is a Brazil where shared culture revolves around social and economic opportunity.

Bom Retiro has long been viewed as an "ethnic" neighborhood. When Italians and Portuguese settled there in the nineteenth century, they saw the luxurious country homes that dominated the neighborhood along with the nearby Jardim da Luz, founded as São Paulo's botanical garden. Later, as Greeks and East European Jews entered, they mixed uncomfortably with students from elite educational institutions like the Escola Politécnica and Escola de Farmácia e Odontologia, both later incorporated into the University of São Paulo. Immigrants may then have seen the world of the elite up close, but it was still far away. Recently, however, things have changed. Today, every corner in Bom Retiro has a newsstand full of glossy magazines with titles like *Japão Aqui* (Japan Here) and *Raça Negra* (Black Race).[2] The ostensibly African religion of *candomblé* has exploded while practice of the syncretic *umbanda* has diminished noticeably. The music shops sell compact discs by the *sertanejo* group Nissei/Sansei, who proclaim that Brazilian country-western music, when sung in Japanese, achieves a "particularly artistic melody." To the consternation of some Jewish residents, Bom Retiro's Renascença school has a number of Brazilian children of Korean immigrants who do not seem to mind studying Hebrew as part of their educational program.[3]

Ethnicity, it seems, has become a popular motif in modern Brazil. While such open expressions may be new, ethnicity has been critical to the negotiation of Brazilian national identity over the last 150 years. This haggling undoubtedly happened at all levels of society, but my focus is on how and why immigrants and their descendants entered into public discussion with Brazil's political and intellectual leaders. These real-life strangers were, as Zygmunt Bauman has argued, "relevant whether . . . friend or foe."[4] They were *diferente* in a country where the popular definition of the word describes something that straddles the border between acceptable and unacceptable. What the newcomers understood, however, was that an apparently static elite discourse was in fact ambiguous. Unlike Eric Hobsbawn's peasants who "work[ed] the system . . . to their minimum disadvantage," these immigrants both manipulated and changed the system, rapidly becoming an integral part of the modern Brazilian nation even as they challenged how that nation would be imagined and constructed.[5]

The sense of being different yet similar was particularly noticeable among the non-Europeans who stood to gain the most by embracing *both*

an imagined uniform Brazilian nationality and their new postmigratory ethnicities. These identities were multiple and often contradictory, and the symbols available to draw upon and rework were in constant flux. Throughout the twentieth century, members of a growing immigrant elite (university students, directors of farming colonies, small and large business owners, journalists, and intellectuals) engaged actively in a public discourse about what it meant to be Brazilian—via newspapers, books, the political arena, and frequently in mass action—with influential state and federal politicians, intellectuals, and business leaders. They created written and oral genres where ethnic distinction was reformulated to appropriate Brazilian identity. Some insisted that they were "white" and thus fit neatly into a traditional society that ran along a bipolar black/white continuum. Others, however, refused to categorize themselves with those terms. These immigrants (and their descendants) insisted that new hyphenated categories be created under the rubric "Brazilian." This was not an easy or smooth process, and attempts to legislate or enforce *brasilidade* (Brazilianness) were never successful. As the millennium approaches, Brazil remains a country where hyphenated ethnicity is predominant yet unacknowledged.

What does it mean to be a public "Brazilian," and how is "Brazilianness" contested? From the mid-nineteenth century on, both terms, and the notions behind them, were increasingly arbitrary, creating the space needed by newcomers to insert themselves into, or to change, paradigms about national identity. A single or static national identity never existed: the very fluidity of the concept made it open to pushes and pulls from below and above. While a relatively coherent elite discourse asserting ethnicity as treasonous was intended to constrain and coerce new residents into accepting a Europeanized and homogeneous national identity, this should not be confused with the actual ways in which it was perceived at either the elite or the popular level. Indeed, immigrants and their descendants developed sophisticated and successful ways of becoming Brazilian by altering the notion of nation as proposed by those in dominant positions. The thesis that elite conceptions of national identity were predicated on the elimination of ethnic distinctions thus must be modified to include the challenges progressively incorporated into notions of Brazilianness.[6]

The shifting sands of nationality and ethnicity were frequently revealed in discussions over the desirability of certain immigrant groups. Much of the language stemmed from Lamarckian eugenics, which theorized that

traits, and thus culture, were acquired via local human and climatic environments. The eugenic proposition that a single "national race" was biologically possible provided a convenient ideological scaffold for national and immigrant elite support of policies to promote the entry of "desirable" immigrants who would "whiten" the country.[7] Eugenics-influenced policy initially favored the entry of German, Portuguese, Spanish, and Italian workers as *braços para a lavoura* (agricultural labor). Yet a fear of social and labor activism, and concerns about whether even Central Europeans would assimilate (Sílvio Romero's 1906 attack on the "dangers [of] Germanism" was the most famous) encouraged a look at non-European groups.[8] This necessitated a modification in the language that linked desirability to Europeanness. The elite craving to make immigrants "white," regardless of their ostensible biological race, matched neatly with immigrant hopes to be included in the desirable category. "Whiteness" remained one important component for inclusion in the Brazilian "race," but what it meant to be "white" shifted markedly between 1850 and 1950.

The experiences of Syrian, Lebanese, and Japanese immigrants and their descendants (known respectively as "Syrian-Lebanese" and *nikkei*) shows the transformation of whiteness as a cultural category. Three very flexible strategies emerged that, while at some times in competition and at others intertwined, crossed group, spatial, and temporal lines. Some immigrant elites argued that their own group was ethnically "white," proposing to render their premigratory identities harmless in return for inclusion in the pantheon of traditionally desirable groups. Others proposed that "whiteness" was not a necessary component of Brazilianness. Instead, they promoted the idea that Brazil would improve by becoming more "Japanese" or "Arab," terms constructed to mean "economically productive" and/or "supernationalist." These immigrants sought to interpret class status as a marker of Brazilian identity, allowing ethnicity to be maintained even as its importance was dismissed. They also proposed that a presumed blind loyalty to rulers prior to migration would be turned into modern Brazilian nationalism. Finally, many immigrants and their descendants seemed to reject all forms of inclusion by creating ultranationalist groups that, at least on the surface, sought to maintain political and cultural loyalty to the countries of origin.

The subjects of this book constructed and used multiple ethnicities that operated in both parallel and intersecting planes. Assimilation (in which a person's premigratory culture disappears entirely) was a rare phenome-

non while acculturation (the modification of one culture as the result of contact with another) was common, even among those who ostensibly rejected majority society by remaining in closed communities. While the "special sorrow" (to borrow Matthew Frye Jacobson's term) of immigrants and their descendants was to create a vision of an unreal national past, hyphenated Brazilians incorporated many elements of majority culture even as they endured as distinct. Acculturation, not surprisingly, often went unrecognized by both outsiders and insiders.[9]

Members of the Brazilian elite were as bewildered as immigrants about the relationship between ethnicity and national identity. Some saw desirability as geographically based and urged prohibitions on immigrants from Asia and the Middle East. Others saw the granting of the full legal and social rights of citizenship to Syrian-Lebanese and nikkei as a reasonable price for economic growth. Still others wavered, wondering if the Brazilian state might insist on the disappearance of immigrant ethnicity *and* garner the benefits of immigrant labor. My analysis of these disparate positions suggests that *mestiçagem,* which many scholars have taken to mean the emergence of a new and uniform Brazilian "race" out of the mixing of peoples, was often understood as a joining (rather than mixing) of different identities, as the creation of a multiplicity of hyphenated Brazilians rather than a single, uniform one.

I have constructed a research model that explores public immigrant ethnicity as expressed in the language of the majority. While much of this discourse has been ignored by scholars both in Brazil and abroad, this is not a story of "hidden transcripts."[10] Rather, the written, oral, and visual texts I have used were openly expressed and understood by immigrants, their descendants, and members of the majority society whose public positions reveal much about private strategies of inclusion and cultural maintenance. Much of the documentation was created in Portuguese, and I have had the good fortune to find translations of materials ranging from Arabic-language poetry to Japanese-language haiku and government documents. Taken together, this material shows how attitudes about ethnicity are both constructed by, and construct, notions of national identity.

As private identities were interpreted for the public sphere, a tug-of-war took place between the leaders of non-European immigrant communities seeking to define social spaces, and politicians, intellectuals, and the press attempting to create the boundaries of Brazilianness. The tension was often expressed as racism, but this is not exclusively a study of bigotry. Rather,

prejudice and the stereotypes that emerge from it were one way that identity was contested as negotiating positions were expounded and then revised as different publics responded. This cultural, economic, and political bargaining left neither side unchanged, keeping Brazilian majority society and postmigratory identities in a constant state of flux. In the end, a homogenization of national or cultural identity simply never took place.

* * *

Since the mid-nineteenth century, the world of non-European immigrant ethnicity could be found in large and small cities throughout Brazil, from Porto Alegre in the south to Belém near the mouth of the Amazon. It could be found in agricultural colonies in São Paulo, Paraná, and Rio Grande do Sul. It could be found in the hinterlands of Goiás and Minas Gerais. While non-European immigrants came from the Middle East and Asia, they were not of any single national, racial, or religious group. Tying them together was social and economic opportunity in a country so consumed with notions of race and ethnicity that even *futebol* players were believed to have the "qualities" of a "people," and the scoring of four goals in one game by seventeen-year-old Pelé made him "racially perfect." [11]

The relationship between race and Brazilian identity, however, is not one of color alone. Indeed, the concept of race is far more complex, and perhaps debased, than the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century European dictionary definition of a "population . . . of human beings who through inheritance possessed common characteristics." [12] Cultural presumptions about racial hierarchy and categories formalized in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries reflected and promoted a sense of European superiority, and many Brazilian thinkers were monogenesists who saw race as biologically and environmentally linked. The German anatomist and naturalist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, author of the influential *De generis humani varietate nativa* (1775/1776), was one of the most frequently cited of the early scientific racialists. He believed that the area around the Caucasus Mountains produced "the most beautiful race of men," and he placed the "Caucasian race" at the top of his racial hierarchy.[13] Such ideas touched the core of Brazil's elite, desperate to derive legitimacy through tentative connections to distant places and cultures. By asserting that geography (i.e., nature) was the basis of race, "white" immigrants *in* Brazil would create a European-like national identity that would smother the native and African populations with its superiority. Even the word *raça* was fluid: it could

refer to people (the human race) or animals (breeds) or, even more generally, species.[14] The same words could describe a person's cultural identity or dehumanize him/her as a "half-breed." Race was an elusive category, and the language of race shows a visceral concern with defining the "other."

Nothing allowed social chemists to see their country as a "racial laboratory"—that ubiquitous metaphor for Brazil—more than immigrants. Immigration played a central role in policy from at least 1850, when it became clear that slavery would not exist long into the future. Although most elites did not seek to use immigrants as a replacement for an eliminated native population (as was the case in Argentina), they did assume a high correlation between immigrant entry and social change. An influential nineteenth-century book on colonization viewed immigrants as the "seed" of municipal life from which would spring the "powerful force of homogeneity and cohesion that will pull together and assimilate" the population at large.[15] In 1888, the literary critic Sílvio Romero used the language of chemistry in asserting that immigration was a social reagent to be handled with the greatest of care since Brazil had "a singular ethnic composition."[16] In the 1930s the anthropologist and Brazilian National Museum director Edgard Roquette-Pinto made the same point as he tried to distinguish between those who "created" wealth and those who "consumed" it.[17] More recently both Brazilian scholars and international observers have looked to Brazilian culture for its "unique" power of assimilation.[18] Ethnicity, then, was never only about social culture, it was about economic culture as well.

Immigrants challenged simplistic notions of race by adding a new element—ethnicity—to the mix. All of the 4.55 million immigrants who entered Brazil between 1872 and 1949 brought premigratory culture with them and created new ethnic identities. Yet it was the 400,000 Asians, Arabs, and Jews, deemed both nonwhite and nonblack, who most challenged elite notions of national identity.[19] Double assimilation was the key to creating a clear national identity: as colonists became Brazilian, Brazil would become European. Thus, as ideology metamorphosed into policy, who was denied entry became as important as who entered. Words like *imigrante* and *brasileiro* came to have much of the same fluidity as "raça," applicable to present residents or potential ones, to those born inside and outside of Brazil.

The ethnicities that these immigrants brought and constructed were situational rather than "immutable primordial indentit[ies]."[20] At various

Table 1. Immigrants Entering Brazil, 1880–1969, by Decade

	Portuguese	Italian	Spanish	German	Japanese	Middle Easterners	Others
1880–1889	104,690	277,124	30,066	18,901	——	——	17,841
1890–1899	219,353	690,365	164,293	17,084	——	4,215	103,017
1900–1909	195,586	221,394	113,232	13,848	861	26,846	50,640
1910–1919	318,481	138,168	181,651	25,902	27,432	38,407	85,412
1920–1929	301,915	106,835	81,931	75,801	58,284	40,695	181,186
1930–1939	102,743	22,170	12,746	27,497	99,222	5,549	62,841
1940–1949	45,604	15,819	4,702	6,807	2,828	3,351	34,974
1950–1959	241,579	91,931	94,693	16,643	33,593	16,996	87,633
1960–1969	74,129	12,414	28,397	5,659	25,092	4,405	47,491
Total	1,604,080	1,576,220	711,711	208,142	247,312	140,464	671,035
	31%	30%	14%	4%	5%	3%	13%

Sources: Brazil, Serviço de Estatística Econômica e Financeira do Tesouro Nacional, Ministério da Fazenda, *Quadros estatísticos, resumo anual de estatísticas econômicas, 1932–1939* (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1941), pp. 80–82; Brazil, "Discriminação por nacionalidade dos imigrantes entrando no Brasil no período 1884–1939," *Revista de Imigração e Colonização* 1, no. 3 (July 1940): 617–642; Armin K. Ludwig, *Brazil: A Handbook of Historical Statistics* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1985), pp. 104–106; Maria Stella Ferreira Levy, "O papel da migração internacional na evolução da população brasileira (1872 a 1972)," *Revista de Saúde Pública* supp., 8 (1974): 71–73.

Note: The Middle Eastern category is made up of many different national immigrant groups. Until 1903 the only groups to appear in official statistics were Syrians and Turks. In 1908 Egyptians and Moroccans were added. Later additions were Algerians, Armenians, Iraqis, Palestinians, and Persians. In 1926 the Lebanese category first appeared, and almost immediately thereafter the numbers of people entering as Turks dropped significantly. In 1954 the categories Iranian, Israeli, Jordanian, and Turk/Arab were added.

moments, immigrants and their descendants could embrace their "Japaneseness" or "Lebaneseness" as easily as their "Brazilianness." Ethnicity often intersected with nationalism (Brazilian and otherwise), making identity extremely pliant.[21] The Brazilian case thus suggests two immediate comparisons, one similar and one different. The former emerges from Mexico, where the ideology of a "Cosmic Race" suggests a social and cultural equality of which few Mexicans, especially those of clearly in-

digenous descent, are aware.[22] A contrary example comes from the United States, where seemingly inflexible categories of both race and ethnicity put power and "Americanness," but surely not "whiteness," up for grabs among those of non-European descent.

While the dominant forces in Brazil, Mexico, the United States, and other nations continue, in their own ways, to insist falsely that all citizens are members of the larger nation, the mask of nondiscrimination is removed when discussing immigration. During the Mexican Revolution, Chinese and Jewish immigrants found themselves attacked both physically and in the press as being unable to integrate to what was ostensibly an all-encompassing Mexican race.[23] In the United States the melting pot rhetoric did not prevent the establishment of immigration quotas or the denial of naturalization rights to Asians.

Brazil shows some similarities to the cases mentioned above. *Official* discrimination with regard to potential residents was common from the seventeenth century through at least 1942, and immigration policies were explicitly and unapologetically bigoted. During Brazil's colonial era, heretics (the code word for Jews and Muslims) were banned from entering, even though the New Christian (recent converts to Christianity) and Marrano (the derogatory term used to describe New Christians who secretly maintained their non-Christian religion) population of the colony was significant.[24] Independence from Portugal in 1822 led the new Brazilian imperial government to allow the practice of non-Catholic Christianity, but "the native population [showed] a great jealousy and dislike for foreigners."[25] In 1889 a republic was declared, and the government's first immigration decree banned the entry of Asians and Africans. Thirty years later the government imposed these prohibitions on anyone it judged "African" or "Asian," including those who had never been to Africa or Asia.[26] Immigration *was* the construction of national identity.

Asking questions about the public construction of immigrant ethnicity opens many windows to Brazilian national identity. Nineteenth-century debates over Chinese entry took place within the context of abolition of slavery and the creation of a republican regime. The arrival of tens of thousands of Japanese immigrants came during a radicalization of Brazilian politics in the 1920s. The rejection of Catholic immigrants from Iraq came in the aftermath of the Revolution of 1930 and the triumphs of fascism and Nazism. In spite of the structures created to manipulate ethnic hierarchies

Table 2. Percent of Immigrants Entering Brazil, 1900–1939, by Nationality and Decade

	1900–1909	1910–1919	1920–1929	1930–1939
Portuguese	32% (195,586)	39% (318,481)	35% (301,915)	31% (102,743)
Italian	36% (221,394)	17% (138,168)	13% (106,835)	7% (22,170)
Spanish	18% (113,232)	22% (181,651)	10% (81,931)	4% (12,746)
German	2% (13,848)	3% (25,902)	9% (75,801)	8% (27,497)
Japanese	.01% (861)	3% (27,432)	7% (58,284)	30% (99,222)
Middle Easterners	4% (26,846)	5% (38,407)	5% (40,695)	2% (5,549)
Others	8% (50,640)	11% (85,412)	21% (181,186)	18% (62,841)
	100% (622,407)	100% (815,453)	100% (846,647)	100% (332,768)

Sources: Brazil, Serviço de Estatística Econômica e Financeira do Tesouro Nacional, Ministério da Fazenda, *Quadros estatísticos, resumo anual de estatísticas econômicas, 1932–1939* (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1941), pp. 80–82; Brazil, "Discriminação por nacionalidade dos imigrantes entrando no Brasil no período 1884–1939," *Revista de Imigração e Colonização* 1, no. 3 (July 1940): 617–642; Armin K. Ludwig, *Brazil: A Handbook of Historical Statistics* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1985), pp. 104–106; Maria Stella Ferreira Levy, "O papel da migração internacional na evolução da população brasileira (1872 a 1972)," *Revista de Saúde Pública* supp., 8 (1974): 71–73.

Note: The Middle Eastern category is made up of many different national immigrant groups. Until 1903 the only groups to appear in official statistics were Syrians and Turks. In 1908 Egyptians and Moroccans were added. Later additions were Algerians, Armenians, Iraqis, Palestinians, and Persians. In 1926 the Lebanese category first appeared, and almost immediately thereafter the numbers of people entering as Turks dropped significantly. In 1954 the categories Iranian, Israeli, Jordanian, and Turk/Arab were added.

through the control of discourse and policy, immigrants often stood firm, creating dialectical spaces where serious negotiations about national identity took place. Probing the intersection of ethnicity and national identity allows a picture to emerge of how immigrants and elites reacted when confronted with a changing world that demanded new responses to cultural questions. It helps explain curious outcomes, such as when "dominant" elites and "subordinate" immigrants came to agree that Brazil was engaged in a mythic search for a "national race."[27]

My discussion of ethnicity and its relation to national identity should not suggest that race can be dismissed as a factor in understanding Brazil. In the nineteenth century some powerful intellectuals and politicians

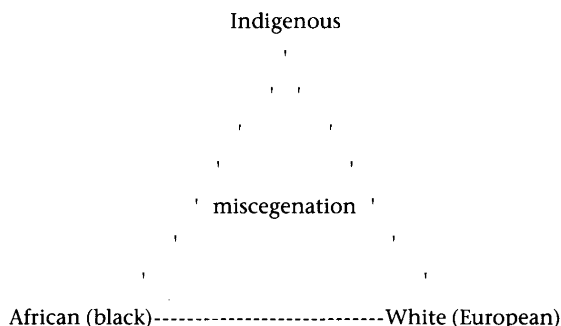

Figure 1

sought "pure" European immigrants who would re-create the Old World in the New. Others argued that the reality of miscegenation underneath the fiction of racial democracy prevented Brazil from achieving its rightful place among elite nations.[28] Since "racial purity," from both a biological and a cultural standpoint, was (and is) necessarily an illusion, a product of nostalgia for an imaginary era of harmony and homogeneity, the mixing of conceptual categories like "nation" and "ethnicity" was often described with racial language. This has led many scholars to subscribe to what might be called the triangle theory of Brazilian society: a "civilization" created from the "collision of three races": Africans (blacks), whites (Europeans), and Indians (indigenous), where the mixture of peoples found within the area enclosed by the borders of the triangle created infinite genetic possibilities.[29]

Disease combined with the often murderous policies of the various Brazilian colonial, imperial, and republican governments to remove indigenous peoples almost entirely from the equation. This compressed the triangle into a continuum that combined ethnicity and skin color by placing Africans (blacks) at one end and whites (Europeans) on the other. Thus, according to the traditional paradigm, Brazil is a country struggling with an identity that always exists at some point along the continuum, and many academics have presumed or implied that anyone without African or indigenous ancestry is, by definition, in the "white" category.[30] A number of studies make this point in their titles: Roger Bastide and Florestan Fernandes's *Brancos e negros em São Paulo,* Thomas Skidmore's *Black into White,* Carl Degler's *Neither Black nor White,* Lilia M. Schwarcz's *Retrato em branco*

African (black)----------------------------White (European)
[Brazilian society]

Figure 2

e negro, Célia Maria Marinho de Azevedo's *Onda negra, medo branco,* and George Reid Andrews's *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo Brazil, 1888–1988* are just a few of the better-known examples.[31]

Although Brazil's ethnic world of immigrant nonwhites and nonblacks often intersects traditional black/white society, it parallels it as well. Cursory readings of anything from nineteenth-century rural slave-owner reports to mid-twentieth-century diplomatic correspondence show that it was the rare person who believed that a Tupí was a Guaraní, a Portuguese Catholic was a German Protestant, or a Hausa Muslim was a Yoruba *orisha* cultist. By exploring outside of the black/white continuum, we can better analyze how cultural meetings spawned new hyphenated ethnicities, all of which had in common their Brazilianness.[32]

How non-European immigrants sought to define their place within Brazilian national identity, and the reaction to these attempts, are the focus of this book. Chapter 2 examines elite discourse on non-European ethnicity in the nineteenth century and suggests that the debates over Chinese immigrant labor created the overarching paradigm against which all other non-European groups would struggle. Chapter 3 investigates how Syrian and Lebanese immigrants manipulated elite discourses on ethnicity to create a hyphenated space for themselves and how, in response, the state and press sought to redefine one Christian Arab group hoping to immigrate to Brazil as "Muslims" and "fanatics" in order to prohibit their entry. The next three chapters analyze how ethnicity and economics came together in the twentieth century to redefine what it meant to be Brazilian, focusing on the massive immigration of Japanese that began in 1908.

The story, however, begins in the early nineteenth century as nervous planters began to search for replacements for slaves. European workers, perhaps from Switzerland or Prussia, captured the Brazilian imagination. There was a problem, though. European wage laborers were neither economically cheap nor socially servile. Soon a perfect new group was discovered. They came from faraway Asia, a place few had been but everyone knew.

2

Chinese Labor and the Debate over Ethnic Integration

Through the mysterious correlation by which
costume influences character, I already felt myself
imbued with Chinese ideas and instincts [after
putting on a mandarin's robes]: the love of
meticulous ceremonial, respect for bureaucratic
formula, a tinge of cultivated skepticism. At the
same time I was filled with abject terror of the
Emperor, abject hatred of foreigners, devotion to
the cult of ancestor worship, fanaticism for
tradition, and a consuming passion for sweets.

—Eça de Queiroz describing his protagonist's mysterious transformation from European to Chinese in The Mandarin *(1880)*[1]