

South America: Land of Immigrants and Emigrants — Italian and Japanese Migration to Argentina and Brazil — and Back

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The history of major Latin American countries, such as Argentina and Brazil in recent centuries, demonstrates that they were nations shaped—and reshaped—by immigration. At the height of mass transatlantic European immigration during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, between 5 and 7 million Europeans immigrated to Latin America and the Caribbean. The intensity of this transoceanic immigration was often as great, or greater than, the contemporary mass immigration to the United States. As a percentage of its population, during the late nineteenth century Argentina received twice as many immigrants as the United States. Less well known still is another major transoceanic labor migration to South America: the migration of Japanese contract laborers to Brazil during the first decades of the twentieth century.

Some of the transoceanic immigrants to South America were voluntary migrants, even when they came as contract labor. This was the case of the Italian immigrants to Argentina—now probably that country's largest ethnic group—and also of the Japanese immigrants to Brazil. (These Japanese migrants compose the origin of what is today the largest overseas population of Japanese descent outside the Pacific islands.) What makes these migration flows particularly interesting to teachers and students of world history is that a century later this migration flow reversed, sending the grandchildren of those Italian and Japanese immigrants back to an Italy or

Japan that they had never known. Still others were involuntary migrants, as was the case with the African slaves whose descendants now compose a majority of Brazil's population of 180 million—justifying its claim to be the second-largest “African nation” after Nigeria.

Transoceanic migration, voluntary or involuntary, should be a central theme of world history, one to which students, whose families likely have migration stories in their past, can relate. It lends itself to an analysis that blends microhistories with macrohistories, incorporating the individual memoir or community chronicle, and to telling stories that students can share. Shifting migration patterns are a reflection of changing relationships between national economies around the world during successive processes of industrialization and globalization, and thus windows to larger historical processes.

The histories of voluntary Italian migration to and from Argentina and voluntary Japanese migration to and from Brazil offer illuminating examples of these shifting relationships and historical processes, and also engaging stories of cultural conflicts and adaptations.

I. Italian Immigration/Emigration to and from Argentina

Italian merchants started coming to Argentina and Uruguay, its neighbor across the Rio de la Plata delta, shortly after their independence in the 1820s. In fact, the famed Italian nationalist and revolutionary of the mid-nineteenth century, Giuseppe Garibaldi, first wore his trademark red shirt fighting for the Colorados (Reds) of Uruguay in the regional war of the 1840s for ascendancy in the Rio de la Plata. Uruguayans call this conflict their Great War. It pitted the cosmopolitan local allies of recent European immigrants who advocated an openness to European liberal ideas and economies against creole proponents of a more insular “American” system.

The first sizable contract labor migration from Italy to Argentina, however, took place during the closing decades of the century, when Argentine ranchers sought to take advantage of the opportunity created by an industrial Europe's increasing inability to feed itself, by adding grains and other food crops to their livestock on their ranches in the rich soil of the pampa of central Argentina. These *golondrinas*—or swallows—were the first Italian migrants to grasp the opportunity created by this leap of globalization across the equator. They were called *golondrinas*, because like swallows they migrated with the seasons. In fact, they were probably the longest-distance seasonal migrant laborers in history who took advantage of the difference in the seasons between the Northern and Southern hemispheres to harvest the crops in

Italy and then take passage to Argentina literally in the *steerage* of the return passage of ships that transported live cattle from Argentina to Italy.

Eventually, some of these Italian agricultural laborers chose to stay in Argentina, a land where food was plentiful and meat was cheap, a new nation with greater opportunities than hierarchical rural Italy, while others returned to Italy with tales of gold in the streets and jewels in the sand that motivated friends and relatives to cross the Atlantic. The dramatic increase in Italian immigration to Argentina during the second half of the nineteenth century—which rose from less than 100,000 during the 1860s to more than 640,000 during the 1880s—reflected both the agricultural depression in northern Italy and the economic boom of the 1880s in South America, when foreign investment multiplied and exports doubled in a region that was being incorporated into an increasingly global economy centered on an industrializing and urbanizing Europe that could no longer feed or clothe itself from its own rural production. The resultant need for labor in both rural agriculture and urban export processing drew large numbers of European immigrants to Argentina—2.5 million between 1880 and 1930, the largest share of Latin America's seven–nine million immigrants during those decades—with Italians in the lead.

Entire villages in the Veneto, the depressed rural hill country near Venice, were deserted in the 1880s by their young men, all of whom seemed to have gone to Argentina. When the Italian government became alarmed at this depopulation and decided to investigate, what it found was a pattern—and a story—that repeated itself in village after village.

On a Sunday morning before Mass, an elegant stranger arrived in the village, impeccably dressed in black. He joined the promenade around the central square, doffing his top hat to the ladies and setting them abuzz with questions about who he might be and whether or not he was an eligible bachelor. When Mass began he entered the village church and took a prominent place in a front pew. When the service was over, he sat down at the best table in the best café and ordered the most expensive drink on the menu.

Then, when the young men who gathered in the square could no longer restrain their curiosity, he invited them to join him and ordered them an expensive drink as well. They asked him where he was from, and he was always from a village close enough so that they had heard of it, but far enough away so that they didn't have any relatives there.

When the church clock struck noon the stranger took out his big gold watch to check the time, while their eyes grew bigger and bigger. How could someone from a

village like their own have become so rich and prosperous? The stranger replied: Only a few years before, he had been a poor peasant like themselves, without hopes for a better future. "And then, and then...?" they demanded. "And then," he declared, "I went to *Argentina!*" They too could be like him. All it took was a few years and a little hard work

The elegant stranger was an agent for a steamship line, which was in turn subsidized by the Argentine government and private landowners as part of a policy of encouraging European immigration, both to "whiten" and "civilize" the mixed-race population, and to secure experienced farmers to add export agriculture to rural Argentina's largely livestock economy. Before he left town, he signed up all the young men he could persuade to ship out to Argentina.

They would have to pay for their passage by working for a landowner for three to five years as indentured labor, breaking up the hard sod, farming a huge 500-acre plot, and turning his ranch into a farm with their strong arms and knowledge of agriculture. When their voluntary servitude was over, they would leave the estate planted with grains and flax—and the alfalfa needed to feed the rancher's new refined livestock. Part of their commitment was to leave these improvements to the landowner when their contract expired. But then they could leave to seek their own fortune—what Argentines called "hacer América" and in the United States we call "the American Dream."

Most had been peasants in Europe and aspired to land of their own, but few found it. Argentina did not have the equivalent of the U.S. Homestead Act³ until much too late, and then the lands available were poor lands distant from transportation and markets. The Argentine pampas were plains with extraordinary rich, well-watered soils, but these lands were already owned by Argentine elites and their value had multiplied with the building of railways and the boom in pastoral and agricultural exports.

Some Italian immigrants banded together in cooperatives to buy land in less pricey regions. But most drifted back to Buenos Aires, Argentina's chief port and political capital, where they could at least enjoy the society of other Italians and hope to find jobs in the booming export economy. During the boom of the 1880s, their American dreams seemed within reach, but their hopes were dashed when boom turned to bust in 1890—and Italian immigrants went jobless and homeless. Some gave up and returned to Italy, but most remained and rode out the storm, turning their trials and disappointments into the early tangos that they wrote, sang, and danced in

3. The Homestead Act was an act passed by U.S. Congress in 1862, giving unsettled land in the West to persons willing to build on the land and develop it.

the bars and brothels of La Boca, the port of Buenos Aires. It became a largely Italian area, where they lived in single-room occupancy slums known as *conventillos*, along with equally poor immigrants from other parts of Europe and the Middle East. By 1890, Buenos Aires was mostly a foreign-born city, where "gringo" meant Italian, not Anglo-American.

This was a development that alarmed the Argentine elite that had initially encouraged this mass transatlantic immigration, but now saw their concentration in the country's capital as a threat to national identity and political stability. The immigrants brought with them from Europe not only their strong arms and labor skills but also revolutionary ideologies such as anarchism and socialism. Soon they were regarded by the elite as a threat to public order, the core of what would become known as "the social question," where social inequality and ethnic exclusion became a charged political issue—and like immigration in the United States today, one that prompted government repression and provoked vigilante violence.

This view of immigration as a menace was reinforced when Italian anarchists took the lead in contesting the Argentine elite's self-congratulatory national centenary celebrations in 1910, and again in the social unrest of the deep recession that followed World War I. Hundreds of Italian immigrants became the first victims of the deadly antiimmigrant repression known as *La Semana Trágica*—the Tragic Week—of 1919.

It began as a strike in a factory staffed by Italian immigrant labor, organized by anarchist "agitators," but ended in a massacre that left hundreds of poor immigrants dead and thousands wounded by security forces and civilian vigilantes organized by the rightist "Patriotic League," in an outburst of elite xenophobia.⁴

During the decades that followed, the Italian immigrants—and their children and grandchildren—gradually integrated into Argentine society, adding their slang to the local language and pasta and pizza to the tables of Argentina.⁵ Their integration was symbolized by the presidential election in 1946 of populist leader Juan Peron, himself of mixed Italian and Spanish ancestry (Argentina's two main European ethnic roots).⁶ His decade in power saw their further integration with the new wave of mixed race

4. For a concise, accessible account of the *Semana Trágica* set within its historical and social context, see Peter Winn, *Americas: The Changing Face of Latin America and the Caribbean*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California, 2006), Chapter 3.

5. This gradual assimilation can be traced in the letters between members of an extended Italian family on both sides of the Atlantic edited by Samuel Baily and Franco Ramella, *One Family, Two Worlds: An Italian Family's Correspondence Across the Atlantic, 1901–1922* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988). Excerpts from these letters would make good primary source documents for students. For an interesting comparison to Italian immigration to the United States during this same era, see also Baily, *Immigrants in the Lands of Promise: Italians in Buenos Aires and New York City, 1870–1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), in which Baily concludes that the integration of Italian immigrants into the receiving society was greater in Buenos Aires than in New York.

6. For a comprehensive, prize-winning history of Spanish immigration to Buenos Aires during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see José Moya, *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850–1930* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1998).

migrants from the Andean interior into a powerful working class, although Peron also restricted further immigration to Argentina to white Europeans.

This Italo-Argentine synthesis of Italy and Argentina was so complete and successful that it was a shock when thousands of Argentines of Italian descent lined up outside the Italian consulate in Buenos Aires in the deep economic crisis of 2001–2002—itself a result of globalization and the Argentine neoliberal response to its challenges—to reclaim the Italian passports that their grandparents had surrendered. Their goal was a return migration to their ancestral homeland in search of work and a better future than they saw possible in the Argentina where they had been born and raised.

Admittedly, it was a crisis so acute and sustained that unemployment soared to 40 percent and most Argentines fell into poverty in a country that was one of the richest in the world less than a century ago, while many Argentines were starving in one of the world's great bread baskets. Still, for a country that had been a land of *immigrants*, not *emigrants*—the country in Latin America with the largest middle class, where the South American version of the American Dream had seemed easiest to realize—it was a shock.

During those first years of the twenty-first century, an estimated 300,000 Argentines left their country in search of jobs and better futures elsewhere. Most went to Europe, where labor shortages offered good job opportunities, and European Union citizenship policies enabled Argentines of Italian and Spanish descent to “reclaim” EU passports and once in Europe work wherever they wanted. Although most may have been Italian in origin, because of the shared language, the vast majority ended up in Spain, which by 2004 was home to nearly 160,000 native-born Argentines—a reflection as well of the booming Spanish economy's expanding labor needs.

Far fewer ended up staying in Italy—although the 11,000 Argentines there are the largest group among the 45,000 Latin Americans working and living in Italy. So far, there have been few studies of those Argentines who did stay, of how they assess their “return” migration to the land of their ancestors. Most of the evidence we have is anecdotal—so I will end this part of my essay with an anecdote of my own:

A few years ago, I was dining at an outdoor table in Trastevere in Rome, where a singer was doing the rounds of the tables singing Neapolitan love songs. His Italian was excellent, but I detected a slight familiar accent. So I asked him in Spanish where he was from and he responded in Spanish: “Buenos Aires.” I am an oral historian, so I began to ask for his life story. He had been living and working in Italy since the crisis, he explained. It was a better living and he had married and was doing well, he said,

but he still carried Argentina in his corazón—his heart—which he poured into the nostalgic tango that he sang for me. As with the Italian immigrants to Buenos Aires of his grandparents' generation, the tango continued to serve as a vehicle for immigrant longings and dreams—and even successful immigrants felt like exiles in their hearts.

II. Migration from and to Japan and Brazil

When Peron banned nonwhite immigration to Argentina in the mid-twentieth century, one of the groups whose presence in his "white" nation that he wanted to restrict was the Japanese. By then, the Japanese had already formed a large community within Brazil, Argentina's neighbor and rival, which had become home to the largest overseas population of Japanese descent outside Hawaii.

Under the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603–1867), Japanese emigration had been prohibited. During the Meiji period (1868–1912), which followed and opened Japan to the outside world, the Japanese government itself promoted emigration as a way of dealing with unemployment and rural overpopulation, and as a source of income via emigrant remittances. Moreover, the dislocations caused by Japan's rapid modernization and industrialization caused widespread rural poverty and distress. During this era, half a million Japanese emigrated, most of them to nearby Manchuria or Korea or to Pacific islands like Hawaii, where Japanese composed 40 percent of the population by the U.S. takeover in 1898.

It was not until the end of the Meiji period, when Japanese immigration began to meet resistance elsewhere, that Japanese began to migrate to Brazil. Brazil had promoted immigration during the closing decades of the nineteenth century as a replacement for the African slave labor that it finally abolished in 1888. But, as in Argentina, it was *European* immigration that its coffee planters had subsidized, in return for contract labor on their plantations. From 1880 to 1900, 1.6 million Europeans arrived in Brazil, half of them from Italy and most of the rest from Iberia. But Brazilian plantation owners, used to slave labor, treated their European workers like slaves, and the Italian and Spanish governments responded by forbidding new emigration, while many of the earlier immigrants left the plantations as soon as they could.

This created a rural labor shortage that Brazil's planters and the government they dominated thought they would once again fill with nonwhite workers. They considered the importation of Chinese coolie labor, but rejected it on racial grounds. Japanese were also racially problematic in a country whose racial policy was to whiten the population through miscegenation, but Brazil's economy depended on its coffee exports, the biggest in the world, and Brazilian coffee planters needed labor.

Moreover, the Japanese had acquired prestige in Brazil because of their victory in the Russo-Japanese War, so they were considered superior Asians. As a consequence of this confluence of concerns, in 1907, the São Paulo state government agreed to subsidize contract Japanese plantation labor, arranged with the help of the Japanese government.

The first group of Japanese immigrants arrived in Brazil in 1908, with little knowledge of their new land, but with high hopes of earning enough money in five years of plantation work to buy land of their own or to return to Japan with resources and their heads held high. Instead they found work that was hard and difficult under foremen who had been slave drivers and treated the contract laborers the same way as they had slaves. The conditions were so different from those promised by the Japanese emigration company that some migrants rebelled and left the plantations, especially when the steamship company failed to return the moneys they had deposited at the start of the journey.

This is a story told as a microhistory in *Gaijin*, a prize-winning film made in 1980 by the then-young Japanese Brazilian director Tizuka Yamasaki, based on the experience of her 101-year-old grandmother, who had told it to her as family oral history.⁷ It is a "docudrama" social history film that would work well in a classroom and allow students to share the experience of these Japanese labor migrants, far from home and facing discrimination, exploitation, and manipulation in a strange cultural setting. The Japanese are isolated in part because of their language but even more because of the insularity of their culture. Because the Brazilians wanted to make sure the migrants would not flee the plantation, they insisted on the migration of families, which led to the creation of fictive families, with husbands and wives "of convenience."

This is the story of Yamasaki's grandmother in *Gaijin*, which is a pejorative Japanese word for "outsider" or "foreigner." Her Japanese husband of convenience dies of a tropical disease, while other migrants commit suicide or flee the plantation. The dramatic culmination of the film, however, is when the enraged Italian workers go on strike while the uncomprehending Japanese migrants continue working. This leads the plantation owner to order: "Hire Japanese workers. They work hard. Not like the Italians and the Spaniards, who are troublemakers." Yet, by the end of the film, a liaison between Yamasaki's grandmother and a socially conscious Brazilian points to a different future in a Brazil that prided itself on being a racial democracy in which racial mixing was both common and a path to integration. It would be a very gradual

7. It would be interesting to have students do oral histories of their own family's immigrant generation or as far back as family memory carries—and then to compare these stories to those in *Gaijin* or Bailly and Ramello's Italian family correspondence.

assimilation, however, for a Japanese Brazilian community that would also try hard to maintain their traditions and identity.

Yamasaki's grandmother was among the first of the nearly quarter of a million Japanese who would migrate to Brazil over the next 50 years, most of them in the 1920s. It was a migration officially promoted and subsidized by a Japanese government fearful of overpopulation, and by Japanese investors eager to develop a Brazilian source of cotton for an expanding Japanese textile industry. Japanese migrants became *colonos* who cleared the forests, prepared the land for the coffee plants, did the planting, tended the plants, and harvested the beans. In the rows between the coffee plants, they grew food crops and earned money selling surplus food and doing odd jobs. They also earned a fixed sum for every 1,000 plants and for every sack of coffee beans, but this was much less than the emigration agencies had promised—only 20 percent of the wages paid in Hawaii.

Many fled the plantations and took refuge in the cities or in working for railway companies. Once they left their tight-knit Japanese community, they often intermarried with Brazilians and assimilated to the dominant culture. But 70 percent became small farmers on the expiration of their *colono* contract. They were helped in acquiring land by the coffee glut that led landowners to sell off parts of their plantations—very different from the high price of land that was a problem for Italian migrants in Argentina—and by the Japanese cultural tradition of banding together in mutual aid credit associations.

With the encouragement of Japanese industrialists, many became cotton farmers. But most became truck farmers around large cities like São Paulo, and by 1935, Japanese farmers produced 80 percent of the vegetables for Brazil's economic capital.

Others retreated to Japanese colonies in the Amazon, ethnic enclaves where they could live as Japanese—reproducing family patterns, religious rituals, and cultural mores. There they created Japanese schools, medical services, associations, and newspapers. Some of these communities were so isolated that they refused to believe that Japan had been defeated in World War II, while others streamed to the coast like a messianic sect because of the rumor that the Emperor had sent a ship to take them back to Japan.

World War II was a big divide for the Japanese Brazilian community in other ways as well. Brazilian paranoia about an alleged Japanese plot to use the Amazon as a naval base led the Brazilian government to restrict Japanese newspapers, schools, and public gatherings in the Japanese language, and to press the Japanese into a

compulsory assimilation program. After Pearl Harbor, internment camps were set up in Brazil, and Japanese were told to move from the coast, but these measures never reached U.S. levels.

After the war, Japanese emigration to Brazil resumed, although on a smaller scale and not in as culturally isolated a fashion. Before, many of the immigrants had defined themselves as *temporary* labor migrants or *Dekasegi Imin*. Now they saw themselves as permanent settlers in a new homeland, as "ex-Japanese" —*Nikkeijin*, foreigners of Japanese descent. Even more important, second- and third-generation Japanese Brazilians—the *Nisei* and *Sansei*—learned Portuguese, were educated in Brazilian schools and universities, and began to make their way in Brazilian society.⁸ They still retained a strong sense of their Japanese roots, but now it was a *Nikkeijin* identity, as Brazilians of Japanese descent, which was "chameleonlike"—at times Japanese at other times Brazilian. Although the *Nikkeijin* faced some discrimination, by the 1980s they had emerged as the model minority, whose educational level, incomes, and professional status exceeded the Brazilian average. They had become so successful and well regarded that Japanese culture and food had become fashionable among non-Japanese Brazilians.⁹ By 1990, there was a Japanese Brazilian community of more than 1.2 million, the largest overseas Japanese descent community (outside Hawaii) in the world.

Yet those same decades of the 1980s and 1990s would see the beginnings of a return migration to Japan as contract laborers of those second- and third-generation *Nisei* and *Sansei*, the children and grandchildren of those Japanese contract laborers who migrated to Brazil earlier in the twentieth century. This return migration would lead to 280,000 Japanese Brazilians living and working in Japan by 2004. It was a development that had both Japanese and Brazilian roots, and involved a working misunderstanding on both sides.

During the closing decades of the twentieth century, Japan, with an expanding economy and low population growth, was facing a labor crisis. It was solving this crisis by importing foreign "guest workers" from other Asian countries, from Communist China to Islamic Pakistan. But their presence and behavior in a largely monoethnic and insular Japan was creating a problem. So it occurred to the Japanese to instead bring in as guest workers ethnically Japanese Brazilians, whom they assumed would fit easily into Japan.

8. *Nikkeijin* — Persons born in Japan or descendents of persons born in Japan who have assimilated into their new societies; *Nisei* — A person of Japanese descent, born outside of Japan, usually in the Americas; *Sansei* — Child of *Nisei* born in the new society (third generation).

9. For a thoughtful and complex discussion of these issues, see Daniela de Carvalho, *Migrants and Identity in Japan and Brazil: The Nikkeijin* (New York: Routledge, 2002), esp. Chapters 3 and 5.

Before 1980, Brazilians rarely emigrated: Why would you want to leave Brazil, with its vibrant culture, beautiful landscape, and an economy that had been among the fastest growing in the world for a century? The Latin American debt crisis of the 1980s—with its high unemployment and hyperinflation—changed that attitude, and Brazilians began to migrate to other countries in large numbers for the first time.

Japanese Brazilians retained an idealized image of Japan and were uniformly referred to as *japones* in Brazil. So they returned to Japan as contract laborers with high hopes and expectations of large earnings, and being embraced by the Japan that their grandparents had come from a century before. Both the Japanese and the Japanese Brazilians were doomed to disappointment. Neither side had their expectations fulfilled.

Japanese Brazilians were given what the Japanese called "3D" jobs: "dirty, difficult, and dangerous." Moreover, the treatment Japanese Brazilian workers received in these work sectors was demeaning, particularly for those who had been middle class and had enjoyed a high status in Brazil. Nor were they welcomed with open arms in Japan and viewed as prodigal sons. On the contrary, they faced discrimination and were regarded as *gaijin* (foreigners). They remained in Japan because of the money—wages that were sky-high compared to Brazil—but they filled mostly low-skill jobs and resented both their treatment and their inability to transcend it.

The Japanese who had brought them "home" felt equally disappointed in the result. The Japanese Brazilians might be *ethnically* Japanese, but they were *culturally* Brazilian. As a result, they did not behave "properly": They dressed and talked too loudly, were never on time, and sang and danced in too sexy a way. Foreigners were not expected to behave like Japanese, but because Japanese Brazilians *looked* Japanese, people would scold them in a language they barely understood for not *behaving* like a good Japanese. As a result, the Japanese Brazilians were slotted into the bottom of Japanese society as a new ethnic minority group—like the Korean Japanese, the Ainu, and the Okinawans—and discriminated against like these other "inferior" ethnicities.

Yet despite these mutual disappointments, the numbers of Japanese Brazilian contract workers in Japan has grown to more than a quarter of a million. Today, these Nikkeijin are the second-largest group of the 800,000 foreign workers in Japan (after the Chinese). As one study concluded: "They are by far the largest and most important source of legal migrant labor in Japan, on which many Japanese industries

now depend. [Japanese Brazilians] have assumed a critical function in the Japanese economy as a flexible and relatively cheap labor force."¹⁰

But their low wages in Japanese terms are many times more than what even middle-class professionals can earn in Brazil, allowing them to send money home to help support their families. Together, they send back to Brazil \$3 billion in remittances annually, equal to 6 percent of Brazil's exports. This is why you have Brazilian teachers doing unskilled manual labor in Japan that they would never do in Brazil. Moreover, a third of pornography ads in Japan now feature Japanese Brazilians—who are viewed as the sexy "other" because of the way they move and dance. This represents another demeaning occupational niche for Japanese Brazilians, most of whom do not dance samba in Brazil.

One result of this disappointment and humiliation is that many Japanese Brazilians work a few years in Japan and then return with their savings to Brazil—these are the *dekasegi* temporary migrant workers. But when they return home, many find it hard to work in Brazil for so much less than they can earn in Japan and become "circle migrants," who remain in Brazil until the money is spent and then return to Japan to work. In a way, they are a twenty-first-century version of the nineteenth-century Italian *golondrinas*.

But other Japanese Brazilians choose to settle permanently in Japan. Like their grandparents who migrated the other way, they bring over their families and make the best of it, despite their feelings of being excluded and discriminated against. What is common to their experience of both countries is being regarded as a minority. But the difference is that where they were viewed as a *positive* minority in Brazil, they are seen as a *negative* minority in Japan. In Brazil, the Nikkeijin were ethnically distinguished as "so Japanese," but in Japan, they are ethnically disparaged as "so Brazilian." Like immigrants elsewhere, they are also blamed for "many problems"—"they fight and quarrel," "they have car accidents," "they do not pay," "they steal."¹¹ This is very different from the model minority image of Japanese Brazilians in Brazil.

The impact on individuals and their identity has been profound, and not what either they or academics had predicted. Many came to Japan expecting to be embraced and to reinforce their Japanese identity. Instead, they were excluded as "Brazilians" and this reinforced their *Brazilian* identity. As one young man put it: "I am now certain that I am more Brazilian than Japanese—I found this out in Japan. . . . Being seen as a foreigner in Japan despite my Japanese face was a shock that I will

10. Takeyuki Tsuda, *Strangers in the Ethnic Homeland: Japanese Brazilian Return Migration in Transnational Perspective* (New York: Columbia University, 2003), xii. Excerpts used by permission of Columbia University Press.

11. Quoted in De Carvalho, *Migrants and Identity*, 141.

never forget."¹² As a result, Nikkei migrants who never danced samba or participated in Carnival in Brazil do so in Japan "to express their Brazilianness."¹³

For others, this initial nationalistic Brazilian response is followed by a more balanced view: "I discovered my Brazilianness in Japan and now I feel much more Brazilian than I did in Brazil," one Nikkei explained. "But my Brazilian feelings do not continue to become stronger over time. After the first shock I received in Japan, I felt a sudden rise in my Brazilian consciousness, but then the confusion ended. Now I can see both the Japanese and Brazilian sides of myself objectively."¹⁴ Or as one Japanese Brazilian put it: "Between karaoke and samba I won't choose. I want to keep the best of both."¹⁵

To the Japanese, the Japanese Brazilians were "weirdos," as one young man put it. "They looked Japanese, but they weren't real Japanese. They acted completely different, spoke a foreign tongue, and dressed in strange ways. They were like fake Japanese, like a fake superhero you see on TV."¹⁶ For a Brazilian, who "was *the* Japanese [in Brazil]...brought up as a weird Brazilian...in a world where there were us [the *Nikkei*] and the *Gaijin* [other Brazilians]," this Japanese response was both "confusing" and painful.¹⁷ Yet anthropologists who have studied the Japanese Brazilians in Japan believe that their children, who are attending Japanese schools and internalizing Japanese mores and values, will overcome their minority status and disappear into Japanese society:

My sister's daughter now thinks completely like a Japanese. She doesn't want to return to Brazil because she thinks Japan is the best. Because of these images she gets from Japanese society, she thinks Brazil is a poor, backward society populated by armed bandits. ... She even asked my sister...if Brazil has televisions.¹⁸

Because Japanese Brazilians are a *cultural* minority in Japan, not a *racial* minority like the Korean Japanese, scholars believe that these children will disappear into the majority populace through cultural assimilation and social mobility because their ethnicity is not racially essentialized. As a local Japanese official in the provincial town of Oizumi explained:

If the *Nikkeijin* children eventually learn to speak the language fluently and to behave just like the Japanese, they will be accepted as Japanese. I believe the

12. Quoted in Tsuda, *Strangers*, 367-68.

13. De Carvalho, *Migrants and Identity*, 137.

14. Quoted in Tsuda, *Strangers*, 368.

15. *Jornal Tudo Bem*, March 28, 1998. Quoted in De Carvalho, *Migrants and Identity*, 140.

16. Quoted in Tsuda, *Strangers*, x.

17. Quoted in De Carvalho, *Migrants and Identity*, 140.

18. Quoted in Tsuda, *Strangers*, 391.

Brazilian *Nikkeijin* are fundamentally different from the Korean Japanese because they are of Japanese descent. The Japanese believe in *kettoshugi* (the principle of descent and blood ties). As we say, "blood is thicker than water."¹⁹

Oizumi may be the best test of that belief. It is the Japanese municipality with the highest concentration of foreigners, and nearly four-fifths of them are Brazilian. As a result, it is known as *Samba no Machi*—the City of Samba—and its Carnival has become a Japanese tourist attraction. By 1997, half of the babies born in Oizumi were Brazilian and by 2002 there were more than fifty Brazilian-owned businesses with more than 4,000 customers weekly. Facing a labor shortage in its manufacturing industries that this Brazilian immigration has solved, Oizumi's officials have tried hard to integrate Brazilians into local society. Yet, one local resident complained that the number of Brazilians and their alien cultural style made her "feel a foreigner in her own city."²⁰

Clearly, the return migration to Japan of Japanese Brazilians—like the original migration of their grandparents from Japan to Brazil—is a complex story, involving many of the themes and issues of world history on both a macro and micro level. It would be a fascinating addition to a world history course. Fortunately, because it has fascinated both media and scholars there is a lot published on it. Moreover, to tell the micro story, Tizuka Yamasaki has recently released her follow-up film to *Gaijin*, which, to underscore the comparison, she has called *Gaijin 2*. It follows Japanese Brazilians through the trials, tribulations, and triumphs of their return to Japan.

There are also suggestive microstories in recent books like Takeyuki Tsuda's *Strangers in the Ethnic Homeland*, which begins with a revealing, descriptive anecdote:

The train slows as it rolls into Shibuyu station in Tokyo. It is past rush hour on the Yamanote line, but the car is still full with commuters. Outside on the station platform await hundreds of passengers. The doors open, allowing the passengers to shuffle out and a new group to file into the train in an orderly manner. Most of the men are dressed conservatively in suits...Finally, just before the doors shut, a group of three men stroll in. Compared to those who preceded them, these Japanese appear quite different. Their demeanor is casual and leisurely. Two of them are dressed in shirts of bright, mixed colors and jeans with a stripe down the seam. The third wears a t-shirt that says "**Brasil.**" They continue their conversation, speaking loudly in Portuguese...

19. Quoted in Tsuda, *Strangers*, 395.

20. Quoted in De Carvalho, *Migrants and Identity*, 136.

Instantly, the three men become the objects of peculiar glances from the surrounding Japanese. Some look up from their newspapers. Others pretend not to notice these strangers. Two Japanese women sitting beside me turn their eyes away from the men and look at each other. They exchange one word: "Gaijin!"²¹

21. Tsuda, *Strangers*, ix.