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Jeffrey Lesser, *Immigration, Ethnicity and National Identity in Brazil, 1808 to the Present*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Map, illustrations, tables, figures, notes, index, 219 pp.; paperback $28.99.

Merica, Merica, Merica,
cossa saràlo 'sta Merica?
Merica, Merica, Merica,
un bel mazzolino di flor.
—Popular Italian song

The immigrant's life is defined by transition and uncertainty. Among a number of countries in the Americas, Brazil has long represented a land of promise and plenty to people around the world. In the United States, the myth of the Promised Land meant that the host country improved the individual lives of migrants. By contrast, Brazil, the Country of the Future, encouraged foreigners to improve a nation burdened by legacies of Portuguese colonialism and African slavery.

Although the reality people encountered often betrayed the initial optimism evinced in the refrain above, immigrants have come to Brazil for centuries, creating opportunities and constructing new communities. Arriving from an array of countries, they fundamentally changed Brazilian identity in unexpected ways. Lesser's new work is a masterful appraisal of these diverse communities, and his book broadly surveys the history of immigration in Brazil since the arrival of the Portuguese royal family in 1808.

Forced to flee the Napoleonic invasion consuming the Iberian Peninsula, the Portuguese king, Dom João VI, became an immigrant himself in a new and foreign land. On arrival, he immediately opened Brazil's economy and culture, planting the seeds for future migration. Although Lesser consciously elects to focus on immigrants who were agents in their migration (11), he repeatedly notes how legacies of slavery and domestic race relations heavily shaped the tenor of official immigration policy. Roughly 45 percent of all African slaves in the New World were forcibly settled in Brazil.

As elites confronted independence and the gradual abolition of slavery, they nervously eyed a historical juncture where whites would be outnumbered and no free person would choose to work under the same miserable conditions that bound the slaves. State policy was subsequently developed to "whiten Brazil" by increasing European immigration. The principal objective among landowning elites was the replacement of slaves with a "servile" *colono* (sharecropper) population to work in the fields. Public officials were sent abroad to actively recruit potential migrants and promote the country as an ideal opportunity, despite the popular perception that Brazil was "a disease-infested jungle with little economic opportunity" (33). *Fazendeiros* could be so abusive to their immigrant employees that emigrant nations actively discouraged or prohibited further migration to Brazil. Due to these circumstances, Brazil generally attracted fewer migrants than the United States, Argentina, or Canada. Nevertheless, mass migration soon followed and, much to the chagrin of the *fazendeiros*, these new Brazilians were not passive additions to their environment.

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Throughout Lesser's account, immigrants generally maintain their individual agency. Instead of being submissive *colonos*, many immigrants fled abusive plantations to build or join colonies of small landowners. Others encouraged their native governments to intervene on their behalf, or avoided agriculture entirely, moving into emerging manufacturing and service sectors. Denied malleable peons, local elites struggled mightily with the implications of immigration for national identity. Racialized debates about wanted versus unwanted immigrants typified public discourse. Opponents feared further "social pollution" of a local population already "deformed" by indigenous and African roots. While attempts were made to block Africans or Asians, local authorities faced awkward situations when white Africans, African Americans, and Japanese arrived in port. Opponents of immigration were soon overwhelmed by a period of massive migration, between 1880 and 1930, that included other "undesirables" like Jews, Arabs, Southern Europeans, and the Japanese.

Immigrants astutely adapted to improve their situation. On departing their home countries, immigrants would capitalize on state subsidies for families by conveniently marrying another immigrant waiting in line. On arrival, the new immigrants immediately recognized the coercive power of the state and developed a complex competition with wealthy *fazendeiros* over the design and direction of state resources. Despite the *fazendeiro* preference for naked subservience, immigrants pushed for greater freedom and better wage pay. As immigrant leaders organized their respective communities and voiced their concerns, they became more adept at manipulating local political institutions to compel change.

Over time, immigrants became increasingly urban and flocked to the industrial hub of São Paulo. Newspapers, community centers, restaurants, and clubs emerged to channel the cultural expressions of ethnic *colônias* (communities). Before long, these urban immigrants became leading magnates of *paulistano* industry. Since political leaders increasingly expected industry to generate future economic growth and modernity, the concerns of a diverse community of industrialists usurped the political hegemony of the *fazendeiros*.

Beyond choosing their economic occupation, immigrants demonstrated agency by manipulating their identity and what it meant to be Brazilian. Instead of conforming to nebulous, elite constructions of Brazilianness, immigrants forged a unique identity that merged their ethnic culture, language, and history with a broader Brazilian national identity. For example, referencing their historical presence in Iberia, Jews and Arabs (migrants of Middle Eastern descent were frequently lumped into the catchall category of Turkish) positioned themselves as legitimate contributors to Portuguese, and subsequently Brazilian, history and race. The Japanese referred to themselves as "white Asians" and theorized that Amazonian indigenous groups were a lost tribe of Japan. Italians and Spaniards highlighted their shared Catholic roots.

While some flexibility with identity existed, immigrant communities could prove to be as prejudiced as native Brazilians, and often exploited prevailing ideas of racial hierarchies. With the interesting exception of the Portuguese, most migrant

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communities denigrated and refused to marry Afro-Brazilians. Seemingly unaware of the irony, recent European immigrants could actively oppose increased African and Asian migration, publish vitriolic tirades on their inferiority, and promote deportation campaigns against the "undesirables." Interethnic solidarity was a scarce commodity, and even Syrians would loudly oppose the migration of Iraqis. As Lesser states, "a majority of immigrants believed they represented a group superior to others" (99).

The Great Depression arrived, and rival ethnic communities failed to patch their differences. The government agenda quickly turned against the rising swell of migrants and made them easy scapegoats for the discontent. Quotas and restrictions were tightened and foreign language newspapers were banned. As World War II developed, Japanese and Germans (but not Italians) experienced greater levels of discrimination and arbitrary detention. While levels of immigration normalized after the war, domestic and international factors shifted. Military dictatorship and successive economic crises dulled Brazil's allure. European and Japanese governments liberalized policies, granting increasing recognition to Brazilian descendants. By the 1980s, Brazil was transformed into a net exporter of migrants, although fellow Latin Americans, Portuguese-speaking Africans, Koreans, and others still continue moving to the *país tropical* in search of a better future. Lesser rightfully concludes, "the story of immigration to and from Brazil is far from over" (196).

A seasoned scholar of Brazilian immigration, Lesser has published multiple books on Chinese, Japanese, Jewish, and Arab migration. While many Brazilian accounts stress the European contribution to national identity, Lesser meticulously develops the critical histories and contributions of non-European immigrants. As he humorously concludes in his *Negotiating National Identity* (1999), despite attempts to remake Brazil as European, political elites successfully created a multicultural country. The current book represents a culmination of sorts by including both European and non-European migrant communities. In this sense, his book becomes comprehensive, with a heavy focus on the boom period between 1880 and 1950. Lesser develops an engaging narrative, seamlessly weaving disparate communities into a general story of immigration to Brazil over two centuries, certainly a highly ambitious and difficult task.

Given the overall objective of producing a general narrative, Lesser is freed from the shackles of sterile methodological debates and just tells the story. Throughout the book, the reader jumps between three levels of analysis: the systemic, the state, and the individual, and impressively, the author does not lose the reader. While the book is highly accessible to the general reader, it does not sacrifice depth for serious scholars of Latin America or migration. The inclusion of a solid historiographical essay invites further discovery and research for scholars, although this reader would have appreciated the inclusion of important Portuguese-language sources. Furthermore, a welcome addition throughout the narrative is Lesser's concurrent comparison of Brazil with other immigrant nations. Constantly referencing immigration figures for several American nations, Lesser provides readers with a more precise framework for understanding the broader phenomenon.

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Ultimately, immigration is a crucial component of Brazilian identity. Official propaganda declares Brazil "a Country of Everyone" with multicolored lettering designed to include all communities. One scans the political landscape and sees President Dilma Rousseff, a second-generation Brazilian born to a Bulgarian father who fled political persecution. Fernando Haddad, the son of a Lebanese-Brazilian textile tycoon, governs Brazil's largest city, São Paulo. Stories of oppressed Bolivians in sweatshops, discrimination against Haitian construction workers, and Bangladeshis slaving in chicken factories never lurk far from the headlines, yet one appreciates the distance Brazil has come. Lesser documents how individual immigrants facilitated this process, and his book is the best effort to date to capture this constant evolution.

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Christina Stolte, *Brazil's Africa Strategy: Role Conception and the Drive for International Status*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Figures, tables, notes, bibliography, index, 236 pp.; hardcover $100, ebook.

Brazil's growing diplomatic and economic presence in Africa was one of the defining characteristics of President Lula da Silva's foreign policy (2003–10). Frequent high-level visits, the opening of 20 embassies (bringing the total to 37), strong growth in Brazil-Africa trade (a sixfold increase between 2000 and 2011, rising from US$4.2 billion to US$27.6 billion), and Brazilian technical assistance to African countries provide strong evidence that strengthening ties with Africa was one of Lula's international priorities.

Analysts usually offer three explanations for Brazil's decision to focus on Africa. They point to hopes for economic gains, political considerations (Africa has 54 votes in the UN General Assembly), and a strategy to project and strengthen Brazil's "African identity," which may help it speak in the name of the Global South. In this new book, Christina Stolte claims that Brazil's Africa engagement—beyond the seeking of economic benefits and votes from African countries at the UN—is motivated by the aspiration to gain recognition as a great power. Put differently, Brazil has tried to use its neighboring continent as a stage to demonstrate its credentials for great power status.

Contrary to what most readers will expect, *Brazil's Africa Strategy* is not a story about Brazil's growing influence on the African continent akin to Deborah Brautigam's excellent *Dragon's Gift* (2009), but an IR theory book that looks at Brazil's Africa strategy as a relatively brief case study that appears only in the fourth chapter. Stolte's theoretical discussion deals with broad questions like power and status. Following a popular saying that "it is not the bigger army that wins, but the better story," Stolte argues that

> role expectations for Great Powers and aspirants to this status have changed. The Great Power privileges of using force and deciding on the world's most crucial issues are no longer conquered through violence and military superiority but are earned by persuasion and the demonstration of the worthiness to receive this status. (25)

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