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# Brazil's 'model minority'

Jeffrey Lesser's study on the Japanese diaspora in South America's largest country finds a society that, although fiercely proud of its citizens of Japanese heritage, still sees them as outsiders

BY BRADLEY WINTERTON  
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There are more people of Japanese extraction living in Brazil's Sao Paulo Province than there are in all the other countries of the world put together, Japan excluded. The remarkable immigration began in 1908, a year after the US had prohibited virtually all further Japanese arrivals. The government in Tokyo encouraged it, believing their country had too many farmers for the land available. And many more arrived in Brazil in the years immediately following World War II. But few of the Japanese Brazilians, known locally as "Nikkei," remained farmers for long. Most took education very seriously, and many moved into the city and quickly became prosperous middle-class success stories. And the other Brazilians were, if anything, proud of them. If these hard-working and talented people can run our businesses and use their Japanese connections, went the general opinion, then maybe one day Brazil will be as rich as Japan.

PORN AND POLITICS

A *Discontented Diaspora* looks at the phenomenon in general, then goes on to investigate two specific areas of Japanese-Brazilian activity — their participation in erotic movies and their involvement in political radicalism, both during the 1960s and 1970s.

The films the author discusses don't appear very erotic by the standards of today's pornography. Screened 40 years ago in mainstream Sao Paulo cinemas, they seem rather to be social comedies on mildly sexual topics. He describes researching them at somewhere called the Canal X Pornography Superstore where he sat on the floor with his laptop peeling open plastic containers of films that hadn't been touched, let alone rented out, for decades. The regular customers thought he was a tax-inspector.

What characterizes them, he considers, is that their female Japanese-Brazilian performers were considered both "exotic" and alluring. Whether they were alluring because they were exotic, or whether the two categories simply co-existed, isn't clear. Either way, the supposed attractiveness — and submissiveness — of Japanese-Brazilian women is part of Brazilian folklore, it seems, along with the docile, hard-working nature of the men — plus their tendency to be less than entirely admirable as drivers.

Jeffrey Lesser probably opts to study the Japanese-Brazilian involvement in student militancy opposed to the dictatorship of President Arthur da Costa e Silva (which began in 1964) because of the ethnic-based movements of that period in the US, such as the Black Panthers. He finds the involvement of minorities in Brazil to have been far smaller, though not insignificant. In the popular view at the era, these reserved, conservative citizens could quite possibly be bank robbers in their free time. But more often it was simply students who became radicalized, as did so many students elsewhere, with their ethnicity of only marginal importance. The press however, compliant with the regime, presented them as being uniquely violent in what was perceived as a Japanese tradition.

A precursor in terms of Japanese political involvement was a secret society from the 1940s, Shindo Renmei, that aimed to preserve Japanese language and culture in Brazil, and even denied Japan's defeat in the war. The student militants of the 1960s and 1970s, by contrast, wanted to be a part of a wider Brazilian student radicalism, and not be seen as specifically Japanese.

There doesn't turn out to be a great deal of material for

PUBLICATION NOTES



A DISCONTENTED DIASPORA: JAPANESE BRAZILIANS AND THE MEANINGS OF ETHNIC MILITANCY, 1960-1980

BY JEFFREY LESSER  
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Lesser to work on. He tracks the careers of two Japanese-Brazilian militants of the period, then spends a lot of time on the 1970 kidnapping of the Japanese Consul to Sao Paulo by student radicals. The release of five students being held (and tortured) by the authorities was the condition for the consul's release, and one of these was known to the public as "Mario Japa" ("Japanese Mario"). The exchange took place after the consul had been held for five days, and he made the headlines on his release by refusing to condemn his captors. They had behaved, he said, like gentlemen. The students were deported to Mexico but allowed to return to Brazil nine years later. The consul later became Japan's ambassador to Brazil.

As for this book's author, he's an Atlanta professor who's written two other books on Brazilian immigrants. He describes himself as being Jewish-American, and his wife, born and raised in Sao Paulo, as Jewish-Brazilian. His Japanese-Brazilian interviewees found these facts reassuring. He, too, was an outsider, they concluded, and so would understand their problems.

MELTING POT

Sao Paulo is a place of immigrants. In addition to its 1.2 million Japanese-Brazilians it boasts the world's largest Italian community outside Italy and the world's largest Lebanese community outside Lebanon. And despite the fact that there are a quarter of a million Japanese Brazilians now living back in Japan, ostensibly looking for temporary work (a movement that began in the 1980s), the subjects of this book can't nowadays really be described as "discontented." They're often well off, are admired by other Brazilians and are in many ways the South American version of the US idea of a "model minority" writ large.

Of course the student radicals of 40 years ago were discontented, as were student radicals all over the world, and in this sense the phrase provides a catchy title for what is an interesting, often surprising and generally well-researched book.

If the Japanese-Brazilians are discontented at all these days it's because they want to be considered simply as Brazilians like everyone else, an appellation the rest of the population stubbornly resists. But Brazil's fondness for them, and pride in them, is unmistakable. This proprietorial sense, combined with a continuing feeling of difference, was exemplified by a famous 1992 advertisement for Semp Toshiba (a Brazil-based company making electronic products) that in Portuguese announced proudly, "Our Japanese are more creative than everyone else's Japanese."



BY GARETH MURFIN  
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When *Street Fighter II* was released in 1991 even Capcom could never have predicted it would still be its best-selling consumer game almost 20 years later. The latest incarnation of the series (*Street Fighter IV*) hit the shelves in February this year for the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360, but does *Street Fighter* still entertain like it used to?

The *Street Fighter* series of games dates back to Capcom's first competitive fighting game in 1984, a coin-op named *Street Fighter*, which was quite popular at the time and saw conversions to many platforms (most notably the TurboGrafx/PC Engine conversion that was released as *Fighting Street*) but was never as popular as its 1991 sequel, *Street Fighter II*.

*Street Fighter II* proved to be hugely successful in the arcades and also on the Super Nintendo Entertainment System, prompting Nintendo to include it as a free game with the system itself (the standard package came free with *Super Mario World*). *Street Fighter II* quickly became the definitive fighting game directly influencing the creation of games like *Mortal Kombat*, *King of Fighters*, *Tekken* and *Soul Caliber*.

Capcom, never one to rest on its laurels, began to release updates to the *Street Fighter* series, each with some unique differences, characters and tweaks. After *Street Fighter II* (full title *Street Fighter II: The World Warrior*) we saw the release of *Street Fighter II: Champion Edition*, *Hyper Fighting*, *The New Challengers*, *Turbo*, *Super* and many more iterations. Each of these was highly received on both arcade and Super Nintendo by the fans, and Capcom continued to tweak the formula further.

Once games machines like the PlayStation and Sega Saturn were commonplace in the living room, so was

3D technology. As part of a huge rush to jump on the 3D bandwagon, Capcom released *Street Fighter EX*, which used 3D models and 3D camera angles. Most hardcore *Street Fighter* fans were not at all happy. The main problem was the slightly sluggish feel compared to the earlier 2D incarnations. Another gripe was that it was awkward to play, since fans had honed their skills in a strictly 2D environment.

This history is particularly relevant since Capcom noted the disappointment of fans and went back to 2D for subsequent versions of *Street Fighter*. But the newest iteration, *Street Fighter IV*, returns to 3D technology, and the question on every fan's lips is: "Does the 3D ruin it?"

The short answer is no. Capcom has ingeniously woven the original feel and graphics into a 3D version of *Street Fighter* with no loss of responsiveness. Game play takes place in a purely 2D environment, meaning fans of the game will immediately feel at home.

The graphics are highly stylized and look more like moving paintings than photo-realistic images. All of the original characters and more have been gorgeously detailed with layers of depth that are simply not possible using traditional 2D techniques. A *Street Fighter IV* character is rendered in meticulous 3D with internal models representing their muscles that realistically contract and flex as the character moves. Vivid skin and embedded vein textures add to the realism, and actual facial expressions allow real damage to be experienced visually for the first time. If you punch someone in the face you can see him or her wince as the fist connects.

The backdrops are beautifully modeled environments with lots of detail. For example, Chun Li's stage (China) has been re-created and modernized so that you can see people sitting in noodle shops



slurping up steaming noodles as you fight in front of them. Characters can be flung in the air and careen into parts of the backdrop that explode in a shower of pieces. The best part is that all of this happens fast at a constant 60 frames per second (and in HD if you have an HD TV), and has no impact on the responsiveness of the game play itself.

Cut scenes, logos and menu screens are all detailed in sweeping Japanese calligraphy style reminiscent of the movie *300*. The only bad graphics to be seen are cheap-looking manga moments that tell the characters' individual stories.

If you're new to the genre, *Street Fighter IV* might feel somewhat limited by its 2D approach to begin with, but over time it can become very, very addictive.

The game is very hard, even for *Street Fighter* veterans. The difficulty is a huge plus point because it challenges experienced players and forces them to update skills that were honed in the 1990s. There are plenty of new moves and combos. Energy bars fill up for both "super" moves and "ultra" combos, and you can keep a key held down to unleash charged up "focus" attacks by holding down the button longer and longer to charge. As you throw your best and watch it effortlessly parried seconds before being cracked in the jaw by a lightning fast counter move, you'll wonder how it can be so hard. The speed and difficulty, as well as the new style and music, really

VIDEO GAME

*Street Fighter IV*'s 2D approach may feel limited to begin with, but it quickly becomes addictive.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CAPCOM

get the adrenalin flowing.

The only unfortunate thing is that despite being difficult, the game is way too short. A player can actually complete the game without seeing many of the classic *Street Fighter II* characters. Depending on which character you choose, there is a pre-defined path through the game (of eight characters selected from the 12 original characters, four new ones and eight "unlockable" ones).

Personally, I see this as a massive flaw, since if you tend to use one character like most players do, then you can complete the game 10 times and never meet a new foe. This forces you to use characters you might not be happy with, just to meet the *Street Fighter II* classic characters you will crave to see in this new styling. This is a problem because using a player that you're not familiar with in such a hard game means you will most likely get beaten, frustrated and then return to your favorite character, who you've probably gotten a little bored of by now.

A byproduct of this is that it inspires more multi-player action. The people you play online or at home choose their own character, as do you, so you can hopefully meet some of the characters you wanted to meet, albeit with an entirely different fighting style compared to the one the AI uses.

In conclusion, fans of the *Street Fighter II* series will not be disappointed, although they may not get as much mileage out of *Street Fighter IV*. New players to the series will find it exciting but also extremely difficult.

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# Who's hot in Hades, and who's not

When TV anchorman Hatcher McCord goes to hell, he meets pretty much every luminary you could think of

BY JANET MASLIN  
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK

The fresh hell described by Robert Olen Butler's new novel is crammed with random celebrities.

It is plagued by modern problems like four-hour erections and crashing hard drives. Patrolled by Satan's minions (among them, two of the Bee Gees) dressed in

powder-blue jumpsuits, it's filled with bookstores that optimistically open with new owners at every sunrise — only to go out of business by the end of each day. If the books they can't sell in hell are maddeningly uneven, ever bouncing between passable wit and sophomoric giggles, Butler's slapdash *Hell* deserves shelf space there.

Butler, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *A Good Scent From a Strange Mountain*, treats his newest novelistic conceit as an occasion to toss every possible ingredient into a fanciful hellscape and then let these elements run wild. Confident that some of his denizens of hell are well chosen (the inventor of the restroom hand dryer is there, as are book critics who read too fast and miss a lot), Butler piles on more and more. He shows no sign of knowing when to stop.

Did this book need J. Edgar Hoover in lipstick? It did not. Hemingway in a white poplin dress? No again. Ike Turner forced to listen to Richard Nixon's version of *Proud Mary*? Now that's a little better. And it's just Satanic enough to be worth a laugh and to keep readers trudging through the often barren landscape of Butler's imaginary underworld.

The main character in *Hell*

is Hatcher McCord, who was a famous network anchorman while he was alive. After death Hatcher still retains a certain authority and cachet. Even though hell's television sometimes features nonstop reruns of *The O'Reilly Factor*, Hatcher has been recruited to do a series of interviews with famous, damned luminaries, asking each one how he or she wound up in hell.

One prospective interviewee is Satan himself, who seems to like Hatcher enough to mock him and at one point even demands a hug. "I've got father issues," Satan tells Hatcher, continuing, "Oh boo hoo."

On this book's scale of witticisms, that counts as one of Butler's better touches. Hatcher, who was married three times on earth, is now mired in a weirdly dysfunctional union with Anne Boleyn, the beheaded ex-wife of Henry VIII. In hell Anne wears jeans and a T-shirt with a changing message ("Hell is losing your head," it says at one point) and is able to do anything she likes with her severed head. She can put it on a bookshelf or, in one of the novel's more painfully bawdy scenes, attach it to Hatcher and have it threaten to bite. However hard or bizarrely they try, Hatcher and Anne can't make a satisfying sexual connection and

continue to be stuck together yet hellishly disappointed.

Somehow, in the course of Butler's fever dream of a plot, *Hell* also includes Dante's Beatrice, now a film noir dame contending with Humphrey Bogart, who pines for Lauren Bacall; a chorus of singing cockroaches enamored of the phrase "poopy butt"; Michael Jackson, doing a woefully inadequate job of singing Wagner and consigned to "Everland, the densely populated molester estate on the edge of the city"; Bobby Fischer, playing chess with a computer from Hadassah; Jerry Seinfeld, whose jokes all bomb; and Celine Dion, who just won't quit singing that damn *Titanic* song.

There is also an Automat at which Hatcher finds Judas Iscariot with his 30 pieces of silver (in hell they're nickels) and a cheap motel room in which Bill Clinton waits for some young woman, any young woman, to arrive. Also wandering around: Martin Scorsese, madly frustrated because he doesn't have a camera, and this is "so clearly his kind of town." Both former US presidents Bush also put in cameo appearances, as does Dick Cheney, who has a chance to compare notes with Beelzebub, Satan's henchman.

Their shared question: How stupid is your boss? "I've spent an awful long time already down a drill hole full of boiling oil," Cheney replies succinctly.

On and on it goes, ever aimlessly. And by the time *Hell* is over, there's only one thing that Butler has really made clear. It's that he likes this world, with its infinite possibilities and surprises around ever corner. He even likes the grisly dismemberings and reconstitutions whereby hell's denizens can be torn apart over and over again, a cycle that this book plays for mindless laughs.

Hatcher McCord winds up liking hell too. For one thing, almost everyone this newsman ever knew in both his private and professional lives has wound up in the same place, so going to hell must be some kind of occupational hazard. For another, it's cozy. And hell turns out to be a great equalizer. Hitler and his great admirer Leni Riefenstahl ("He had me at 'Fellow Germans,'" she recalls) are on the same footing with celebrity bloggers.

As for those bloggers, here's what hell has in store for them: They are eternally saddled with the same cellulite and heavy bling that they used to mock. Now and then Butler's hell is a nice place to visit after all.