

IMMIGRANTS IN RURAL BRAZIL:

Some Recent Studies

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ITALIANOS E GAÚCHOS; OS ANOS PIONEIROS DA COLONIZAÇÃO ITALIANA NO RIO GRANDE DO SUL. By THALES DE AZEVEDO. (Porto Alegre, Brazil: A Nação/Instituto Estadual do Livro, 1975.)

IMMIGRANTS ON THE LAND: COFFEE AND SOCIETY IN SÃO PAULO, 1886–1930. By THOMAS H. HOLLOWAY. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980.)

A COLONIZAÇÃO ALEMÃ NO RIO GRANDE DO SUL, UMA INTERPRETAÇÃO SOCIOLÓGICA. By ALDAIR MARLI LANDO AND ELIANE CRUXÊN BARROS. (Porto Alegre, Brazil: Movimento, Instituto Estadual do Livro, 1976.)

A IMIGRAÇÃO JAPONÊSA PARA A LAVOURA CAFEEIRA PAULISTA (1908–1922). By ARLINDA ROCHA NOGUEIRA. (São Paulo, Brazil: Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros, Universidade de São Paulo, 1973.)

A COLONIZAÇÃO ALEMÃ NO VALE DO ITAJAÍ-MIRIM; UM ESTUDO DE DESENVOLVIMENTO ECONÔMICO. By GIRALDA SEYFERTH. (Porto Alegre, Brazil: Movimento, 1974.)

Throughout the history of Brazil, the government has tried to encourage the effective occupation of the entire national territory. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the southern borderlands were targeted as a vital zone for settlement. With the establishment of São Leopoldo in 1824, the imperial government had begun its sporadic efforts to support self-sufficient “colonies” of European farmers in the southern provinces of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina. The rationale for establishing colonies was that the development of a class of yeoman farmers of European stock would help ensure a bright future for Brazil. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, immigrants were also sought to supplement or replace slave labor on the coffee plantations of São Paulo. The coffee interests and *paulista* policymakers specifically did *not* want to establish self-sufficient immigrant colonies on the virgin forest lands in São Paulo. According to the large paulista landowners, such colonies would divert valuable territory and labor away from coffee production.¹

For this review, five books were selected from a wealth of recently published materials on foreign populations in Brazil. A number of works were published in commemoration of the one hundredth and the one

hundred and fiftieth anniversaries of the beginning of German and Italian immigration, respectively. Some of the literature deals with official debates over whether, and to what extent, various levels of government should support, encourage, discourage, or restrict immigration. Particularly welcome is the publication of certain primary works, including memoirs and interviews of immigrants and their descendants, a new translation of a contemporary travel account, local histories, and a collection of photographs.²

The books reviewed here cover the two major rural zones of immigrant settlement, several nationalities of immigrants, and more than one important theme in the historiography of immigration. Three of the books look at the experience of immigrants in the South during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Lando and Barros, and Azevedo on Rio Grande do Sul, and Seyferth on Santa Catarina. Nogueira and Holloway both deal with the São Paulo coffee zone. Two of the books, Seyferth as well as Lando and Barros, concentrate on the German immigrants, the most numerous group of non-Portuguese speakers to move to Brazil in the middle of the nineteenth century. Azevedo focuses on Italian immigrants in Rio Grande do Sul from the point in the 1870s when they started to outnumber immigrants of all other nationalities. Nogueira presents research on the Japanese, an important minority group among the immigrants. As she explains, only in the first decades of the twentieth century, when European sources of immigrant labor became insufficient, were the Japanese allowed to enter Brazil. Holloway's book considers immigrant groups of all nationalities.

All five books share a common interest in the social and economic aspects of immigration, rather than the political or institutional aspects. A central theme in these and other works on immigration history is the process of successful assimilation and integration. Four decades ago, Emilio Willems gave direction to the research of future generations with his theoretical statement on the social psychology of assimilation of German colonists, *Assimilação e Populações Marginais no Brasil*. Willems suggested various criteria that influence the relative assimilation or marginalization of immigrants. The authors of the works reviewed here use a variety of indicators to measure actual and potential assimilation—some borrowed from Willems and others that are original.³

It is interesting to note that although all of the books discuss the issue of assimilation, it receives the most attention in the books on the South. The difference in emphasis reflects some of the regional variations in settlement patterns and the goals of immigration. In the South, immigrants tended to remain settled in isolated colonies and had little contact with outsiders. In fact, this isolation has allowed some immigrants and their descendants to retain their original language and culture for generations and has created something of a stumbling block in

achieving one of the basic goals of immigration to the South: the establishment of a middle class of yeoman farmers who would facilitate overall progress for Brazil. In São Paulo, both expectations and reality were different. On most coffee plantations, immigrants tended the fields with workers of various nationalities who included immigrants from other countries, former slaves, and other Brazilians. In addition, coffee workers were a highly mobile group, moving from one plantation to another, or moving off the plantation to other rural areas or to the cities. In São Paulo, as in the South, it was hoped that European immigrants would help “whiten” and brighten Brazil’s future, but there was no pressing need to draw immigrants into the already sizeable middle class in São Paulo.⁴ The assimilation of Japanese, as Nogueira describes it, was a special case. Some policymakers were opposed to the entrance of Asian immigrants on the grounds that Asians were likely to remain isolated and reemigrate rather than become assimilated and increase the Brazilian population. Other policymakers were opposed to Asian immigration on the grounds that, if assimilated, Asians would not “whiten” the population.

In recent years, the central emphasis of some immigration studies has shifted from assimilation to economic mobility. Nineteenth-century propagandists for immigration to Brazil promised a social paradise and a land of easy fortune. Was leaving home to “make America” an unrealistic dream of naive peasants blinded by propagandists’ lies, or was economic betterment a real possibility for foreigners in Brazil? Each of the books under consideration here gives some attention to economic mobility, but only Holloway addresses the issue directly. For the South, both Seyferth and Azevedo describe a situation of great stability among the immigrants and their descendants after the initial change from landless peasants in the Old World to freeholders in the New World. Their income was never great, but landownership was a realizable expectation. The situation was different for the immigrants to São Paulo. While they did not become landowners immediately, according to Holloway, they could reasonably hope to save enough from their wages and the sale of garden produce eventually to buy land.

The three books on the South will be discussed first and compared. Then, these three will be compared and contrasted with the two works on São Paulo. A brief summary of the contents, strengths, and weaknesses of the individual books will lead to some suggestions for further research.

In *A Colonização Alemã no Rio Grande do Sul*, Lando and Barros propose to revise earlier analyses of the reasons for German immigration, the structure of immigrant colonies, and the immigrants’ integration into Brazilian society. The book is based on standard secondary and theoretical works and presents no new evidence. The authors promise

to offer a new sociological framework for analyzing the German immigrant experience in Rio Grande do Sul, but unfortunately, they succeed only partially.

The first part of their thesis is that German settlement in Rio Grande do Sul was neither an isolated event nor a mere coincidence, but an integral part of capitalist development in Brazil and Germany. This idea is hardly an original contribution. Only the rhetoric is revisionist, and even it has become commonplace among the generation of historians who have read Immanuel Wallerstein and André Gunder Frank. In this section, Lando and Barros show how German peasants, forced to leave their homeland by economic need, should have become wage laborers in Brazil. They did not, the authors contend, because the land-owning elite in the South (as distinct from the paulista elite) was too conservative economically and too weak politically to stop the establishment of isolated colonies. The authors argue that government interest in colonies of independent farmers was rooted in the desire to gain control over extra-legal, and sometimes violent, land invasions (*intrusos*) and squatting (*posses*).

The second part of Lando and Barros's thesis holds that true social integration, which they define as a more profound process than simple cultural assimilation, involves participation in all levels of society and was a failure (p.8). The authors support this contention in three ways. First, the political participation of German immigrants was limited because as peasants in Germany, they had been excluded from politics and thus had no political habits or experience. (This line of argument easily could have been strengthened by presenting more than simple, impressionistic evidence; political participation is easily measured.) Second, the potential for linguistic and cultural assimilation was minimal because both formal and informal education in the colonial zones were conducted in German, usually by German teachers. Third, involvement in the Muckers movement is presented as evidence of marginalization from the mainstream medical, religious, and political spheres. Lando and Barros's interpretation of the Muckers may be their most original contribution because they revise earlier views that simply disregarded the movement as unexplainable fanaticism unrelated to other historical currents.⁵ It is also the most innovative measurement of assimilation used in any of the books reviewed here.

Giralda Seyferth's *A Colonização Alemã no Vale do Itajaí-Mirim* also considers German settlement in the south, but unlike Lando and Barros's work, it focuses on just one community. Chosen for study was one of the later German immigrant colonies that was established in the 1860s in the Itajaí-Mirim Valley in Santa Catarina. Seyferth asserts that the economic system of immigrant settlement was a Brazilian adaptation of German traditions that had three interlocking components: the rural

farming colony, the town (Brusque), and commercial ties that bound these two together. Seyferth's prose is clear and well organized, with lucid descriptions of complex social and economic structures. The creative use of a variety of source materials enhances her treatment of the topic. As a native of the Itajaí-Mirim Valley, Seyferth took advantage of her familiarity with the local language (a dialect of German) and customs to interview some thirty-five descendants of the original colonists there. She supplements the oral histories with local documents, including annual reports of the provincial presidents of Santa Catarina, local newspapers, and official property maps.

With the detail of an anthropological monograph, Seyferth describes the routines and overall economic system of the farming colony at Itajaí-Mirim, noting traditions rooted in feudal Germany and adaptations to the new local environment. She suggests that the town of Brusque, which served as the administrative, commercial, and manufacturing center, was structurally similar to towns in rural communities in Germany.⁶ Of particular interest is her description of the tight mercantilist credit and marketing system that was run by town merchants and served to restrict contact between farmers and outsiders. She argues that the colony remained an isolated, primarily rural peasant community well into the twentieth century. Even the advent of textile industries in Brusque did not change the basic structures of farm production, labor, and rural-urban ties.

Seyferth's work shows a thorough knowledge and an excellent understanding of the society and economy of the Itajaí-Mirim Valley, but her perspective may be too limited. She is imaginative in suggesting structural continuities between Germany and the immigrant colony, but some of the patterns actually may not have their origins in Germany. In fact, both Seyferth and Azevedo might be faulted for assuming that certain patterns such as landholding (parallel plots fronting on access routes) and socializing (in the chapel at the nearest crossroads) were either specifically German or Italian in origin: the similarities between the two are striking.

While Seyferth focuses closely on one colony, Thales de Azevedo takes a broader look at some of the patterns of immigrant settlement throughout the state of Rio Grande do Sul, in his *Italianos e Gaúchos*. He argues that nineteenth-century immigration, designed to promote effective settlement of the region by establishing a class of small farmers, was successful, but that the effective assimilation of Italian immigrants was limited. Azevedo's analysis stresses the importance of culture and intellectual currents, unlike the other authors, who base their arguments largely on economic relations.

Azevedo explains that the Brazilian government promoted Italian immigration because policymakers believed that progress would come

with a larger population that was, preferably, of free European stock with experience in farming. Azevedo does not directly address some of the questions raised elsewhere as to why these immigrants were set up in isolated colonies in the South rather than being introduced as wage labor, or how the major political and economic interests in Rio Grande do Sul and São Paulo reacted to the establishment of these colonies. He emphasizes cultural and intellectual factors in the shift of the source of emigration from Germany to Italy. By the 1870s, he says, Germans were no longer interested in moving to Brazil because it had received too much bad publicity. At about the same time, Italians were willing to emigrate, not because of rural overpopulation as such, but because of outright misery (pp. 43–54). He describes some of the immigrants' problems and frustrations when the reality of the voyage and new home did not come up to their dream of "making America." Azevedo compares the social systems of Italy with those of the colony, describing continuity and tradition modified in the new environment. He illustrates the comparison with examples taken from such diverse areas as architecture, residential patterns, and the use and abuse of blasphemy. He makes the standard argument that acculturation and assimilation were limited by geographic isolation, then adds some other interesting insights. On the one hand, he explains, the colonists' social isolation was both a partial cause and a result of the creation of a new Italian identity among groups with separate, and often hostile, regional identities (such as Venetians, Lombards, and Milanos). On the other hand, integration seems to have been closely correlated with residence and occupation: farmers were the most conservative group, while urban artisans and merchants were more likely to become assimilated.

Azevedo is a mature scholar who knows his topic well, having studied Gaúcho culture for several decades. As a result, *Italianos e Gaúchos* is a broad and complex social history. He shies away from quantitative materials, using instead immigrants' letters that were sent home, land-use maps, architectural observations, Italian-language newspapers, and the proceedings of local civic groups. Because of the complexity of the topic and the variety of materials consulted, the text sometimes seems to lack clarity and order.

The works of Azevedo, Seyferth, and Lando and Barros all describe a region of immigrant settlements so isolated from each other and the rest of the country that second- and third-generation colonists commonly speak the language of their ancestors. Such settlement is seen as economically unadvantageous to the southern landowning elite. By contrast, the paulista system of immigrant wage labor seems to have been just one more factor on the road toward economic success in São Paulo.

In *Immigrants on the Land*, Thomas Holloway takes an approach similar to Seyferth's, emphasizing the economic system in which the

immigrants participated rather than the immigrant culture, but Holloway's focus is broader, taking in the entire coffee-growing zone of São Paulo. The region is characterized by a mobile population that moved about continually within the fluid and expanding coffee frontier. Holloway's thesis is that geographic mobility and access to good lands on the frontier allowed for a relatively open society in which the elite of landowners expanded to incorporate both old Brazilian planters and first- or second-generation immigrants. He uses the approach and techniques of the "new" social history to conceptualize and begin to measure economic mobility.⁷

Holloway tests Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis on the São Paulo case and finds that it is not entirely applicable.⁸ First, Holloway observes that São Paulo was indeed a frontier zone, with plenty of new good lands to be opened up, incentives to open them, and actual waves of expansion into the frontier. But, he argues, the "safety valve" effect that draws population away from the social and economic pressure in the cities and other more settled areas should not be given the importance in São Paulo that Turner gave it in the United States. Although hard times had prompted emigration, Holloway stresses that most people would not have come to the paulista frontier had not coffee planters and their political cronies felt the need for a large wage-labor force and sent aggressive agents to Europe to seek immigrants for their fields with the offer of subsidized passage.

Even though Turner's emphasis on the "safety valve" effect of the frontier seems misplaced to Holloway, the frontier's theoretical "democratizing" effect does seem to hold. According to Holloway, landholding in the paulista coffee economy was more complex than one would normally expect in a plantation system. In return for taking care of an assigned portion of a coffee plantation and helping at harvest time, the workers (*colonos*) earned wages and had free access to lands for food production. If a colono was dissatisfied with the terms of his contract or the quality of land he was allowed to work, he could (and frequently did) abandon one plantation for another. Holloway explains that more and more virgin-forest expanses were cleared for coffee planting because the colonos preferred to work new lands; the older coffee groves were worked by recently arrived immigrants. Nevertheless, settlement patterns in rural São Paulo were somewhat more complex than traditionally has been assumed. Holloway argues that coffee planters were willing to allow a certain amount of "democratization" of landownership because this practice did not hurt their own potential profits in the rich paulista frontier zone. Often, he says, planters would sell off parcels of old coffee fields to immigrants and other landless workers. In this way, the planters could liquidate their assets and invest them in more

profitable areas in a manner that they hoped would create a more stable local labor force. Nevertheless, Holloway notes, although this practice may have stabilized the population as a whole, the new smallholders were not necessarily willing to continue as part-time plantation laborers once they acquired land of their own.

Holloway's final chapter presents quantitative evidence to support his argument that the paulista system of landownership was fairly open and allowed immigrants access to land. Perhaps because the proper sources do not exist, the evidence does not do justice to the argument. For example, he shows that more foreigners owned coffee groves in 1934 than in 1905, but does not show the number who owned fields planted in other crops, even though immigrant participation in coffee production was less important. Moreover, he leaves the reader wondering about the immigrants' real chances for economic mobility. Was it normal or exceptional for an immigrant to become a landowner? How did the rates of mobility (measured in terms of land acquisition) compare for foreign immigrants of various nationalities, non-paulista Brazilians, and natives of São Paulo? The answers to these questions should not be dismissed lightly, especially in view of Warren Dean's findings for the paulista coffee county of Rio Claro: "It cannot be claimed, as some historians have, that the 'average' immigrant or 'many' immigrants, achieved landownership. In Rio Claro, few managed the feat."⁹ These unanswered questions constitute an unfortunate, if unavoidable, weakness in an otherwise strong book by Holloway.

In her *Imigração Japonêsa*, Arlinda Rocha Nogueira is also interested in the entire coffee zone of São Paulo, but she focuses on just one segment on the immigrant population: the Japanese immigrants who received travel subsidies from the Brazilian government. Her thesis is that Brazilian attitudes toward Asian immigration ranged from outright hostility to mere ambivalence and that Japanese immigrants were brought in only because of the perceived need for wage laborers in the early twentieth century.

Despite the greater linguistic and cultural differences between the home country and Brazil that the Japanese faced, the Japanese immigration experience that Nogueira describes was not so different from that of other immigrants. After the Meiji Revolution in 1868, increasing demographic and financial pressures on the rural population of Japan led them to emigrate, primarily to the Pacific and North America. Asian workers were prohibited from entering Brazil until 1907, when the immigration laws were liberalized. Nogueira argues that one of the primary reasons why the Brazilian immigration restrictions were reversed was that the flow of European immigrants did not fill all the labor needs of paulista coffee growers. In fact, the coffee interests were well repre-

sented in this scheme because the ships that brought Japanese immigrants to Brazil had contracted to carry coffee to sell in Africa and Japan on return trips.

Nogueira argues that the Brazilian government never really was committed to supporting Japanese immigration and halted the "experiment" in 1914, when high unemployment eased the pressure for labor. Then, three years later, when unemployment had decreased and the war was slowing immigration from Europe, subsidies to Japanese immigrants were renewed, only to be suspended again in 1922. The government's lack of commitment was apparently rooted in racism and a fearful uncertainty about the economic role that Asians might assume in Brazil. Japanese workers were praised for their hard work and frugal habits, but this very behavior was seen as a drawback because it was likely to create dissension among competing workers of other nationalities.

In general, Nogueira's presentation is clear and well ordered. She utilizes some interesting sources, including ships' passenger lists, immigrant registration lists, Japanese consular and foreign ministry reports, state and municipal documents from São Paulo, newspapers, and contemporary accounts. She complements descriptive materials with quantitative information, but unfortunately, the quantitative materials are not analyzed as completely as they might have been. For example, she does not compare and contrast various characteristics of the data presented in two different chapters on the first and second periods of subsidized immigration (1908–14 and 1917–22). Nevertheless, the author has had the courage to defy linguistic barriers and to open the important field of Japanese immigration to Brazilian scholars, and she should be lauded for the effort.¹⁰

The history of immigration in Brazil may be nearing a new era. A number of strong research works dealing with various phases of immigration are now available.¹¹ But more quality monographs, like the ones reviewed here, would further enrich our understanding and might then be used as building blocks for comparative analyses. It would be interesting to compare the experiences of different social groups by nationality, date of arrival in Brazil, occupation, and region of settlement. Such studies might focus on any one of several variables to measure assimilation and integration: language, religion, education, farming techniques, marriage patterns, or political participation. Research on economic mobility might emphasize landownership (as Holloway does), or earnings, savings, purchases and remittances, or intra- and intergenerational occupation histories.

The background of the immigrants is another important topic that is touched on by many studies, but has not yet been dealt with in depth. Which immigrants brought their families with them, never expecting to

return to the country of their birth, and which considered the move to Brazil as a temporary expedient? What skills and experience did the immigrants have when they came and how did this affect their life in Brazil? A related issue, the determination of the immigrants' final destinations, also needs to be studied. After initially landing by chance in one situation or another, many immigrants moved several times before settling permanently. Who moved between regions, within the same region, between occupations, and from rural to urban areas, and why? Eventually one can hope for even broader comparative analyses.

The present essay has been limited to a discussion of the immigrant experience in rural areas, but how did this compare with the urban experience? We should also make the jump from studies of immigration by itself to integrated studies of the social and economic systems that involved both immigrants and natives. Taking an even broader view, it is important to compare the Brazilian case with other regions and nations in the Americas, including both those that received numerous immigrants and those that did not. In sum, the history of immigration in Brazil offers a wealth of research possibilities for interested scholars.

NOTES

1. As the wage-labor system developed in São Paulo after abolition, most immigrant workers there were known as *colonos* although their role differed from that of the colonists in the South. Perhaps the distinction between the terms immigrant and colonist had been lost because so many earlier immigrants had, in fact, been colonists. For a discussion of colonos in São Paulo, see Warren Dean, *Rio Claro: A Brazilian Plantation System, 1820–1920* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1976) 168–69; and Holloway, *Immigrants*, pp. 70–74.
2. A good overview of the role of immigration in Brazilian history is given in chapter 5 of Thomas W. Merrick and Douglas H. Graham, *Population and Economic Development in Brazil: 1800 to the Present* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979). Recently published primary sources include Thomas Davatz, *Memórias de um Colono no Brasil (1850)*, translation, notes, and preface by Sergio Buarque de Holanda (São Paulo: Martins, 1972); Francisco Cupello, *Memórias de um Imigrante* (Rio de Janeiro: Casa Editôra Vecchi, 1973); and two volumes by Rovílio Costa, et al., *Imigração Italiano no Rio Grande do Sul: Vida, Costumes e Tradições* (Porto Alegre: Livraria Sulina, 1974) and *Antropologia Visual da Imigração Italiana* (Caxias do Sul: Universidade de Caxias and Escola Superior de Teologia São Lourenço de Brindes, 1976). The secondary works on immigration in Brazil are too numerous to list here.
3. Among the criteria that Willems considers are: the similarities of physical and cultural environments of both home and host countries, expectations of permanent relocation in the host country, the presence or absence of prejudices about the immigrants' culture and race, language, family structure, religion, economic activities, education, law, and politics. See Emílio Willems, *Assimilação e Populações Marginais no Brasil: Estudo Sociológico dos Imigrantes Germânicos e Seus Descendentes*, *Brasiliana*, Série 5a., v. 186 (São Paulo: Companhia Editôra Nacional, 1940).
4. On the "whitening" process, see Thomas E. Skidmore, *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).
5. See, for example, Aurélio Porto, *O Trabalho Alemão no Rio Grande do Sul* (Porto Alegre: Estabelecimento Gráfico Santa Terezinha, 1934), pp. 187–91.

6. For a dissenting opinion of the structure and function of towns in rural Brazil and Germany, see Willems, *Assimilação*, p. 80.
7. One example of the "new" social history applied to immigrant mobility in the United States is Thomas Kessner, *The Golden Door: Italian and Jewish Immigrant Mobility in New York City, 1880–1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).
8. See Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1947).
9. Dean, *Rio Claro*, p. 190.
10. Other works on the Japanese in Brazil that have appeared in Western languages include José Thiago Cintra, *La migración japonesa en Brasil* (México: El Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios Orientales, 1971); Burajiru Nikkeijin Jittai Chosa Iinkai, *The Japanese Immigrant in Brazil* (Tokyo: The University of Tokyo Press, n.d.); Hiroshi Saito, "The Integration and Participation of the Japanese and Their Descendants in Brazilian Society," *International Migration* 14,3 (1976):183–99.
11. For examples of such comparative studies, see: Herbert S. Klein, "The Integration of Italian Immigrants into Argentina and the United States: A Comparative Analysis," paper presented at the conference "Imprenditori e Lavoratori Italiani nel processo d'industrializzazione dell'America Latina" in Torino, Italy, September–October 1980; and Chiari Vangelista, "Immigrazione, struttura produttiva e mercato del lavoro in Argentina e in Brasile: 1876–1914," *Annali della Fondazione Luigi Einaudi* 9 (1975): 197–216.