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## **Negotiating National Identity: Middle Eastern and Asian Immigrants and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil**

By Jeffrey Lesser  
Connecticut College

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**Jeffrey Lesser**

The role of race has dominated scholarship in the field of Brazilian studies. Yet virtually every examination has assumed that Brazilian society exists along a black/white continuum. Unlike in the US, where the "one-drop rule" has traditionally created inflexible, and widely understood, racial categories, in Brazil, race always seems to be, at some level, up for grabs as long as it remains within the black/white spectrum. Thus, when I first started studying Brazil, doing research on images of Jews, I placed them in the "white" category along with all others of European descent. Yet the documentation told a different story. Jews were neither white nor black: they were in a category that the traditional scholarship never mentioned. My initial assumption was that this placement was related to the very specific history of Jewish-Gentile relations in the Americas. But then I received a phone call from Albert Hourani, one of the foremost scholars of the Arab experience. He wanted me to contribute an essay to a volume he was writing on the Lebanese diaspora. "Prof. Hourani," I implored, "I study Jews not Arabs." The Professor was not interested in my excuses, "Go back to the documents" he told me, and of course I did. What I found shocked me. Virtually every public discussion of Jews in Brazil was also about Arabs and Japanese. What could it mean that these three groups, who arrived at different times, inserted into the economy in different ways, and had little to do with each other, were linked over and over again? And why did the traditional scholarship ignore the millions of members of these groups by functionally lumping them into the "white" or "European" category? As I researched these question, I began to realize that the linkages did not simply happen. Rather each of these groups used similar public strategies to negotiate their identities as Brazilians and it is these strategies, and their meaning, that I would like to explore today.

In order to begin our discussion I would like to briefly tell you four foundational fictions that are commonly heard in ethnic Brazil:

Myth 1: This myth is frequently heard among members of Brazil's Jewish community of about 120,000 people or less than 1/10 of one percent of the Brazilian population. The overwhelming majority of this community either immigrated or descends from immigrants who arrived between 1920 and 1940. According to this myth, during the Inquisition, Jews in colonial Portugal chose non-Jewish names based on biblical animals and trees. The claim is that anyone with a name like Coelho or Cardoso descends from Jews. In a recent issue of *Gerações* the newsletter of the São Paulo-based Sociedade Genealogica Judaica do Brasil a recent article included a genealogical tree suggesting that Fernando Henrique Cardoso, current president of Brazil, is descended from Jews.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Gerações*, [newsletter of the Sociedade Genealogica Judaica do Brasil, São Paulo], Volume 1, no. 2, (May, 1995), 13.

Myth 2: This is a myth that started circulating around Brazil in the 1870's and was picked up by intellectuals of Arab descent. There are about a quarter of a million Brazilians of Arab descent in Brazil. Beginning in the nineteenth century, a number of well-respected French crackpot theorists suggested that King Solomon sailed the Amazon River and that the Quechua and Portuguese languages were offshoots of ancient Hebrew. Such theories were repeated frequently by the most well-known Arab intellectual of the 1930's, Salomão Jorge, a prize-winning poet, author and radio commentator. Jorge modified the myth to suggest that King Solomon was the "ancestor of the Syrians" and thus Brazil's indigenous tribes descended from Solomon and by extension Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

Myth 3: The "Legend of the town of Marataize" which has been told to me by numerous members of Brazil's Siro-Lebanese community

"There once was a group of peddlers who sold their wares in the interior of Espírito Santos, going from place to place by mule. One of the peddlers was named Aziz and his wife was considered the leader of the women who stayed behind as the men went out to sell their goods. These women went out every day to wash clothes in a place called the "Turkish basin" (bacia das turcas). Over time, the town that grew up around the place where the women washed their clothes came to be called Marataize in honor of the wife (Marat) of Aziz."<sup>3</sup>

Myth 4: Between 1908 and 1941 about 190,000 Japanese entered Brazil. Today, almost one million Brazilians claim Japanese descent and some 200,000 of these self-defined nikkei currently work in Japan. Hachiro Fukuhara, a wealthy businessperson returned from an exploratory trip to the Amazon claiming that Brazil was "founded by Asiatics" since "the natives who live along the River Amazon look exactly like the Japanese. There is also a close resemblance between them in manners and customs . . . (and) a certain Chinese secretary in the German Embassy at Rio (has) made a careful study (of language) and concluded that these Indians descended from Mongols." Fukuhara even stated that he knew of a Buddhist ceremony performed in the Himalayas where a woman holds a tree as she is bearing a child and her husband walks around her, exclaiming happily "I saw the same thing in the Amazon."<sup>4</sup> Rokuro (RO - KRO) Koyama, an early 1920's immigrant to Brazil and funder of an influential São Paulo-based Japanese-language newspaper agreed.

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<sup>2</sup> Vicomte Enrique Onffroy de Thoron, *Voyages des flottes de Salomon et d'Hiram en Amerique: position géographique de Parvaim, Ophir & Tarschisch*. (Paris : imp. G. Towne, 1868). "O Rei Salomão no Rio Amazonas" in Júnior Amarílio, *As vantagens da imigração syria no Brasil : em torno de uma polemica entre os Snrs. Herbert V. Levy e Salomão Jorge*, no "Diario de São Paulo" (Rio de Janeiro: Off. Gr. da S. A. A Noite, 1925), 87-103. Viriato Correia, "O Rei Salomão no Rio Amazonas." in Salomão Jorge, *Album da Colonia Sírio Libanesa no Brasil* (São Paulo: Sociedade Imprensa Brasileira, 1948), 471-479.

<sup>3</sup> This story has been told to me in various forms of which I repeat only one. A slightly different version can be found in Claude Fahd Hajjar, *Imigração árabe: 100 anos de reflexão* (São Paulo: Icone Editora, 1985), 145.

<sup>4</sup> Article by Hachiro Fukuhara, "Brazil founded by Asiatics?" in *The Japan Times and Mail* 26 June 1927. The Kanegafuchi Cotton-Spinning Company was known for its innovative use of dormitories and health services as a means of maintaining female labor. See E. Patricia Tsurumi, *Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 154. "Nipponese Gets 2,500,000 Acres as a Basis for a Vast Colony" *Japan Times and Mail*, 11 May 1930.

Koyama asked in the introduction to his Tupi-Japanese-Portuguese dictionary: "Did we Japanese and Tupi-Guarani originally come from and share the same Polynesian seed? Do we meet again now, after four thousand years?"<sup>5</sup>

These four myths all have something in common. They each allow the group in question to claim a more "original" or "authentic" Brazilianness than members of the European descended Brazilian elite itself. The reasons are not hard to fathom. Since Brazil is a country in which the social insecurity of the elite is paramount, hyphenated identities do not exist. Indeed, for at least the past one hundred years Brazilians have placed successful people in the "white" category, regardless of their skin color. This reflects the widely accepted upper and middle class notion that Brazilians whose ancestry is mixed and includes some African heritage have been problematic elements in the building of the nation. But what about the millions of Brazilians who trace their ancestry to the Middle East and Asia, who it might be said are neither white nor black? Certainly the messages about these groups have been mixed. On the one hand, we might see integration if we looked at the advertisement for the very popular 1980's soap opera "The Immigrants" that went, "Portuguese, Japanese, Spanish, Italians, Arabs - Don't Miss The Most Brazilian Soap Opera on Television."<sup>6</sup> Yet a different impression emerges when we examine the language that Brazilians use to describe ethnicity: a third generation Brazilian of Japanese descent remains "Japanese," and not Japanese-Brazilian, while a fourth generation Brazilian of Lebanese descent may be called a "turco," an "arabe," or even a "sirio." Over the course of the twentieth century, being a Brazilian citizen has never ended the condition of foreignness.

Today I will examine the processes by which ethnic identities and perceptions were constructed in the twenties, thirties and forties, and how these function as a kind of mirror in which national identity confronted itself. These were decades of enormous demographic change, massive economic growth, and authoritarian rule. They were also years when what it meant in a public sense to be a "Brazilian" was widely contested. By examining similar strategies used by Syrian-Lebanese (the term used to describe those of middle eastern descent) and nikkei (which describes those of Japanese descent) I will show how markedly Brazilian national identity was redefined prior to World War II. I have chosen these two groups for three reasons: first these communities each claim over one million people (there are more people of Japanese descent in Brazil than in the rest of the world combined, for example); second, many who define themselves as Syrian-Lebanese and nikkei have found wide success in the political, economic and social spheres; and third, it was exactly the "non-whiteness and non-blackness" of these two groups that most challenged elite notions of Brazilian identity.<sup>7</sup> By examining public ethnicity as expressed in the language of the majority – in newspapers and books, on the political stage, and in the academy - I want to suggest that the definitions of virtually all of the components of national identity - ethnicity, class, color, gender, and even the very boundaries of the Brazilian state - were successfully negotiated by certain groups. By the mid-twentieth century, elite paradigms about who was and was not an acceptable Brazilian changed so markedly that many European groups were no longer in the "white" category while at certain times Asians and Middle Easterners were.

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<sup>5</sup> Rojuoro Koyama, *Tupi Tango Shu* (The Tupi Lexicon) (São Paulo: Teikoku Shoin, 1951), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Advertisement for the Bandeirantes Television Network tele-novela "Os Imigrantes" (1981) in *Jornal do Imigrante* IV:422 (September, 1981), p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Maria Stella Ferreira Levy, "O Papel da Migração Internacional na Evolução da População Brasileira (1872 a 1972)." *Revista de Saúde Pública*, supplement, 8 (1974): 49-90. "Discriminação por Nacionalidade dos Imigrantes Entrando no Brasil no Período 1884-1939." *Revista de Imigração e Colonização* 1:3, (July 1940), 617-638.

There are two main actors in this story. On one side are members of the majority elite, comprised of politicians, intellectuals, journalists and businesspeople. Almost all were well educated, generally in the same few schools of law and medicine where they learned about eugenics and other forms of scientific racism. While this shared learning created a common methodology for understanding the role of immigrants and their descendants in Brazilian society, it did not create a common outcome. Instead the elite was sharply divided between those who saw the "whitening" of Brazil as a goal that would be achieved via the physical transformation of the skin color of the masses and others who saw "whiteness" as related to economic growth and domestic production. For the former only Europeans could be white and Africans and Asians simply had to be banned from entering: the latter position is best summed up by a Federal Deputy who declared in 1935, "(T)he Japanese colonists are even whiter than the Portuguese (ones)."<sup>8</sup>

On the other side was an immigrant and minority elite, also composed of politicians, intellectuals, journalists and business people. They too were well educated and their goal was to establish a place for their particular group. Like those in the majority, they were markedly divided and thus three very flexible strategies emerged during the first half of the twentieth century. Prominent among these responses was an apparent auto-deculturalation, where minorities insisted on their own whiteness, placing themselves neatly into a pantheon of traditionally desirable groups. More measured gestures gravitated towards a bicultural compromise where "whiteness" was not a necessary component of Brazilianness. Instead these minority elites promoted the idea that Brazil would improve by becoming more "Japanese" or "Arab," formulations that partake of the basic impulse to construct a national hierarchy by identifiable ethnic characteristics. Productivity, class status and nationalism thus became markers of identity, allowing ethnicity to be maintained even as its importance was dismissed. The final, and most extreme, strategy was an apparent radical ultranationalism, as different groups attempted to recreate an imagined ethnic future.

The three strategies that I will explore today all emerged in the early years of the century and were used by numerous groups over the next fifty years. I would first like to examine hyphenation and to do so I will use a Syrian-Lebanese example, although I would be happy to give other ones later. Middle Easterners began arriving in Brazil in significant numbers in the late 19th century and by 1939 some 107,000 Arabs, mainly Melkite and Maronite Catholics, entered, generally from Syria and Lebanon.<sup>9</sup> Arabs were difficult for Brazilians to contextualize, given the multiplicity of images that began with Iberia's conquest by the Moors and continued with the thrill of European reconquest. Arabs thus had a special place, as both friend and enemy, as exotically different yet somehow familiar.

These kinds of ideas among influential Brazilians matched with another elite desire - economic growth. Middle Easterners were critical to this process since they were the first large-scale peddlers in the

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<sup>8</sup> Speech of Acylino de Leão, 18 September 1935. Republica dos Estados Unidos do Brasil, *Annaes da Camara dos Deputados: Sessões de 16 a 24 de Setembro de 1935*, Vol. 17. (Rio de Janeiro: Off. Graphica D' "A Noite," 1935), 432.

<sup>9</sup> "Discriminação por Nacionalidade dos Imigrantes Entrando no Brasil no Período 1884 - 1939." *Revista de Imigração e Colonização* 1:3, (July 1940), 617-642. "Movimento Imigratório no Brasil de 1819 a 1947" cited in J. Fernando Carneiro, *Imigração e Colonização no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Faculdade Nacional de Filosofia, 1950). *Revista de Imigração e Colonização* [hereafter RIC] 1:4 (October 1940), 617-638. Meir Zamir, *The Formation of Modern Lebanon* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 15. See also Taufik Duoun, *A Emigração Sirio-Libanesa as Terras de Promissão* (São Paulo: Tipografia Arabé, 1944), 89; Rollie E. Poppino, *Brazil: The Land and People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 194; J. Fernando Carneiro, *Imigração e Colonização no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Faculdade Nacional de Filosofia, 1950), 64; Clark S. Knowlton, "Spatial and Social Mobility of The Syrians and Lebanese in the City of São Paulo, Brazil" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1955), Table 1, 58-59. Published in Portuguese as *Sirios e Libaneses* (São Paulo: Editora Anhembi, 1960).

country, had introduced the idea of credit to rural areas, and as the twentieth century progressed were building both the factories and retail outlets needed for Brazil's expanding industrial base. Arab-Brazilians were economically desirable and leading members of the community used this to reinforce their place in society. Evidence of my point can be found in the participation of Syrian-Lebanese in the celebrations surrounding the 1922 centennial of independence, when the state used massive public events, such as the dedication of buildings, bridges, roads and monuments, to reinforce nationalism.

Leaders of the Syrian-Lebanese community understood that nationalist rhetoric contained the discursive space to promote Arab-Brazilian identity. A campaign to raise money to build a monument to the Syrian-Lebanese community led to donations from rich and poor, from immigrant and Arab-Brazilian.<sup>10</sup> The sculptor could have been a nobody and the statues could have been stuck at the end of a little street. But that is not what happened. Instead Ettore Ximenes, a renowned Italian sculptor whose work was associated with Brazilian nationalism, was commissioned to build a monument that would be placed in the Parque Dom Pedro II as part of the centennial celebration. The word "Park" is a bit of a misnomer: this space was the most prestigious government area in Brazil's largest city. For everyone involved, a monument by Ximenes in the Parque Dom Pedro II meant you had made it.

"Amizade Syrio-Libanesa" (Syrian-Lebanese Friendship), was a fifty foot tower of bronze and granite. The base was divided into four sections. Each of three sides contained reliefs representing "Syrian" contributions to world culture: the Phoenicians as pioneers of navigation, Haitam I's discovery of the Canary Islands, and the teaching of the alphabet. The fourth side was the "symbol of Arab penetration in Brazil," represented by the "the commerce [that has led to] great prosperity." The top of the monument was composed of three life-sized figures. At the back stood a female figure representing the Brazilian Republic, "whose glory is the glory of the Brazilian fatherland." In front of her a "pure Syrian maiden" offers a gift to her "Brazilian brother," an indigenous warrior, "with the same love with which she was welcomed upon arriving in this land blessed by God."<sup>11</sup>

Reading the reliefs in "Amizade Syrio-Libanesa" as a story that begins from the base, the message is clear: ancient Arab greatness changed the world, allowing Brazil to be "discovered" and then prosper. By suggesting that Arabs were part of the colonization of Brazil, and asserting that the three figures at the top of the monument were "brothers," the Syrian-Lebanese community became biologically Brazilian. The symbolism, however, should not be read as assimilationist. At the base of the monument is a poem, in both Arabic and Portuguese, by Ilyas Farhat, who would later become world famous for his Arabic writings. The poem transformed the Middle East into a region of mobile cultural and religious strength, suggesting that Arab ethnicity was not related to place but to person and could co-exist easily within other national cultures. Arabs were at the heart of Christianity and while immigrants were indebted to Brazil for allowing them to settle, the Arab presence had increased Brazil's stature as a "Christian nation."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ugo Fleres, *Ettore Ximenes: Sua Vida e Sue Opere* (Bergamo: Instituto Italiano d'arti Grafiche, 1928), 175-180. São Paulo, Prefeitura Municipal, *Catálogo das obras de arte em logradouros públicos de São Paulo: Regional Sé* (São Paulo: Dept. do Patrimônio Histórico, 1987), 39.

<sup>11</sup> Ettore Ximenes, quoted in *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 3 May 1928. P. 9. For a short discussion of a similar monument constructed by the Lebanese community in Tucumán, Argentina see Michael Humphries, "Ethnic History, Nationalism and Transnationalism in Argentine Arab and Jewish Cultures," *Immigrants and Minorities* 16: 1 & 2, (March/July 1997), 167-188.

<sup>12</sup> Elias Farhat, September, 1922. Translated into Portuguese by Afonso Nagib Sabbag. In Emil Farhat, *Dinheiro na Estrada: Uma saga de imigrantes*. (São Paulo: T. A. Queiroz, 1986), 3.

The public dedication of "Amizade Sírio Libaneza" took place in 1928. Photographs show that it was a huge event. The ceremony, opened in the name of the President of Brazil, celebrated "the traditional friendship that unites the hardworking Syrian community to the Brazilian people," and included a parade by two thousand soldiers. In a remarkable display of collective ahistorical memory that reflects how effective Syrian-Lebanese were in asserting their "authentic" Brazilianness, the newspaper *O Estado de S. Paulo* claimed that "Syrians and Brazilians" in the crowd "exchanged expressions of the ancient friendship that unites them."<sup>13</sup> Nagib Jafet, an industrialist who was vice-president of the commission, hammered home the point in his keynote address, as he sought to celebrate ancient ancestry as creating power in the present. The Phoenicians, he reminded the crowd, were "the fathers of the colonizers who came later, the Greek, the Roman, the Portuguese, the Spaniard and the English." Syrian and Lebanese immigrants and their descendants were the real founder's of Brazil.<sup>14</sup>

As I mentioned earlier, the strategies at play here - the use of foundational fictions and the assertions of hyphenation - were not specific to the Syrian-Lebanese. But now I would like to shift to the negotiation of whiteness as a cultural category by examining the Japanese immigrants and their descendants. Almost 200,000 Japanese settled in Brazil between 1908 and 1941, helping to create an explosion in Brazilian-Japanese commercial relations. Many exports were produced on immigrant colonies and just fifteen years after the arrival of the first Japanese settlers rice went from being an import to one of Brazil's top exports. Yet elite interest in Japanese immigrants and their descendants was not only about production; many desperately wanted to mirror Japanese international status, its powerful military and its imagined homogenous society and saw a "Japanized" society as part of the answer.

These impressions of Japan placed Nikkei in a strong position to negotiate their place in Brazil. For example, when nikkei suggested that Japan's particularly nationalistic culture meant that they were super-patriotic Brazilians, the idea resonated widely among the elite. Thus when Cassio Kenro Shimomoto and José Yamashiro, students at São Paulo's prestigious São Francisco Law School, volunteered for the São Paulo state forces during the unsuccessful 1932 Revolution, they were hailed for their decision, especially after Shimomoto declared to a reporter that he was "before anything . . . a Brazilian."<sup>15</sup> Yamashiro's moment of fame came when São Paulo's largest newspaper published a letter from his farmer father that complimented José "as a Brazilian and Paulista, for obeying the natural impulse to pick up arms to defend his State."<sup>16</sup> The use of the word "natural" is critical here: I think that it really means biological and that it suggests that nationalistic Brazilians - better Brazilians - would be created via Japanese immigration. Put differently, members of the Japanese "race" had a genetic propensity towards loyalty and that mystery

<sup>13</sup> *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 4 May 1928.

<sup>14</sup> "O Discurso do Sr. Nagib Jafet," in Duoun, *A Emigração Sirio-Libanesa*, 153-156.

<sup>15</sup> *Brasil e Japão: Duas Civilizações que se Completam* (São Paulo: Empreza Graphica da "Revista dos Tribunaes," 1934), 238-240.

<sup>16</sup> *O Estado de São Paulo* 19 September 1932. José Yamashiro, *Trajatória de Duas Vidas: Uma história de imigração e integração* (São Paulo: Aliança Cultural Brasil-Japão/Centro de Estudos Nipo-Brasileiros, 1996). The section on the revolution of 1932 can be found on pages 111-117.

gene, in the children of immigrants, would make them super-patriotic. Who was a better Brazilian than one whose loyalty to the state was natural? <sup>17</sup>

Nikkei did more than assert their genetic patriotism. They also heavily invested in the promotion of their own whiteness. These notions came to the broader Brazilian public via newspapers, books and magazines that regularly published photographs of "Brazilian" looking children who were, at least ostensibly, of Japanese and Euro - Brazilian parentage.<sup>18</sup> The photos were uniform: Japanese men married to white Brazilian women who had produced white children. Each gave the message that Japanese immigrants were an elite, only interested in, and able to attract, those of high racial status. Japanese immigrants were whitening Brazil even as they made it more productive. As Bruno Lobo, a professor at the Rio de Janeiro Medical School, noted in a book published by the Brazilian government, "it is not an exaggeration to say that more than 94,000 Nipo-Brazilian children have already been born, children of resident Japanese immigrants, almost 100,000 little future Brazilians."<sup>19</sup>

While whiteness and genetic patriotism seem obvious ways in which a group might assert its place within the Brazilian nation, the use of ultra-nationalism targeted towards other countries might not. Yet a number of seemingly non-Brazilian nationalist movements became critical to the negotiations over national identity in the first part of the last century. The revolution that created modern Syria, for example, was led by a man who came to Brazil as a child and formed both his concepts, and his party in Brazil. Yet for many Syrian-Lebanese, Arab nationalism was not loyalty to another state, but a successful strategy for reminding the Brazilian majority of their importance. We can discuss this example later, but for now I would like to focus on seeming Japanese-nationalism, a phenomena that was strong since the early part of the century among immigrants and nikkei, but showed its most public face after Brazil ended its flirtation with fascism and joined the Allies in 1942. An official "Brazilianization" campaign banned foreign language schools and newspapers and led to intense anti-Japanese propoganda. Bela Lugosi's *Yellow Peril* played to large crowds in São Paulo, Zero scares were common, and anti-Japanese lyrics found their way into popular songs.<sup>20</sup>

Some immigrants and nikkei responded to these challenges by keeping as low a profile as possible; but others responded to the racist policies and discourse by forming secret societies that insisted Japan won the war. What makes these groups particularly interesting is their size - they claimed over 150,000 members - and that their influence exploded AFTER World War II ended. How, in 1946 and 1947 and 1948, could 150,000 literate people living in Brazil believe that Japan had won the war? The technical reasons are that the idea of Japan's defeat had little resonance among immigrants since the Japanese-language media was banned and few in rural areas had access to Brazilian newspapers or newsreels.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Nippak Shinbun* 21 July 1932.

<sup>18</sup> *Folha da Manhã* (São Paulo), 5 July 1934; Bruno Lobo, *Japonezes no Japão-No Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1926), 159; Calvino Filho, ed., *Factos e Opiniões Sobre a Imigração Japoneza* (Rio de Janeiro: np, 1934), 17, 33, 97, 112; *Cruzamento da Ethnia Japoneza: Hypothese de que o japonez não se cruza com outra ethnia* (São Paulo: Centro Nipponico de Cultura, 1934).

<sup>19</sup> Bruno Lobo, *Esquecendo os Antepassados: Combatendo Os Estrangeiros* (São Paulo: Editorial Alba Ltda, 1935), 144.

<sup>20</sup> *Diário da Noite* 30 September, 1942.

<sup>21</sup> Y. Kumusaka and H. Saito, "Kachigumi: A Collective Delusion Among the Japanese and their Descendants in Brazil." *Canadian Psychiatric Association Journal* 15:2 (April, 1970), 169. Pp. 167-175.



This meant that secret newspapers found a willing audience among the many immigrants educated to believe in Japan's superiority and invincibility.

Of course one did not have to "believe" that Japan had won the war to support the societies in their demand for a space for Japanese-Brazilian ethnicity. Indeed, secret societies were a counter-attack on the way national identity was defined. The most powerful was the Shindo Renmei (Way of the Subjects of the Emperor's League) which emerged in late 1945. The society's initial goals were to maintain a permanent Japanized space in Brazil through the preservation of language, culture and religion among nikkei and the re-establishment of Japanese schools.<sup>22</sup> What the Shindo Renmei did not promote was a return to Japan. Home was Brazil and by the end of 1945 the group had 50,000 members who believed, or claimed to believe, that Japan had won the war.<sup>23</sup> News of Japan's defeat was dismissed as nothing more than U.S. propaganda and just a week after Emperor Hirohito broadcast his surrender message, the Shindo Renmei released its own statement:

"Emperor Hirohito has been forced to abdicate in favor of a Regent... The Imperial combined fleet has been given the order for immediate action, and in a furious battle in Okinawan waters the Japanese Navy and Air Force destroyed about four hundred Allied warships, thus deciding the course of the war. The Japanese employed for the first time their secret weapon, the "High Frequency Bomb." Only one of the bombs killed more than one hundred thousand American soldiers on Okinawa. [This led to the] 'unconditional surrender of the Allies (and) the landing of Japanese expeditionary forces in the United States.'"<sup>24</sup>

The "news" spread quickly and by mid-1946 the Shindo Renmei claimed 130,000 members and its propaganda included altered photos of President Truman bowing to Emperor Hirohito and "press" reports of Japanese troops landing in San Francisco and marching towards New York.<sup>25</sup> When a group of

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<sup>22</sup> Hekisui Yoshii, "Gokuchû Kaiko-roku" (Memories from Prison), Manuscript, 1948. Cited in translation by Susumu Miyao and José Yamashiro, "A Comunidade Nipônica no Período da Guerra" in Comissão de Elaboração da História dos 80 Anos da Imigração Japonesa no Brasil, *Uma Epopéia Moderna: 80 Anos da Imigração Japonesa no Brasil* (São Paulo: Editora Hucitec, 1992), 262. Translation of Shindo Renmei documents can be found in "Perigosa Atividade Nipônica em São Paulo" *Arquivos da Polícia Civil de São Paulo* 8:2 (1944), 567-571. Emilio Willems and Hiroshi Saito, "Shindo Renmei: Um problema de Aculturação," *Sociologia* 9 (1947), 143. Two excellent studies of the Shindo Renmei and similar movements are Takashi Maeyama, "Ethnicity, Secret Societies and Associations: The Japanese in Brazil," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 15 (April, 1970), 589-610 and Susumu Miyao and José Yamashiro, "A Comunidade Enfrenta um Caos sem Precedentes" in Comissão de Elaboração da História dos 80 Anos da Imigração Japonesa no Brasil, *Uma Epopéia Moderna: 80 Anos da Imigração Japonesa no Brasil* (São Paulo: Editora Hucitec, 1992), 265-360.

<sup>23</sup> See translation of Shindo Renmei objectives and statutes in report of João André Dias Paredes to Major Antonio Pereira Lira (State Police Chief, Paraná), 30 April 1949. Secretaria de Estado de Segurança Pública, Departamento da Polícia Civil, Divisão de Segurança e Informações. No. 1971- Sociedade Terrorista Japonesa. Arquivo Público Paraná, Curitiba. Mário Botelho de Miranda, *Shindo Renmei: terrorismo e extorsão* (São Paulo: Edição Saraiva, 1948), 11. James L. Tigner, "The Okinawans in Latin America." Scientific Investigations in the Ryuku Island (SIRI) Report #7. Washington, D.C.: Pacific Science Board - National Research Council, Department of Army, 1954), 42.

<sup>24</sup> Article by José Yamashiro in *Paulista Shinbun* 29 April 1947. Translated and reprinted in James L. Tigner, "The Okinawans in Latin America." Scientific Investigations in the Ryuku Island (SIRI) Report #7. Washington, D.C.: Pacific Science Board - National Research Council, Department of Army, 1954), 44.

<sup>25</sup> *O Estado de São Paulo* 26 March 1946; *Correio da Manhã* 6 April 1946; *A Noite* (Rio de Janeiro) 13 April 1946. Herculano Neves, *O processo da "Shindo-Renmei" e demais associações secretas japonesas*, (São Paulo: np, 1960), 97, 124.

prominent nikkei circulated the actual surrender documents they were accused of being traitors and the community quickly divided into two camps: the *kachigumi* (victorist) and *makegumi* (MA-KAY-GOOMI) (defeatist) who called themselves *esclarecidos* in Portuguese (clear-headed or enlightened).<sup>26</sup>

What brought the Shindo Renmei to the attention of the wider public was a series of killings by young people recruited to assassinate community members who publicly insisted that Japan has lost the war. The press sensation grew still more when captured Shindo Renmei members insisted that "Japan did not lose the war. As long as there is one Japanese on earth, even if he is the last, Japan will never surrender."<sup>27</sup> Not all nikkei agreed with these tactics and Brazil's government, itself in a moment of transition after Vargas was forced to leave office in 1945, was equally concerned about its inability to control the hostilities. Thus, in mid 1946 four hundred Shindo Renmei leaders were arrested and Brazilian diplomats had the new Japanese government prepare documents outlining the Allied victory. The papers, however, were immediately dismissed as false.<sup>28</sup>

The Brazilian government had a number of options in dealing with the situation. They could have ignored it as a internal "Japanese problem" since political killings were, and are, far from atypical in Brazil. They could have sent out the army, made mass arrests, and imposed martial law in communities with large Japanese and nikkei populations. Yet this is not what happened. Rather, in July 1946, one of Brazil's most powerful politicians, José Carlos de Macedo Soares, invited police, military officials, diplomats, and Shindo Renmei members, including those in jail, to a friendly meeting at the Governor's Palace. Imagine the scene, one of the two or three most important politicians in Brazil taking 400 people out of jail, putting them in the same room with other leaders of a secret society claiming 130,000 members and calling them "the most important part of the Brazilian population." Those in the audience understood the rules of the game and Sachiko (SA-CHKO) Omasa laid out the deal: "We Japanese do not believe . . . in Japan's defeat. If Your Excellency want to end the disputes and terrorist acts, begin by spreading word of Japan's victory and order that all false propaganda about defeat be stopped."<sup>29</sup>

At this point Macedo Soares could have dismissed the Shindo Renmei as a bunch of kooks but he did nothing of the sort. Instead he prohibited newspapers from publishing news of Japan's defeat and ordered the term "unconditional surrender" taken out of all official communications. The killings stopped and large-scale nikkei efforts to raise funds for Japanese victims of the war helped to marginalize the extreme "victorist" groups. The last gasp came in early 1950 when the Japanese Olympic swimming champions arrived in Brazil. An exhibition match at a major soccer arena was a sell-out and included the presence of the Governor of São Paulo. But during an interview the swimmers expressed shock when

<sup>26</sup> Tomoo Handa, *O Imigrante Japonês: História de Sua Vida no Brasil*. (São Paulo: T.A. Queiroz: Centro de Estudos Nipo-Brasileiros, 1987), 651-655.

<sup>27</sup> Tomoo Handa, *O Imigrante Japonês: História de Sua Vida no Brasil*. (São Paulo: T.A. Queiroz: Centro de Estudos Nipo-Brasileiros, 1987), 673.

<sup>28</sup> "As atividades das sociedades secretas japonesas e a ação repressiva da polícia de São Paulo, publicadas pela imprensa." *Arquivos da Polícia Civil de São Paulo* 12:2 (1946), 523-530.

<sup>29</sup> Information on the meeting from: *A Gazeta* 20 July 1946, *Jornal de São Paulo* 20 July 1946, Susumu Miyao and José Yamashiro, "A Comunidade Enfrenta um Caos sem Precedentes" in Comissão de Elaboração da História dos 80 Anos da Imigração Japonesa no Brasil, *Uma Epopéia Moderna: 80 Anos da Imigração Japonesa no Brasil* (São Paulo: Editora Hucitec, 1992), 300-305.

presented with the idea that Japan had *won* the war. As a result the remaining Shindo Renmei activists began a poster campaign claiming the swimmers were Koreans masquerading as Japanese.<sup>30</sup> The suggestion was ludicrous and public support for the secret societies ended, in large part because a space, albeit a contested one, for nikkei had emerged in post-war Brazil.

Today I have tried to show how the discourses on Brazilian identity were cracked open and re-assembled via strategic negotiations of race, ethnicity and nation. By examining ethnicity as a factor that makes national identity circular and ever-changing, I have tried to move away from the "elite"/"popular" dichotomy that has dominated Latin American studies. By expanding the black/white or Indian/white paradigms of race and nation, we can better understand what it means that the President of Peru, Alberto Fujimori, is called "el chinito," or that the golpes led by Argentine Colonel Mohammed Alí Seineldín included strong doses of millenarian Christianity.

The question remains, however, if Brazilian national identity includes those of non-European descent? Certainly the narrow national paradigm of a "white" or "European" Brazil was expanded during the first half of the twentieth century as the notion that ethnicity and Brazilian citizenship could go hand in hand became increasingly accepted. Yet all this took place within a context of open prejudice. I am just beginning a new research project that picks up where my previous work has ended. By focussing on post-World War II Brazil, I want to see how ethnicity was transformed during the age of industrialization, hyper-inflation and military dictatorship. My preliminary work suggests that in many ways success and discrimination goes hand in hand. In the last fifteen years, for example, some quarter of a million nikkei have settled in Japan, and many speak of discrimination at home and a search for identity as motivations for migration. At the same time, assertions of whiteness by minority groups carry with it a racism of its own and it appears that a strong feature of the post-war minority struggle against discrimination was an aggressive mimicking of the racism of the majority.

You may be asking yourself if the events I have discussed today are more than symbolic. For me, the answer is a resounding yes. In the post-war period, to marry a Brazilian of Japanese or Middle Eastern descent became a positive, regardless of the class status of the individualx involved. The Brazilian state promotes itself by using images of certain ethnic groups and a major bank has advertised itself for the last 25 years with a close-up of a nikkei and the caption "We need more Brazilians like this Japanese." A powerful federal politician, whose leftist politics and Okinawan parents insure his lack of nikkei support, recently discussed his successful campaign strategy with me. "I need to remind voters" he told me, that "Japanese are the best possible Brazilians: honest, hard-working, and well-connected." This is just the most recent formulation of the great Brazilian paradox - that policies constructed to re-make Brazil as "white" in fact created a multi-cultural society. Today the nikkei and Syrian-Lebanese communities are broadly successful in the economic, political, military and artistic arenas. Both groups seem more part of the Brazilian nation than do, for example, Afro-Brazilians or Polish-Brazilians.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Folha da Noite*. (SP) 21 March 1950. Tomoo Handa, *O Imigrante Japonês: História de Sua Vida no Brasil*. (São Paulo: T.A. Queiroz: Centro de Estudos Nipo-Brasileiros, 1987), 746-752.

<sup>31</sup> There are no reliable statistics on Syrian-Lebanese economic ascension. A 1995 Datafolha survey found that eight per cent of nikkei families in São Paulo had incomes of at least ten minimum salaries; overall only thirty per cent had salaries that high. The same study showed that fifty-three per cent of nikkei adults had university educations compared to only nine per cent of the overall adult population. *Folha de São Paulo*, 19 October 1995. Boris Fausto, Oswaldo Truzzi, Roberto Grün, and Célia Sakurai, *Imigração e Política em São Paulo* (São Paulo: Editora Sumaré/FAPESP, 1995). *Vida e Sangue de Polacko*, documentary film directed by Silvo Back (Curitiba, Paraná), in Coleção Silvio Back, Museu de Imagem e Som, São Paulo, C 309/93. Octavio Ianni, *Raças e Classes Sociais no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Civilização Brasileira, 1972), 169-198.

As I think about the different strategies used by minority groups to negotiate their Brazilianness, I cannot help but be reminded of Greil Marcus' comment that history is the result "of moments that seem to leave nothing behind, nothing but the spectral connections of people long separated by place and time, but somehow speaking the same language . . ." <sup>32</sup> The connections here are indeed spectral: Were Asians and Arabs white? If Amazonian Indians had descended biologically from Japanese and Arab ancestors, were new immigrants from Asia and the Middle East more Brazilian than most members of the elite? In the end, Brazil emerged as a nation that is multi-cultural but hyphenless.

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<sup>32</sup> Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 4.