



**Latin American Studies Center**

**The University of Maryland, College Park**

**Japanese Brazilian Women  
and their Ambiguous  
Identities:  
Gender, Ethnicity and  
Class in São Paulo**

**Mieko Nishida**

2000

Working Paper No. 5

**Mieko Nishida** is Assistant Professor of History and Coordinator for Latin American and Caribbean Studies at Hartwick College in Oneonta, New York. She holds a Ph.D. in history from The Johns Hopkins University and has been awarded a Predoctoral Research Fellowship from the Carter G. Woodson Institute of the University of Virginia (1989-1991); a Rockefeller Foundation Postdoctoral Fellowship from the Graduate Institute of the Liberal Arts of Emory University (1993-1995); and a Postdoctoral Fellowship from the Latin American Studies Center and the Department of History of the University of Maryland at College Park (1997-1998). She is also the recipient of a Summer Visiting Scholar Fellowship from the University of Chicago-University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Joint Center for Latin American Studies (2000) as well as a Library Scholars Summer Grant from the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, Harvard University (2000). Nishida's articles on urban slavery and the African diaspora in 19th-century Salvador, Brazil have appeared in the *Hispanic American Historical Review* and the *Journal of Social History*. She has completed a book manuscript entitled "The Creation of Identity: Ethnicity, Gender, and Race in Salvador, Brazil (1808-1888)" and is at work on two other manuscripts: "The (Re)Making of Gender, Race and Ethnicity: 'Black' and 'Japanese' Women in São Paulo, Brazil (1888-2000)" and "'Three Stars in the Sky': A Nisei Woman's Journey in Brazil."

**Mieko Nishida**

**Japanese Brazilian Women  
and Their Ambiguous Identities:  
Gender, Ethnicity and Class  
in São Paulo**

**2000**

**Latin American Studies Center  
University of Maryland, College Park**

**LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES CENTER**  
**Working Paper No. 5**

**LASC Executive Committee**

Roger Betancourt  
Herman Daly  
James Dietz  
Roberto P. Korzeniewicz  
Carol Robertson  
Daryle Williams  
Saúl Sosnowski (Director)

Series Editor: Tanya Huntington

Copyright © 2000 by Mieko Nishida

Latin American Studies Center  
University of Maryland, College Park  
4205 Jiménez Hall  
College Park, MD 20742

[www.inform.umd.edu/LAS/](http://www.inform.umd.edu/LAS/)  
[al68@umail.umd.edu](mailto:al68@umail.umd.edu)

# Japanese Brazilian Women and Their Ambiguous Identities: Gender, Ethnicity, and Class in São Paulo

*"You are no longer Japanese. You are not American, either.  
You will never become Brazilian. Who are YOU then?"*

Dona Hisako/Maria, questioning the author's identity

## I. Introduction: The Meanings of *Gaijin*

In 1980, the first Japanese Brazilian woman to direct cinema, Tizuka Yamazaki, made a sensational international debut with her movie: "*Gaijin: os caminhos da liberdade*."<sup>1</sup> Yamazaki was born in 1949 in Brazil to an Issei (immigrant) father and a Nisei (second-generation) Japanese Brazilian woman. This amazing bilingual film, which begins with several bright, urban scenes of the traditional "Japanese" district of the city of São Paulo called Liberdade ("liberty" as the movie's subtitle goes), vividly captures various aspects of Japanese immigration to Brazil, including the hardships of coffee plantation life and daily interactions with European immigrants who had previously arrived. These illuminating stories are narrated by a young Japanese woman who in 1908, as a member of an "artificial" immigrant family, got on the first Japanese immigrant ship—named the *Kasadomaru*—when she was 16 years old.<sup>2</sup>

The protagonist of "*Gaijin*" is named Titoe. Just before her departure, she is forced into a paper marriage with her brother's best friend in order to facilitate their immigration to Brazil. Upon her arrival, she is immediately exploited as a quasi-slave laborer on the Santa Rosa coffee plantation. In the domestic domain she is expected to serve her husband and brother after her obligatory plantation labor; eventually, she becomes pregnant. One evening after work, Titoe's brother and other men talk about the female body and their male sexuality. Some of their comments are: "I just want a woman and any woman, even a *gaijin* would satisfy me sexually"; "Women are all the

same; they have the same sexual organs”; “Sex is not what one lives for”; “I wish I could sleep with a Japanese woman. But who would come to be with me in such a terrible place as this [Brazil].”

When Titoe informs her husband of her pregnancy he reacts with tremendous joy: “It must be a boy! I will raise him back in Japan.” But when a girl is born, her terribly disappointed husband yells at her, “Goddamn it. A baby girl. That’s no use at all.” Within a few years, her husband falls gravely ill and passes away on the plantation. Titoe finally runs away with her daughter and becomes a factory worker in the city of São Paulo. Afterwards, she says to her daughter in Japanese that they may go back to Japan in the near future. Her daughter responds to her in Portuguese: “You go there alone. I will wait for your return here with my friends.” And Titoe, who is now an independent woman in Western dress with a great deal of self-confidence, goes to see an Italian immigrant named Tonho, who has left his position as overseer on the plantation and works in the city as an activist against Brazilian immigration laws. On the plantation, Tonho always protected and cared for Titoe, eventually helping her leave. Their memories flash back in their minds as they warmly exchange glances at the end of the movie.

The movie is based on the true story of Yamazaki’s maternal grandmother. The Japanese Brazilian community (*colônia*), particularly the so-called intellectuals, did not support this project financially and remained rather cold and indifferent to the brilliant, prize-winning movie, ignoring even now its enormous value. Whenever I visit São Paulo, I continue to hear remarks from Japanese Brazilians—including Japanese immigrant women—such as: “I have heard of the movie but have not seen it. And I know I will never see it, either. Why should I? I have been there and have done it all.” The voice usually carries some intense irritation and great frustration with my own enthusiasm for this particular movie.

In June 1985, Yamazaki visited Japan to participate in an international film festival and was interviewed by some journalists. Yamazaki has no fluency in the Japanese language, which she attributes to her rigorous resistance to parents who wanted her to be “Japanese.” She completed a degree in architecture in Brasília and then studied filmmaking at the Universidade Federal Fluminense in the state of Rio de Janeiro. According to Yamazaki, when she was young, while “behaving as if she were Japanese with her family, she would identify herself as Brazilian outside her household.” Yamazaki says, “The first

generation did struggle greatly with the terrible hardships of life, but we [my generation] have surely continued to suffer from the ambiguity of our identity.” The movie’s title, “Gaijin,” a Japanese word literally translated as “foreigner” which usually refers to white foreigners in Japan, is the term with which Japanese Brazilians have always referred to non-Japanese Brazilians. But Yamazaki says, “It is indeed the Japanese who have been *gaijins* in Brazil. They were abandoned by their native country and alienated in a new land. And, you know, [*gaijin* refers to] women of Japanese descent also.” This is what led to Yamazaki’s choice of the title “Gaijin” for the movie.<sup>3</sup>

The question is, then why do Japanese Brazilians themselves and women of Japanese descent in particular dismiss such an amazing film? It is their own story, or at least their mothers’ and grandmothers’, which they may even have heard firsthand during their childhood. If they continue to deny the “truth” of their own history, what more truthful stories will the Japanese Brazilian community present to the interested audience? And how have Japanese Brazilian women voiced their own experiences and identities?<sup>4</sup>

This paper is intended to answer these questions, largely based on my in-depth interviews with Japanese Brazilian women who live in the city of São Paulo. From several dozens of women informants I spoke to regarding their life stories in 1998-1999, I have chosen four women in their late 50s and 60s who identify themselves as “Japanese.” They are either Nisei or quasi-Nisei (or “child immigrants”), who were born to Japanese parents who reached Brazil in the 1920s and 1930s, before the outbreak of World War II.<sup>5</sup> Given their parents’ strong hope they would eventually return to their home country, these women were brought up to be “good” Japanese women in Brazil; however, their destinies became sidetracked as they were forced to face and conform with drastic changes which took place both in the host society and within the Japanese (and Japanese Brazilian) community.<sup>6</sup>

## II. The “Japanese” in São Paulo: From Immigration to *Dekassegui*

It is widely believed that Japanese Brazilians have enjoyed success as a model minority group in urban Brazil. Dedicated to their children’s higher education, highly motivated immigrant parents left coffee plantations for the city of São Paulo. Many Brazilian-born

children attended the most prestigious University of São Paulo and became lawyers, medical doctors, and dentists. It is often said that by now, Japanese Brazilians have managed to join the middle and upper-middle class. Is this picture of the elite Japanese Brazilian a social reality or a cultural myth?

The state of São Paulo has the largest concentration of persons of Japanese descent outside Japan, second only to Hawaii. In Brazil as a whole, the total number of persons of Japanese descent amounts to some 1.2 million, almost 1% of the entire Brazilian population of 155 million.<sup>7</sup> Their presence is the result of large-scale Japanese immigration to Brazil in response to the great demand for organized labor among still booming coffee plantations in the Southeast following the abolition of slavery (1888). The Japanese became Brazil's reluctant replacement for European immigrant coffee laborers, given that these had virtually stopped coming to Brazil by the beginning of the 20th century. Japanese immigration to Brazil began in 1908, and quickly rose to more than 100,000 people by the 1930s. Most settled in rural areas as agricultural laborers; only 8% of the residents in the state of São Paulo were located in urban areas. The bulk of Japanese immigrants arrived in the 1920s and 1930s. During these decades, 94.3% started their lives in agriculture. More than 90% of such agricultural workers came as *colonos*, namely, contract laborers for coffee plantations.<sup>8</sup>

During the late 1930s and early 1940s, the Japanese and Japanese Brazilian populations were faced with two drastic changes. One was Brazilian nationalism; the other, Japan's involvement in World War II. Under President Getúlio Vargas's *Estado Novo* and new constitution, immigration laws and the assimilation policy were strictly enforced: education led by aliens and taught in foreign languages was suppressed in 1938, and aliens were not allowed to operate any schools in rural areas. As a result, almost all Japanese schools, numbering about 600 at the time, suddenly ceased operations; and beginning in 1940, newspapers in foreign languages were subjected to censorship. After Pearl Harbor, Japanese immigrants were no longer permitted to publish newspapers, not even in Portuguese. Furthermore, Brazil severed diplomatic relations with Japan in January 1942, and Japanese lost all freedom to travel inside the country.<sup>9</sup> The Brazilian government prohibited Japanese immigration in 1943, although immigration was allowed to resume a decade later.



The urbanization of the Japanese population did not take place until after Japan's defeat. By then, the majority had given up hope of returning to Japan with a substantial fortune; instead they reluctantly decided to settle in Brazil with their Brazilian-born children. During the 1950s, they began to move to major cities on a large scale,<sup>10</sup> and by 1958, 44.9% were urbanized. By 1978, 65% of Japanese immigrants and their descendents were living in urban areas.<sup>11</sup>

The late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed a crucial change among the Japanese Brazilian population. A large-scale labor migration of persons of Japanese descent in countries such as Brazil, Peru, and Argentina started to take place in the mid-1980s from South America to the economically booming Japan and continued to relocate a great number of manual laborers throughout the 1990s. By 1990, it is said that 150,000 Japanese Brazilians were working in Japan. Such international migrations are known both in Brazil and Japan by the Brazilianized Japanese term *dekassegui* (originally *dekasegi*, which refers to seasonal labor migration from rural Japan to major cities such as Tokyo).<sup>12</sup> The "Japanese" migrant workers from Brazil, many of whom, both men and women, work on assembly lines—or typically in the case of women as nurse's aids and domestic servants—have ended up forming their own "Brazilian" communities in various small industrial cities in Japan, such as Hamamatsu of the Shizuoka prefecture and Oizumi of the Gunma prefecture.<sup>13</sup> By 1997, some 250,000 Japanese Brazilians were working in Japan. The number of *dekassegui* workers dropped drastically in the last years of the 20th century when the Japanese economy fell into a recession and began to register a high unemployment rate.

The impact of *dekassegui* on the Japanese Brazilian community in São Paulo has been significant and almost every Japanese Brazilian family has at least one member or relative who works or has worked in Japan. *Dekassegui* started predominantly with the Japanese-born immigrant population of Japanese citizenship, but after the Japanese government made a partial amendment of the Immigration Code in June 1990—giving persons of Japanese descent and their spouses permanent residency in Japan—second- and third-generation Japanese Brazilians became involved. The trend has even extended to the fourth generation, which is largely interracial.<sup>14</sup> By now, the Japanese district of Liberdade is virtually gone; the majority of "Japanese" stores and restaurants have been sold to Chinese and newly arrived Korean immigrant merchants,

who continue to use the stores' original Japanese names and employ Japanese Brazilian clerks. Many "Japanese" hotels and travel agencies have also closed, while the number of small *dekassegui* agencies owned by Japanese Brazilians has increased.<sup>15</sup> Some Japanese Brazilians have referred to their identity problems and attachment to their "homeland" as the main cause behind *dekassegui*, but, needless to say, Japanese Brazilians' global labor migrations to Japan are attributable, first and foremost, to daily struggles with the deeply troubling Brazilian economy. It is commonly said in Brazil that if a household earned the average wage for Brazilian middle-class families —approximately US\$1,000 a month— none of the family members would migrate to Japan for *dekassegui*.<sup>16</sup> In other words, *dekassegui* would not have taken place to such a large extent had most Japanese Brazilians moved into the urban middle class.<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, *dekassegui* has destroyed much of the myth of the collective success of Japanese Brazilians and revealed the reality of non-elite Japanese Brazilian life. Thus, Japanese Brazilian women's lives and their identities have to be understood within a changing historical context, from the start of Japanese immigration in 1908 to the ongoing international migrations to Japan, which have taken place since the mid-1980s.

### III. Japanese Brazilian Women and Their Voices

It is extremely difficult to find the voice of Japanese Brazilian women in writing. Their echo has never been heard in major Brazilian women's magazines, such as *Revista Feminina* or *A Cigarra*.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the Japanese Brazilian community itself seems to lack women's narratives. While it is true that it has been rather common practice over the past few decades for successful men of Japanese descent, immigrant men in particular, to write and publish memoirs or autobiographies in Japanese (which they have proudly distributed to their relatives and friends/colleagues both in Brazil and Japan), their female counterparts have not developed a similar practice, except for collections of poetry (especially *tanka*). Whereas almost every publication on the Japanese and Japanese Brazilians is filled with descriptions and pictures of successful men, there is only one publication on the subject of Japanese Brazilian women: *Universo em segredo: a mulher nikkei no Brasil* (1990), a collection of photographs of elite

professional women, including the filmmaker Tizuka Yamazaki.<sup>19</sup> These women are presented as role models for a younger generation of Japanese Brazilian women.<sup>20</sup>

One of the most prominent is Margarita Vatanabe (1900-1995), whose life story was recorded and written as a book by the Japanese anthropologist Takashi Maeyama.<sup>21</sup> Dona Margarita immigrated to Brazil as a young girl and worked as a maid over the next 18 years for the upper-class French Brazilian family of a University of São Paulo professor of medicine. After gaining fluency in Portuguese and converting to Catholicism, she married a successful Japanese immigrant man, and raised her three sons, all of whom received a college education. Her husband passed after around 20 years of marriage; this tragedy strengthened her religious faith. During World War II, when many Japanese went to prison for political reasons in Brazil, she cared for the prisoners and formed the Japanese Catholic Committee of São Paulo, with the support of São Paulo's archbishop D. José Gaspar de Affonseca e Silva. She also founded a nursing home for aging Japanese immigrants, later named the "Ikoi no Sono" (Garden of Solace).<sup>22</sup>

Also well known in the Japanese Brazilian community is the women's voluntary association named Sociedade Beneficente Feminina "Esperança" (Esperança Fujinkai), which continues to receive the sponsorship and support of elite Japanese Brazilian women. In 1949, Esperança Fujinkai was born out of well-to-do Japanese Brazilian women's collective efforts to send care packages to post-war Japan. Today, approximately 1,200 members are active in charity as well as classes on the tea ceremony, flower arrangement, cooking, and so on.<sup>23</sup> Needless to say, over the years, the character of their association has changed; elite Japanese immigrant women have given way to second- or third-generation Japanese Brazilian women and current memberships even include women of Chinese and Korean descent.

The model story of elite women who are competent *donas de casa* (homemakers) has been told repeatedly in public. In reality, however, many have not lived up to this clear-cut image. Japanese Brazilians appear to form a homogeneous ethnic community that is relatively isolated from society at large. Oftentimes such a stereotypical assumption of ethnic homogeneity masks considerably different gender roles and identities, which are also determined by the social class of the individual or his/her family. The following four cases of Japanese Brazilian women should serve to reveal the complex cross-section of

gender, ethnicity, and class which can be observed in non-elite Japanese Brazilian women's ambiguous "Japanese" identities.

III-i. Dona Midory: "No, I have never been to Japan but my mother went there a few years ago. She says she would not like to visit Japan again."

Dona Midory Kimura Figuchi is the Director of the State Museum of Immigration (Memória do Imigrante/Museu de Imigração), built in the former Hospedaria dos Imigrantes (Immigrants' Hospice) in the "Italian" district of Brás, in São Paulo. The Hospedaria, founded by Paulista coffee planters in 1888, the year slavery was abolished, had housed not only newly arrived immigrants but also poor migrants from other states, especially from the Northeast, until it was finally closed in 1978. Dona Midory and her Nisei husband live in an upper-middle class, non-Japanese district. She is one of the greatest female celebrities of Japanese descent, partly because of her frequent appearances in the mass media. Interestingly Dona Midory, who speaks Japanese fluently and identifies herself as "Japanese," agreed to have me record her interview only in Portuguese.<sup>24</sup> I was to learn from her that, despite her fluency, she does not have sufficient command of the Japanese language to be able to read.

Dona Midory was born to a Japanese immigrant couple from the Kagawa prefecture on a coffee plantation in the southern state of Paraná. She is the youngest in a family of eight children and the only one with a college degree. She attributes her achievements to her parents' great enthusiasm for their children's education and admires their intelligence and deep understanding of the Japanese language and culture, yet much of her professional success seems to have been the result of her own endless efforts at upward mobility.

Dona Midory and her family left plantation life for the city when she was 15. She worked during the day and attended night school. At 21, she graduated from the University of São Paulo with a bachelor's degree in public health and worked as a nutritionist at public hospitals. She married her husband at 23 but, after taking a few years off in order to care for her infant children, she went back to work with the strong support of both her husband and her mother-in-law: "My husband did not go to college but always believed in higher education and told me to

be our children's role model. My mother-in-law was also very intelligent and very supportive"; "Our sons responded very well to our high expectations. My older son (born in 1963) is a professor of biology at the University of São Paulo, with a Ph.D. from the University of Paris. He is quite busy with his job and research and has never married. My younger son (born in 1966) is also a University of São Paulo graduate and an electrical engineer." In 1998, her younger son married an upper-class white woman of Portuguese descent who works in marketing.

Dona Midory has a longstanding relationship with her former maid (*empregada*), a migrant worker from Bahia who is now 50 years of age. "Yes, she is black. She was 15 when she started to work for me and raised my sons for the next 10 years until she got pregnant and married. Her ex-husband is not black; he is a light-skinned mulatto from Minas Gerais. I taught her how to sew and cook, and after her divorce several years later, this woman supported herself, her two children, and a grandchild by working as a seamstress." Now her former maid works twice a week in the new home of Dona Midory's younger son and his wife. Dona Midory says, "My sons truly love her so much. They have never missed the chance to send her birthday and Christmas gifts since their childhood. Now my younger son enjoys behaving like a spoiled child whenever she comes to work. She enjoys it also.

"Yes. I am a daughter of Japanese parents [*filha de japoneses*].

My Japanese is not good enough and I would very much like to learn the Japanese language, literature, and history. But I am not interested in visiting Japan. My mother could not stand dirty bathrooms in Japan and because of that she came back to Brazil earlier than she had planned. It seems as though Japan is still culturally backward.

"I think many Japanese Brazilians continue to live with the cultural components from the old era of Meiji, when their grandparents and parents emigrated to Brazil. Japanese Brazilian women still follow and obey the old social notions and cultural traditions, which Japan itself lost long ago. They want to be good homemakers, first and foremost, taking care of their husbands and children, while remaining oppressed by a patriarchal order."

Dona Midory's life appears to be a typical model success story for second-generation Japanese Brazilian women. Not only has she built up a glorious career, she has also succeeded as a homemaker in raising a happy family with a supportive spouse and two bright sons. Yet, one

wonders what happened to her siblings who, unlike their very successful youngest sister, did not get a college education. During the interview, she briefly mentioned the fact that one of her sisters, whom her mother visited several years ago, works in Japan as a *dekasegui*.

The Museum of Immigration was inaugurated with a “festival commemorating the immigrants” on the rainy Sunday of June 20, 1999. A big stage was set in the Museum’s inner court, where various groups of dancers showed their exotic ethnicities. This colorful presentation of cultural diversity in the city of São Paulo, which avoided any mention of the painful history of immigration to Brazil, was successfully produced by a famous art director of non-Japanese descent, who is married to a Nisei Okinawan woman. Despite the bad weather, a substantial number of people gathered to celebrate Dona Midory’s career.

III-ii. Dona Hisako/Maria: [Upon hearing a living room clock’s recorded message tell the time in Japanese] “Clocks made in Japan speak the Japanese language only.”

Dona Hisako lives with her husband and her daughter in a non-Japanese working-class neighborhood of the Pirituba suburban district. In her Brazilian neighborhood, she is known not by her real Japanese name, but as Dona Maria. A mutual friend introduced me to her a decade ago and we have corresponded over the years. In December 1997, when I revisited São Paulo, I finally met the members of her extended family and conducted lengthy interviews with them. Dona Hisako generously included me in her special holiday gatherings with her family and relatives at her home, where I met and got to know her mother, husband, and daughter, as well as some of her siblings. Her father passed away a few years ago but her aging mother, Dona Toshie, lives in a separate house only a minute away from hers. Dona Hisako takes care of all aspects of her mother’s life during the daytime, but pays a young black migrant woman from the northern state of Ceará to sleep with her in the same bedroom. Nonetheless, Dona Toshie is not content with her life and frequently expresses her strong desire to spend her final years at the “Japanese” Ikoi-no-Iye nursing home, conversing in Japanese with other aging immigrants.<sup>25</sup> Dona Hisako says this is “very selfish” of her mother. Dona Hisako and her family have been very close to their siblings and other relatives but have seldom maintained

any contact with other Japanese Brazilians. She and her mother are longtime members of the Kami-no-Ya ("House of God"), a syncretic Japanese Brazilian religion that combines Shintoism with the worship of the local, black-faced Brazilian goddess Nossa Senhora Aparecida.

Dona Hisako was born in Okayama prefecture, Japan and moved to Brazil in 1936, with her parents, maternal grandmother, and uncle (mother's younger brother), when she was only 2 years old. She is the eldest and the only Japanese-born child of the family; all of her siblings (three brothers and one sister) were born in São Paulo on a Japanese agricultural settlement (*iju-uchi*) called Tietê. She started to work in the fields at the age of 5 while babysitting her younger siblings. Her parents later began to cultivate vegetables but could barely make a living and kept searching for better employment. Dona Hisako had no opportunity to attend school, but at home her grandmother taught her the Japanese language and basic manners of Japanese women. Dona Hisako remembers the old days: "Grandma always said, 'Never speak Portuguese. You have to learn proper Japanese manners. I was the daughter of *samurai*, not a commoner.' She used to get angry with me whenever I spoke Portuguese. Even after the War was over, Grandma still intended to go back to Japan. As for myself? Not really. I did not know anything about Japan."

As the eldest child, Dona Hisako was considered by her family to be a most valuable laborer. First, she first worked as a field hand on the plantation, and then at the age of 12 or 13 she began to work for wages at a china factory. It enabled her to finally attend a Brazilian school, where she learned how to read and write in Portuguese, but she quit after a few months. She ascribes this to her female Brazilian teacher who "talked about dating [*namorar*] in class all the time." She admits that she would have been illiterate in Portuguese if she had not gone to the school, while insisting that she has a better command of the Japanese language. "My family sent me to another town to live with a family who owned a laundry. I was to learn sewing from the laundry owner's sister. No, it did not turn out as expected. Instead I worked there as a domestic servant for a year. Afterwards, I worked at home as a seamstress until I turned 23.

"My husband and I met at a snack bar/café [*bar* in Portuguese] which we frequented. He worked then as a truck driver. We dated for around seven years. I continued to work as a seamstress, while raising my little brothers and sister at home. My parents were still indecisive as

to where to settle permanently. My husband has been always anti-social; he rarely says a word to anybody.” Her husband, who is also a quasi-Nisei/child immigrant who was born in Japan and taken to Brazil at 5, has a Japanese name, Kazuyoshi, but usually goes by his Brazilian name Joaquim. He is a mechanic who owns and runs a small repair shop with one of his older brothers. Dona Hisako recalls: “Well, we got married in 1957, and moved to Pirituba, where our daughter was born in 1958. Within six or seven years after my daughter’s birth my parents also moved to Pirituba to be with us.” Her mother quickly added: “We have always depended on Hisako . . . as our oldest daughter, Hisako always had to sacrifice herself for the sake of the family. Poor thing!”

“My brother Keiichi [born in 1941] graduated from college and became an engineer. He is the only one who went to college. He went to school while living at my uncle’s home and working during the daytime. He did well but married a ‘wrong’ woman with a bad reputation. She is also Nisei, though. They have two sons. One is living with a Brazilian lover who gave birth to a child by him; the other is unemployed. They do not bother to come see Mother. Another brother Mario (born in 1944) attended grammar school only and became a mechanic. He used to live with us in this house until he met and married his Japanese wife, Ritsuko Clarisse, only a few years ago. She is much younger than him and a rather fanatic believer of a Japanese religious organization. No, that was not an arranged marriage [*miai*]; they ‘met in the street.’ They have a two-year-old daughter, Haruko. My only sister Yoko (born in 1947) attended grammar school only and became a hairdresser. She is married to a Nisei husband, who is 11 years her senior and works as a truck driver. They have three grown daughters. The oldest daughter is married to a mixed Japanese Brazilian man with a baby and the other two live in Nagano, Japan, as *dekassegui* workers.

“Well, they are different indeed! We do not really know them,” says Dona Hisako of her “Brazilian” in-laws. “My husband did not want to approve of my third son’s marriage. He was very upset,” added her mother Dona Toshie, whose youngest sons are married to “Brazilian” women. “Takashi (third son of the family, born in 1954) attended grammar school and became a mechanic. He has had three women, all ‘Brazilians.’ The first was a lover named Loti, a white woman. He married the second one, Isabel, who is a black woman from Bahia with some Indian blood. She looks Japanese. She already had



two children. The third one is his current wife Rosa, who is black and has two children from a previous marriage. No, Takashi does not have any children of his own. My youngest brother Hiroshi is also a mechanic and has two daughters by his former “Brazilian” wife, who lives in Japan as a *dekassegui* worker. He is now married to Iraides, who is white and has three children from a previous marriage. Takashi and Hiroshi used to work at my husband’s auto repair shop but then they bought their own.”

During my visits at her house, many neighbors stopped by to extend their holiday greetings to her and her family or to ask for the special herbs she grows in her small garden and generously gives away to everyone who needs them. She is well liked and respected as “Dona Maria” and everybody knows her as the Japanese woman of the neighborhood. Sitting in the living room, which faces a *favela* across the street, she says, “We did not have any *favelas* here when we bought this house 30 years ago. *Favelas* have taken hold everywhere in São Paulo, even in the upper-class residential district Morombi . . . Those [squatters] who live on the other side of this street are different from us. They do not even know how to say hello. But as long as you are nice to them, they do not do anything bad to you.”

Her only daughter Mutsumi Luzinete —a single, college-educated librarian who is 41 years old— has never left home. When I asked her if she would like to marry and if not, why, she said that she would not like to be with a black Brazilian man.<sup>26</sup> It is very likely that Dona Hisako’s only daughter will stay with their parents and take care of them until her parents pass away, much in the same way her mother did with her own parents.

“They say Japan is such a good place. Two of my nieces married Japanese men after working *dekassegi* for a few years. They are so happy there and say that they will not be coming back to Brazil. They are pretty Japanized by now. They really love it . . . Japan is a very small country, isn’t it? I do not want to live in such a place. For a long time I was so hungry for anything concerning Japan, but not any more.”

Dona Hisako asks: “How are your parents in Japan? Do you call them often? You will have to go back there to take care of them one of these days. Because they are your parents and that is your responsibility as a daughter.”

III-iii. Dona Yukie: “I do not think I am a person of color. Yes, I am Japanese [nihonjin]. What else can I be? Brazilians can always tell I am Japanese. They come up and say, ‘Tia [Auntie], you are Japanese [japonesa].’ I look Japanese and I even have a Japanese accent, you know.”

Dona Yukie works full-time as a cleaning lady/receptionist at a private Japanese Brazilian institute. She was born in Brazil to Japanese immigrants from the Kochi prefecture and grew up with immigrant families and their children in a big Japanese settlement named Cotia. Unlike the case of Dona Hisako/Maria, Dona Yukie possesses an excellent command of the Japanese language in speaking, reading, and writing. She rents a house with a garden in the city with her youngest daughter and her family as well as her youngest brother, who is single. She is a very devout adherent of the Soka-gatsukai, one of Japan’s so-called New Religions, which prevail widely in urbanized southern Brazil.<sup>27</sup>

“My father was from the Kochi prefecture, but before he came to Brazil he had already worked as a carpenter in the city of Tokyo for some years and also in Korea. I heard he left Kochi for Tokyo when he was 16 years old. Unfortunately in 1923, the Great Kanto Earthquake destroyed Tokyo and my parents decided to emigrate in search of new opportunities. His aunt, who had already immigrated to Brazil, encouraged my parents to come for the booming coffee economy, and she paid for their tickets. At that time, my father was 21 years old and Mother was 18. Well, Mother was also from the Kochi prefecture and was actually from a small village next to my father’s. She had worked as a factory girl at a silk mill before her marriage. My parents barely knew each other when they were married. Upon their arrival in Brazil, Father worked as a carpenter in a city for a while until his Japanese boss left there for another city. Father did not speak Portuguese and Brazilians started to complain, ‘This Japanese works hard but does not understand the [Portuguese] language. We cannot communicate with him about our houses.’ He eventually lost the job and moved to the countryside with my mother and his aunt to work in agriculture.

“I was born in 1931, here in Brazil. Yes, I am the oldest of the family and I had three brothers and three sisters, but two sisters are dead. One died at birth and the other at the age of 3. Two of my younger brothers are married to ‘Brazilian’ women and worked as bus

drivers but they are in Japan for *dekassegui* now. The youngest brother [born in 1950] has never been married and lives with my daughter's family and me.

"I grew up on the Cotia settlement, where my family grew potatoes. I went to Cotia's Japanese school with certified Japanese teachers whom the Japanese government sent to Brazil. They say it was exactly like schools back in Japan. All morning classes were taught in Japanese but we also had Portuguese classes in the afternoons. My sister and I lived in a school dormitory after our parents moved to another town. I had just finished fourth grade when World War II broke out and all Japanese schools were banned. There was a rumor that all the Japanese in Brazil would be exiled to an island. My parents got worried and took us home. I engaged in agriculture with my family after I came home until I married out.

"I married an Issei from the Kochi prefecture in 1952. He lived in the same neighborhood but I did not know him at all; I had met him only once before our wedding. Of course, it was a typical *miai*. Dating was taboo back then. Our first daughter was born in 1954, followed by a son in 1955, and by another daughter in 1957. Then my husband suddenly passed away. I became a widow after only five years of marriage. I did not learn until his passing that he had a delicate constitution; he had a long history of asthma attacks. Yes, it was an arranged marriage, but nobody had told me of his poor health. I had small children and never thought of marriage again. I had to work as hard as possible just to feed them every day. It was not easy, but I worked as a seamstress at home for many years. I really wanted my children to go to school. I chose to rent a house near a grammar school until they had all finished. Around the time when my youngest graduated, my younger sister suggested I should work delivering dairy products to individual homes rather than sewing day and night at home for a smaller wage. I worked as a delivery woman for several years while all of my children got various jobs at stores. My younger daughter lived with her employer's family and completed junior high. Then I started my small business at a local market [*feira*]. I sold vegetables at a market stall and it went very well. The work itself was very tough but all of my customers were really wonderful. All middle-class people, both Brazilian and Japanese.

"None of my children understands Japanese. They may be able to read *hiragana* [Japanese alphabets], nothing more. My older

daughter got married around 1980. Her husband is a 'local' person—yes, he is from the North, Pernambuco. He is a truck driver. They have two children. The son, 19 years old, works in Japan as a *dekassegui*, and the daughter is a high school student. My son married a Bahian woman in 1983, and they have two children. They too are gone to Japan as *dekasseguis*. They have been back home twice just for a visit. The children go to Japanese schools in Japan. Well, they call me every weekend in Portuguese, of course. My younger daughter married a Brazilian from Bahia. He is a carpenter but has been sick and does not work. They met at a supermarket where both of them were employed. They have three children: two daughters (ages 14 and 12) and a son (10 years old). We all live together. My grandchildren always say, 'Grandma, you do not understand [Portuguese] at all. Not at all!'<sup>28</sup>

"Yes, we the Japanese worshiped the Emperor of Japan here in Brazil before the end of the War. I remember a 'divine picture' of the Showa Emperor Akihito being hung on a wall at home.<sup>29</sup> At the end of the War, all the people in my community got together and argued with one another as to whether Japan had won or surrendered. Somebody said, 'Japan was defeated' and all the rest got mad at him and said that he was 'no longer Japanese.' But before too long we all heard of the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and started to wonder if Japan might have really been defeated.

"I had never been outside my house until I became a member/adherent of the Soka-gatsukai in 1965. That was when I was working at home as a seamstress and I had not been able even to walk around in the city. A neighbor took me to their meeting place. I enjoy being with many other adherents and have been active as a member of their women's club. My younger sister met her husband there and she and our mother also gained membership. All of my children are also believers.

"*Nordestinos* [Northerners] are also *dekasseguis*. São Paulo is filled with them. This neighborhood [Liberdade] was not like this during the 1950s but it really looks like the North now. The *colônia* has also changed. I am afraid that in Brazil the Japanese cannot remain pure; we cannot afford to. But even today some level-headed Japanese people tell their children never to marry non-Japanese . . . Yes, I am Nisei and have never been to Japan. But I have always thought of myself as Japanese since my childhood. What would I be otherwise?"

III-iv. Dona Emi/Emília: “No, I never spoke Japanese when I was growing up. There was nobody who spoke the language in my town, except my own family. I later learned Japanese from a *Bahiano* [black Bahian man] and I continue to carry a strange accent.”

Dona Emi, a 55-year-old Nisei woman, became an administrative assistant at a private institution in Liberdade after having worked at banks and credit unions for many years. She continues to work there while receiving pensions from the government as a retiree. For the last 12 years, she has lived in the city of Moji das Cruzes. She commutes two hours each way to work six days a week. I conducted interviews with her in Portuguese and Japanese simultaneously. With her great sense of humor she always made me laugh with her funny Japanese slang, such as “Mieko-san, bakachon ne! [Mieko, you are an idiot!].” According to Dona Emi, such slang is the only Japanese she learned when she was growing up in the countryside. She does not read or write Japanese and her speaking is also rather limited, although she does understand. Dona Emi was born as the sixth of nine children in her family.

“Both of my parents were from Hokkaido and immigrated to Brazil in the same year [1927] but it was just a coincidence; they actually got on different immigrant ships. Of course, they were not married to each other. Mom was married to her first husband. His appendix burst and he died on board. My oldest brother is actually a half-brother, born in Japan to my mother and her first husband. He was only a year old when his father suddenly passed away. My parents met here in Brazil, got married, and worked on a coffee plantation for ten years before they moved to Moji das Cruzes. Mom was always sick throughout her life.

“My half-brother Eiichi is married with three children and one of his daughters is a school teacher. My oldest sister was born in 1934. Her name is Sawako Wanda. She is the first one who moved to the city of São Paulo. She graduated from the Akaboshi Sewing School and became a sewing teacher.<sup>30</sup> Her husband is Issei. Sawako visited Japan and really loved it. My second oldest sister Tamiko Julia [born in 1938] became a hairdresser and was the only ‘Japanese’ student at her beauty school. She married a *gaijin*, but they are divorced now. They have a daughter and a son, both of whom are gone to Japan for *dekasegui*

while she takes care of a little grandson at home. The next older sister was born in 1940, and her name is Seiko Alejria [nicknamed Zezinha]. When she was a child, she hated studying and loved reading comic books. She actually flunked school many times. She married a Nisei and they own a bike shop. They have a son and daughter but they too live in Japan for *dekassegui*. The next child died soon after birth. They say this baby boy was very cute and extremely white. Then I came along in 1944. I was very black. They named me Emi [meaning 'smile' in Japanese] because, they say, I had a big smile on my face when I was born. A German neighbor baptized me with a Christian name, Emília. My younger sister Katsuko Sandra was born in 1947. She is married to a Nisei. They live in the same city as I do. My brother Jorge was born in 1950. He graduated from college and became an engineer. He lives with someone. My youngest brother, Satoru Teodoro, was born in 1952. He graduated from the University of São Paulo with a degree in chemistry and he too works as an engineer. He is married to an Italian Brazilian woman.

"I moved to the capital of São Paulo at the age of ten for schooling; there was no school to attend in the countryside. By that time my oldest sister had already moved to the capital. I was alone and stayed at Dona Margarita's [Margarita Vatanabe's] dormitory [*pensão*] for young women in Liberdade for three years. Today, a Japanese hotel is located there. I enrolled in college in 1961 while holding down a full-time job but could not finish my college degree until 1974. It took me too many years to finally graduate! [Laughter] Oh, well, I had to work all the time and hold more than one job while taking care of my parents at home. Yes, I had to move back home [from the capital to Moji das Cruzes] to take care of them when their health began to deteriorate.

"Dad passed away in 1976. He was 72. Mom, who was much younger than Dad, died in 1989, at the age of 77. Throughout her life, she had been always sick and was gravely ill in her final years. After a severe stroke, she developed rheumatism and suffered from it until she died. Yes, I took leave from my job and took care of her until the last moment.

"No, I have never been married, nor have I dated anyone in my whole life. There is a very simple reason; I have worked all the time and have had no time for that. I am the only single daughter in my

family, so I always help and take care of my family. That is my job.” Dona Emi puts an emphasis on the word of “help” (*ajuda* in Portuguese). She lives with her divorced sister and her grandnephew in their late parents’ house and continues to take good care of them.

“I have just attended mass. No, it was not at Church but a *hoji* [Buddhist ceremony] for my cousin’s son. Didn’t I tell you that he was murdered a few weeks ago? He was only 19. His Mom bought him a brand new car and he got so excited that he drove it alone to the countryside. He disappeared before he got there and soon the police notified my cousin of his passing. Somebody chased his car and killed him just to rob the new car. His dead body was abandoned in the woods.”

Dona Emi, whose hobby is to obtain many diplomas and certificates, according to her, is now taking a Japanese language class on Saturdays. While working on a simple drill in her textbook, Dona Emi writes: “Japanese is a very difficult language, indeed!” She has not given up, though, at least not yet.

#### **IV. Conclusion: (Re) Defining “Japanese” to a Japanese Woman<sup>31</sup>**

Collective gender roles can be modified and recreated in a new setting, in combination with ethnic identities and class positions. This is the case of non-elite women of Japanese descent in urban Brazil, who have become the caretakers of the family undesirables, namely their aging parents and unmarried siblings. In traditional Japanese culture, which is strongly patriarchal and patrilocal, such caretaker roles were assigned to the eldest son of the family. Before 1945, Japan’s family inheritance was based on primogeniture: the eldest son was legally entitled to inherit all of the family property without dividing it with his siblings, if there were any, while in return he and his wife took care of their aging parents until they passed away. Usually, younger siblings would stay with the family until they married. The eldest son was to carry the family name and honor also and to pass it to the next generation, while all daughters were supposed to marry out to become members of other families, unless the family did not have any sons.

Why, then, did the caretaker role come to be assigned to daughters in Brazil as a major responsibility? In my opinion, it originated from the ways in which the population of Japanese descent

has assimilated Brazilian society over the years. First of all, non-elite Japanese Brazilian families have always needed to rely financially on a younger generation. They couldn't afford special hospital facilities and nursing homes for their aging members; parents also expected a child to take care of them, at least in their final years, even if it meant asking or forcing the child to sacrifice his/her individual life to a considerable extent. Second, even if parents want sons and their wives to be their caretakers, successful Japanese Brazilian men are hardly available to them; they tend to marry out of the family or even the Japanese Brazilian community. This is the case of Dona Hisako's younger brother Keiichi as well as Dona Emi's younger brothers. Third, unlike that of men, women's higher education does not always provide them with individual advancement in society. While they listen to their parents, who advocate and insist on ethnic endogamy, they find it very difficult nonetheless to meet suitable candidates with similar educational backgrounds and careers, since their potential spouses marry white women. This is exemplified by Dona Midory's younger son, whose wife is an upper-middle-class white Brazilian of Portuguese descent, whereas we should note that lower-class Japanese Brazilians tend to conduct class endogamy with black Brazilians, as in the case of Dona Yukie's children and two of Dona Hisako's younger brothers. As a result, many college-educated Japanese Brazilian women have ended up staying single in order to assume the role of caretakers. Such is the case of Dona Emi and Dona Hisako's daughter. Despite their higher education and white-collar occupations, these women remain with their working-class families while fulfilling their responsibilities.

All of my Japanese Brazilian women informants made great efforts to tell me their life stories and redefine themselves as "Japanese" women to me as their interviewer, a single, Japanese woman who lives and works as a historian in the United States. With the exception of Dona Midory—who developed an amazing career only by not assuming the "traditional" caretaker roles as a daughter faithful to her family—my unusual "non-caretaker" figure shook my informants' collective notion of "Japanese" womanhood to a varying degree, and even threatened, to a certain extent, their own Japanese identities. Dona Hisako took it particularly hard, probably because of our closer relationship and also as a result of her having an only daughter, whom she often compared with me for many reasons. In her view, I should not



be Japanese, American, or Brazilian. Moreover, I had no freedom to identify myself as Japanese.

As I prepared to return to the U.S., Dona Hisako kindly insisted that she and her husband would give me a ride in his car to the São Paulo international airport. She cheerfully said, "Well, we have been there many times by now and are completely used to everything about the airport. We have our nephews and nieces who are gone to Japan for *dekassegui* and whenever they come home and leave again, we go to the airport to see them off." As soon as I checked into my airline counter, we ran into an endless line of *dekassegui* workers, escorted by so-called *dekassegui* travel agents, waiting to check in as a tour group. The line of Japanese Brazilian workers and their families, each of them carrying several heavy suitcases, was moving painfully slowly. Most of these Japanese Brazilian passengers appear to have been interracial, which would make it difficult for them to pass as Japanese in Japan. Dona Hisako, her husband, and I stood there without saying a word, then she eventually broke the silence. "You too are Japanese but they [the airline clerks] treated you differently from these people. You checked in as a passenger and they treated you as a human being and a real customer. Look at the way these Japanese people are being treated here. They are just commodities to ship. That is exactly the same way my nephews and nieces have been treated. I would never have known it if I had not come here to see you off today." I sensed that she did not expect any response from me; I kept silent. But I almost told her: "You have finally identified me as Japanese, after repeatedly denying it and defining who and what I am in your own terms. You have tried many times to identify yourself as Japanese by categorizing me as non-Japanese. Now that you have made me Japanese, how do you identify yourself?" At that moment, a series of clear images from the movie "Gaijin" suddenly appeared in my mind with the words of the director, Yamazaki: "We have surely continued to suffer from the ambiguity of our identity."

## Interviewed Japanese Brazilian Women

Historical events	Dona Midory Age 60; Director, Museum of Immigration; married with 2 sons; 7 siblings	Dona Hisako/Maria Age 64; homemaker; married with a daughter; 1 sister and 4 brothers
<p>1888: Abolition of slavery</p> <p>1908-1943: Prewar Japanese immigration (some 190,000)</p> <p>1939-1945: World War II.</p> <p>1953- the present: Postwar Japanese Immigration (some 90,000)</p> <p>1980s-the present: Japanese Brazilians' <i>dekassegui</i> (labor migrations) to Japan (some 250,000 in 1997)</p>	<p>Year (?): Parents' immigration from Kagawa.</p> <p>1938: Born in the state of Paraná</p> <p>1953 Moved to the city of São Paulo</p> <p>1959: Graduated from U. of São Paulo with a B.S. and became a nutritionist</p> <p>1962: Marriage</p> <p>1963: Birth of her older son</p> <p>1968: Birth of her younger son</p> <p>1993: The Museum was established</p> <p>1995: Became the Director</p> <p>1998: Marriage of her younger son</p>	<p>1934: Born in Okayama, Japan</p> <p>1936: Family's immigration and their settlement in Tieté, São Paulo</p> <p>1957: Marriage to Kazuyoshi/Joaquim</p> <p>1958: Birth of her daughter (Mutsumi Luzinet)</p> <p>1995: Passing of her father at 87</p>

## Interviewed Japanese Brazilian Women, cont.

Historical events	Dona Yukie	Dona Emi (Emi Emília)
<p>1888: Abolition of slavery</p> <p>1908-1943: Prewar Japanese immigration (some 190,000)</p> <p>1939-1945: World War II.</p> <p>1953- the present: Postwar Japanese Immigration (some 90,000)</p> <p>1980s-the present: Japanese Brazilians' <i>dekassegui</i> (labor migrations) to Japan (some 250,000 in 1997)</p>	<p>Age 67; cleaning lady/receptionist; widow with 3 children; 3 sisters (only 1 alive) and 2 brothers</p> <p>1925: Parents' immigration from the Kochi prefecture</p> <p>1931: Born in São Paulo</p> <p>1936-1939: Attended a Japanese school.</p> <p>1952: Marriage</p> <p>1954: Birth of her older daughter</p> <p>1955: Birth of her son</p> <p>1957: Birth of her younger daughter</p> <p>1959: Passing of Husband at 32</p> <p>1983: Passing of Father at 79</p> <p>1985: Passing of Mother at 87</p> <p>1999 Younger daughter's separation</p>	<p>Age 55; administrative assistant; single and living with a sister; 1 half-brother, 4 sisters and 3 brothers (2 alive)</p> <p>1927: Parents' immigration from Hokkaido; and passing of Mother's first husband</p> <p>Year (?): Parents' marriage</p> <p>1944: Born in São Paulo</p> <p>1961: Enrolled in college</p> <p>1974: Obtained a college degree</p> <p>1976: Passing of Father at 72</p> <p>1989: Passing of Mother at 77</p>

## Acknowledgments

This paper is based on a public talk I delivered on April 7, 1998 at the Latin American Studies Center of the University of Maryland at College Park, which, jointly with the Department of History, awarded me a postdoctoral fellowship for the 1997-1998 academic year for my current research project entitled "The (Re) Making of Gender, Race, and Ethnicity: 'Black' and 'Japanese' Women in São Paulo, Brazil, 1888-2000." My profound gratitude goes to Saúl Sosnowski, Winthrop R. Wright, Regina Harrison, Phyllis A. Peres, Maria Christina Guidorizzi, Tanya Huntington, Marlene J. Mayo, Eleanor Kerkham, and Daryle Williams of the University of Maryland at College Park, as well as to the wonderful staff of the Museu Histórico do Imigração Japonesa no Brasil, especially Sr. Yasumi Nakayama, as well as those of the Museu da Imigração, especially Dra. Midory Kimura Figuchi, for their most generous help and warm friendship; and to all of my Japanese Brazilian women informants for telling me their incredible life stories so eloquently. My belated gratitude is extended to Professors Takashi and Janjira Maeyama, my former mentor and first Portuguese teacher at the University of Tsukuba, Japan, for introducing me to the studies of Brazil and Japanese Brazilians. I should not fail to mention that I have been able to conduct follow-up interviews with my informants during June-July 1999, thanks to the generous Trustee Research Grant from Hartwick College. Kevin P. Rauch truly deserves my special personal thanks for his strong support, as always.

I would like to dedicate this paper to Sr. Tetsuya Tajiri and Sra. Chikako Hironaka, both of whom passed away in São Paulo in the year of 1998.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Professor Koichi Mori of the Centro de Estudos Nipo-Brasileiro for making his copy of the movie "Gaijin" available to me.

<sup>2</sup> In order to obtain steady contract laborers, Brazilian immigration laws were established, requiring immigrants to come in family units which included at least three economically active members (12 to 50 years of age). Therefore, many artificial families were created by using the widely practiced traditional Japanese custom of adoption (*yoshi*); young couples most commonly adopted the husband's or wife's younger siblings, cousins, nephews, or nieces, and, if there were none available, non-relatives as well. As in the case of Titoe and her husband in "Gaijin," many young people married at emigration — some married only in name, divorcing or separating as soon as possible after their arrival. These artificial or "feigned" families, including those formed through the adoption of relatives, were called *kosei kazoku* or *tsure kazoku* (family with companions). This practice was particularly strong among the earliest immigrants of the 1908-1923 period. See Takashi Maeyama, "Ethnicity, Secret Societies, and Associations: The Japanese in Brazil," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 21:4 (1979): 589-610, p. 591.

<sup>3</sup> Colonia Geinou-shi Hensan Inkaï, ed., *Colonia Geinou-shi* (Colonia Geinou-shi Hensan Inkaï: São Paulo, 1986), pp. 283-284.

<sup>4</sup> I have greatly benefited from the life stories written by Sidney W. Mintz, Daphne Patai, and Ruth Behar. See Sidney W. Mintz, *Worker in the Cane: A Puerto Rican Life History* (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1977 [1960]); idem, "The Sensation of Moving, While Standing Still," *American Ethnologist* 16: 4(1989): 786-796; Ruth Behar, *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993); Behar and Deborah A. Gordon, eds., *Women Writing Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); and Daphne Patai, *Brazilian Women Speak: Contemporary Life Histories* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> Japanese Brazilians have often referred to children who immigrated to Brazil with their parents as quasi-Nisei or child immigrants. The poet/writer and former journalist/labor organizer Masugi Kiyotani wrote an illuminating essay entitled "Eien no Kigakan: Aru Nisei Keiken (The Sense of Eternal Hunger: Some Personal Experiences as a Quasi-Nisei)" on the ambivalent identity of

child immigrants caught between their native country (Japan) and host society (Brazil). See Masuji Koyotani, *Toi Hibi no Koto* (São Paulo, 1985), pp. 121-128. I am thankful to Sr. Kiyotani for the very generous gift of a copy of his book, which is out of print.

<sup>6</sup> The number of Japanese immigrants to Brazil amounts to some 280,000 and they are divided into two major groups: prewar immigrants (190,000 for the period 1908-1943) and postwar immigrants (90,000 from 1953 to the present).

<sup>7</sup> For the most recent statistical survey on the Japanese Brazilian population, see Centro de Estudos Nipo-Brasileiros (São Paulo Jinmon Kagaku Kenkyu-sho), ed., “Brajiru ni okeru Nikkei- Jinko-Chosa Hokokusho, 1987-1988 ” (São Paulo: Centro de Estudos Nipo-Brasileiros, no date).

<sup>8</sup> Maeyama, “Ethnicity, Secret Societies, and Associations,” p. 590.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 597.

<sup>10</sup> Japanese Brazilians named their large-scale migrations to the cities an “ethnic mega- movement” (*minzoku dai-ido*).

<sup>11</sup> Maeyama, “Ethnicity, Secret Societies, and Associations.”

<sup>12</sup> For major legal issues concerning the *dekasegui*, see Masato Ninomiya, org., “*Dekassegui*”: *Gensho ni kansuru Simpojiu Hokoku-sho* (São Paulo: Sociedade Brasileira de Cultura Japonesa, 1993). Recent anthropological monographs on *dekasegui* workers in Japan include Joshua H. Roth, “Defining Communities: The Nation, the Firm, the Neighborhood, and Japanese Brazilian Migrants in Japan” (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> There have been many journalistic accounts on Japanese Brazilian workers and their communities in Japan. See, for instance, an article headlined “ In Japan, Bias Is an Obstacle Even for the Ethnic Japanese,” *The New York Times*, November 13, 1991; and “Kyuzo suru Nikkei Brajiru-jin: ‘Sokoku’ Nippon de Hataraku,” *Asahi Shimbun Weekly Aera*, March 19, 1991; Kamige Shutsupan-sha, *Samba no Machi kara: Gaikoku jin to tomo ni Ikiru: Gunma, Oizumi* (Kamige Shutsupan-sha: Maebashi, Gunma: 1997).

<sup>14</sup> Japanese Brazilians' interracial "mixing" rate grows with each passing generation. For instance, in the statistics for the years 1987-1988, interracial percentages were 6.30% for the second generation; 42.00% for the third generation; and 61.62% for the fourth generation. See Centro de Estudos Nipo-Brasileiros, "Brajiru ni okeru Nikkei-Jinko- Chosa Hokokusho," p. 37 (Table 2-20).

<sup>15</sup> *Dekassegui* seems to have caused a strong sense of shame among both workers and agents. In the late 1980s when it first began, many families tried to hide that their family members had gone to work in Japan. Even today, some *dekassegui* returnees say that they went to Japan not for work but just to look around Japan and to have a good time. Former and current *dekassegui* agents told me in person that they decided to become agents in order to "help" their people or that they never wanted to do such a job and felt very ashamed.

<sup>16</sup> This unofficial information has been confirmed by the staff of the Centro de Imformação e Apoio ao Trabalhador no Exterior.

<sup>17</sup> There has not been much research or even a report on the poverty of Japanese Brazilians, except a wonderful but brief journalistic account on a "Japanese *favela*" published in a weekly "Japanese" journal in the mid-1960s. See Utaro Kanai, "Favela de Japoneses ignora miséria pensando no futuro," *Shukan Nikkei*, no. 104 (August 14, 1964), pp. 2-4.

<sup>18</sup> The back numbers of these pioneering feminist magazines are housed at the State Archives of São Paulo (Arquivo Público do Estado do São Paulo).

<sup>19</sup> Tania Nomura, ed., *Universo em segredo: a mulher nikkei no Brasil* (São Paulo: Diário Nippaku, 1990).

<sup>20</sup> The Archives of the Museu Histórico da Imigração Japonesa no Brasil has successfully housed almost all such memoirs and autobiographies to date.

<sup>21</sup> Takashi Maeyama, *Dona Margarita Vatanabe: Imin-Rojin Fukushi no Gozusan Nen* (Tokyo: Ochanomizu shobou, 1996). My thanks go to Professor Maeyama for the generous gift of his book.

<sup>22</sup> I am grateful to Dona Sonoko Yoshiyashi, Dona Margarita's successor in the "Ikoi no Iye," for having generously provided me with this updated information.

<sup>23</sup> Sociedade Beneficente Feminina “Esperança,” *Comemoração do 45.º Aniversário*, Boletim Informativo N.º 49 (December 1994). My thanks go to Sras. Shizu Saito and Sachiko Shimizu, both longtime members of Esperança, for the valuable information on their association and activities.

<sup>24</sup> One of her longtime acquaintances, who is also a college-educated Nisei woman in her late 50s, maintains that this can be attributed to Dona Midory’s shame regarding her insufficient Japanese language skills, something many in her generation share. Two of my other informants, also Nisei in their late 50s and early 60s, agreed to have interviews with me in Japanese only if I did not use a tape recorder.

<sup>25</sup> Dona Toshie says: “I do not understand what they [my family] talk about [in Portuguese]. I really would like to speak Japanese every day. My daughters understand most of what I say but not all.” Saying that she was very excited about speaking to a “real” Japanese in Japanese, Dona Toshie talked about herself and her family’s life to me in detail tirelessly for more than several hours until three o’clock in the morning on New Year’s Day, 1998. Exhausted, I finally had to excuse myself.

<sup>26</sup> She used the term “kuronbo” (equivalent of the English term “nigger”). There are some extremely pejorative, outdated Japanese terms used by the “Japanese” population in Brazil, including college-educated second- or third-generation white-collar Japanese Brazilians who do not comprehend Japanese at all. These racist words were common in the pre-World War II period in Japan, but have since then virtually vanished.

<sup>27</sup> For Japanese Brazilian religions, see Centro de Estudos Nipo-Brasileiros (São Paulo Jinmon Kagaku Kenkyu-sho), ed., *Brajiru no Nikkei Shukyo* (São Paulo: Centro de Estudos Nipo-Brasileiros, 1985); and Takashi Maeyama, *Ikyo ni “Nippon” o Matsuru* (Tokyo: Ochanomizu Shobo, 1998).

<sup>28</sup> The story of her younger daughter’s marriage and family has turned out to be much more complicated and painful than the version Dona Yukié gave me at the time of her interview. Her daughter’s older daughter is not her husband’s child; she gave birth to her out of wedlock by a previous lover, also a man from the Northeast. Her husband, who has never had a stable job and depends on the income of his wife and mother-in-law, sexually molested his stepdaughter at home. After his wrongdoing was revealed to the family by the daughter’s schoolteachers, the couple were forced to be separated for the sake of the daughter and the husband went back to live with his mother. Yet Dona Yukié’s daughter did not really take her granddaughter’s side. Believing in her



husband's claim of innocence, she keeps in touch with him and hopes to be reconciled with him.

<sup>29</sup> Regarding Emperor worship among the Japanese in Brazil, see Takashi Maeyama, "Ancestors, Emperor, and Immigrant: Religion and Group Identification of the Japanese in Rural Brazil (1908-1950)," *Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs*, 14:2 (1972): 151-182.

<sup>30</sup> Amaboshi Sewing School was one of the first trade schools for young Japanese Brazilian women.

<sup>31</sup> I have written an essay on my own identity as a Japanese historian of Brazil in relation to my current project on black and Japanese Brazilian women in São Paulo. See Mieko Nishida, "My Hiroshima: Memory, History, and Identity," forthcoming in the *Revista Cultura Vozes*.



**LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES CENTER**  
**Working Papers / Documentos de Trabajo**

- No. 1*     **Adolfo Gilly**  
"Por una utopía cruel dejamos nuestras casas" (*Rue Descartes*)
- No. 2*     **Raúl Vallejo**  
"Crónica mestiza del nuevo Pachakutik"  
(Ecuador: del levantamiento indígena de 1990 al Ministerio Étnico de 1996)
- No. 3*     **Jessica Chapin**  
"Crossing Stories: Reflections from the U.S.-Mexico Border Bridge"
- No. 4*     **Graciela Montaldo**  
"Intelectuales y artistas en la sociedad argentina en el fin de siglo"
- No. 5*     **Mieko Nishida**  
"Japanese Brazilian Women and Their Ambiguous Identities: Gender, Ethnicity and Class in São Paulo"

