
Ethnos

Tacit Promises

Stories such as the ones just presented became a medium through which first-generation immigrants from Japan in Brazil worked through the ramifications of their dramatically altered circumstances.¹ Again, though one must not take given literary representations as simple reproductions of historical individuals, let alone communities, it is worth noting how many individuals from Japan were experiencing similar situations. Japan's expansion resulted in a large-scale population shift that placed Japanese citizens in direct contact with heterogeneity of various sorts, which is reflected in these literary texts. That is not to say that these texts were solely concerned with typical manifestations of difference. These works not only represented individuals marked as other—primarily, but not solely, through the lens of race—but also reappraised what could be expected from relationships with individuals thought to be racially identical. What these representations reveal, unsurprisingly, is that “race” is a central concern; perhaps counter-intuitively, however, the writers seem to be even more preoccupied with intraracial, rather than interracial, alterity.² This, I suggest, is prompted not merely by a fear of the instability of identity itself, but also by a recognition that the implied solidarity of racial identity did not, in fact, vouchsafe preferential treatment.

Three of the stories show a particular sensitivity to racial, gender, and linguistic alterity: “The Death of a Certain Settler,” “An Age of Speculative Farming,” and “Tumbleweeds.”³ In addition, they display an awareness of economic alterity that exceeds simple disparity, as the writers describe exceptional degrees of privation and hardship. What perhaps is unexpected is that perceived difference between racial categories and between languages plays a far less significant role in the stories than does perceived intraracial and intralingual difference.⁴ As such, the stories show far greater concern with what I will call “acquired” alterity, and with betrayals of bonds thought to be implied by racial filiation, than they do with

threats posed by conventional racial alterity. An examination of these moments of representations of alterity, which are often marked by a negative affective valence and an increased affective intensity, reveals a powerful sense of racial betrayal that stands in relief from any normative evaluations of racial others that appear in the stories. In addition, an examination of edits made to the stories over time reveals the shifting sensibilities and sensitivities of the community.

RACIAL OTHER AS INSTRUMENT OF JUSTICE

“The Death of a Certain Settler” by Nishioka Kunio most closely conforms (at least at first glance) with a stereotypical narrative of the racial other as both abject and threatening. A settler, having just begun his triumphant return to Japan after achieving financial success in Brazil, is murdered, presumably by a non-Japanese laborer. Rather than portraying the murdered settler sympathetically, however, the story depicts him in an unflattering light, even implying that the settler’s brutal end was deserved; to the extent that the non-Japanese assailant is developed as a character, he is presented as being hard-working, honorable, and worthy of the reader’s sympathies.

The story begins with a confrontation between the races: a Japanese landowner, Kaneko Daisuke, is facing a man with “gleaming black” skin:⁵

A man who seemed to be *baiano*, with a face that gleamed black, and a woman who was presumably his wife, with her belly hugely swollen, stood with their shoulders shrugged in front of his [Daisuke’s] home. On the ground to their side was one *arroz sacco* jammed with all of their worldly possessions and a large child, with a thin, monkey-like face and wide eyes, who sat staring uneasily at Daisuke.⁶

Although we discover later that the “nearly six-foot-tall” black man would be towering over Daisuke, this is not a case of the threatening Other; rather, it is actually Daisuke who is attempting to intimidate the visitor verbally. The man has come to Daisuke’s home to ask for work, so that he and his impoverished family might eat; Daisuke responds with aggression and condescension but in the end agrees to hire the man.

After Daisuke returns from the day working on his *cafezal* (coffee plantation) with the man and three young Japanese laborers, they all sit down at a table with Daisuke’s wife and son to share a meal. When Daisuke sees the man’s wife staring in through the window, however, he calls out abusively, referring to her as a “beggar” (乞食奴) and shouting at her to get lost, asking if there is “any law that says that someone who doesn’t work should eat?”⁷ This prompts another confrontation with the man, who leaps up from his chair, glaring down at the diminutive Daisuke with his fists clenched. The man, quickly recognizing that there is nothing he can do under the circumstances but defer to his “master” (支配者), unclenches his fists, collapses back into his chair, and appeals to the charity of the “*patrão*” (パ

トロン, boss). His wife, he pleads, has not eaten all day and cannot work because she is in the last month of her pregnancy. The man assures Daisuke that were he to feed her, in return the man would work even harder the next day. Daisuke remains firm, but eventually fishes some coins from his purse and casts them onto the table. The man, wearing a saddened expression, stands up and leaves with his family, refusing to acknowledge the coins.

It is interesting to note that in reflecting on these events the next day, Daisuke does not attribute the “unreasonable” demands of the man and his wife to their race; instead, he disparages the man’s “womanly” sentimentality and the “impertinence” he believes the man shares with other young people. To the contrary, later in the story Daisuke states that in the future he intends to hire only *baiano* laborers, who, while potentially dangerous, are perfect for “taking advantage of”; simultaneously, he differentiates them from “hairy foreigners” (毛唐人), who will pull out a knife without the least provocation, and Japanese, who are not dangerous but are constantly quibbling.

This confrontation is followed by a second, briefer interaction with racial alterity, which in its positioning is implicitly contrasted with the first. Three or four blue-eyed children, “the sort one sees in the *colônia* on the other side of the mountain,” come asking to buy oranges from the trees on Daisuke’s property.⁸ When they produce a one-*mil* coin, Daisuke stands up and gets them a stick, which the tallest uses to knock down the fruit. Chiding them for knocking so many down, Daisuke counts the fruit off one by one as he puts them into the children’s bag. The scene reinforces the idea that Daisuke is motivated not by racial animosity, but instead by imperiousness, greed, and parsimony. While the blue eyes mark the children as likely either white or *mestiço* (multiracial) children, producing the option of reading this as differential racial treatment, the story does not explore this further.

After these interactions, the story devotes itself to Daisuke’s drunken recounting of his life to an audience of young Japanese men, as he prepares for his first trip back to his hometown in Japan in twenty-eight years. Throughout the narrative, Daisuke goes to great lengths to establish that his success is the result of his own labors, often explicitly rebutting assertions by other Japanese that it was the result of luck. We learn that Daisuke, born in Hokkaidō in the early 1880s (the narrative never exactly establishes the years) to a former samurai turned millet farmer, left home at the age of twenty. After two years in Tokyo, he began a process of serial migration: first to Manchuria, then to Lima, Peru (where he was a barber to “hairy foreigners”), Chile (where he worked mining nitrates for fertilizer), and Buenos Aires before finally moving to Brazil because he had heard that it was “friendly to Japanese.” After a dramatic change of attitude when he realized he needed to think about the future, he began to save his carpenter’s pay diligently and eventually bought land.

Having purchased the land sight-unseen, he, his wife, and his young son headed inland to begin their new lives. At that time, the train line did not yet reach all the way to the property, so the three of them were forced to hike forty kilometers through dense growth while carrying their supplies. Daisuke acknowledges the relief he felt when they encountered the home of “an Italian” thirty kilometers in and describes the generosity he and his family received from him. As Daisuke points out to his audience (unaware of the irony), “deep in the mountains, any man you encounter is a brother.”⁹ Thanks to the chickens and pigs he purchased from the Italian, he and his family were able to survive until the train line was extended. Despite this fact, he concludes his story by telling the young men that although people in their *colônia* believe he succeeded through luck, he, like all men, was made through his own efforts. Although it is not a central component of this story, we should note here that the young Japanese laborers to whom he is speaking are explicitly described as “copper-colored”; Daisuke’s own face is described as “red-dish black,” the result of both intoxication and sun exposure. Though this skin color would be a natural effect of prolonged exposure to the sun in the course of agricultural labor, the fact that it warrants mention is our first indication of the importance of a discourse of acquired alterity, which is present in all of the stories under consideration here and to which we will turn later.

On his last day before setting off on his trip to Japan—a trip in which he will achieve the clichéd goal attributed to many migrants to Brazil, that of eventually returning home “wearing a gold brocade” (錦を着て)—Daisuke visits the twenty-four families, including both *colonos* and four-year contract workers, living on his property.¹⁰ It is at this point that Daisuke decides to contract only *baianos* upon his return, as he recalls an incident from the previous year in which an Italian *colono* had come after him with a knife after Daisuke had berated him. The night before his journey back to Japan he sets off for town, where he plans to stay so as to be able to catch his early morning train the next day. On the way, however, he is confronted by a man who steps out from the dense growth on the side of the road. The narrative describes how something “flashed like lightning” amid his “crowded memories” as Daisuke sees the man’s face. In the 2008 version of this story, it is not clear which of the many wronged men from Daisuke’s past it might be. A shot is fired, Daisuke falls to the ground with a groan, and after a few slight shudders, his body lies still. The story closes a few days later, with a brief description of a new grave marker dedicated to Daisuke in the communal cemetery.

As mentioned, “The Death of a Certain Settler” superficially conforms to a narrative of the racial other as both abject and threatening: the destitute black laborer, his desperate wife, and his silent child are placed in a position of abjection and supplication vis-à-vis the Japanese landowner; when the laborer is refused food for his wife, the men nearly come to blows. Later in the story, the racial other—be he *baiano*, Italian, or some other “hairy foreigner”—is characterized as inclined to violence, and one (unclear in the 2008 version, though much clearer in the original,

as I will argue) finally carries through on this implied threat of violence. Despite this basic narrative, however, the story functions not to demonize the racial other, but rather to vilify the miserly, arrogant, and cruel Daisuke, who despite receiving kindness from others in his time of need—most notably the Italian—refuses to acknowledge any ethical debt to anyone in a similar situation. The violence visited upon Daisuke is implicitly presented as a form of retribution for his vanity—in the end, his body lies on the ground clothed portentously in a “gold brocade covered with fresh blood”—and for the economic violence to which he has subjected both Japanese and non-Japanese alike.

The editorial staff of the 1975 anthology made a number of changes to the original text of “The Death of a Certain Settler,” though most were attempts to make superficial corrections. Further—and more noteworthy—changes were introduced when the anthology was reproduced for inclusion on the DVD-ROM in 2008. One specific bowdlerization, which was introduced in the 2008 version, should be given particular attention: the removal of the adjective “black” as a descriptor of skin color. Sufficient information remains—the “gleaming black” face, the “black family,” and the reference to the worker as a *baiano*—that the racial marking is preserved. The elimination, rather, seems to be a response to shifting normative attitudes about the propriety of terms denoting blackness, with the editors choosing in most cases to avoid them.¹¹

In one way, however, the 2008 edition’s concern with discriminatory language actually undermines the apparent intentions of its editors. In the final confrontation, when the figure emerges from the dense growth on the side of the road and is described (in the original and revised versions) as merely a “man,” the sudden absence of the modifier “black” is very noticeable in the early versions; in the 2008 version, where nearly all references lack it, the absence is less conspicuous. Furthermore, when Daisuke sees the face of the man and experiences the shock of recognition, his original response is “Aah! That *ku*. . .”; the “*ku*” is removed from the revised version. In discussing this scene previously, I stated that it was ambiguous (in the 2008 version) who the shooter was; in earlier versions, however, something more complex is happening. The “*ku*,” I would argue, would likely be interpreted by readers as the first syllable of the racial slur for blacks, *kuronbō* (黒坊), that appears in a number of the stories; the fact that it was removed by the 2008 editors suggests they may have interpreted it similarly. This fragment, then, marks the shooter as being black, which when combined with the demonstrative “that,” creates a strong likelihood that the assailant is the *baiano* who was wronged in the initial scenes of the story. This makes the idiosyncratic and conspicuous usage of “man” (rather than “black man”) all the more interesting; while it is possible that it was an oversight on the part of the author, it is also possible to read the character as having become a stand-in for all of the individuals wronged by Daisuke, an instrument of justice who at that moment has transcended his individual race. The racial other becomes a faceless (or, more accurately, nameless) instrument of

a cosmic order that punishes transgressions against an ethic that transcends the racial self-same.

INTRARACIAL BETRAYAL

While “The Death of a Certain Settler” clearly establishes a narratorial perspective of limited sympathy for its protagonist, it lacks the sustained affective intensity in response not only to alterity but also to intraracial betrayal that is present in Sonobe Takeo’s “An Age of Speculative Farming.” This story was selected as the first-place recipient in the first Colonial Literary Short Fiction Award competition, which had explicitly sought works that grappled with “the society of Japanese in Brazil today,” which possessed “conditions that were completely different from those in Japan.”¹² The story certainly addresses contemporary society; it also dwells extensively on two of the same concerns that we have already seen: acquired alterity and intraracial betrayal. To this story is added a preoccupation with female sexuality, and the ways in which it is seen as integrally tied to the other dangers lurking in this new, overtly heterogeneous space.

Unlike the preceding story, “An Age of Speculative Farming” is set in the city (not the state) of São Paulo. The narrative focuses on a “mixed-blood” (混血児, glossed as *ア－イノコ* [sic]) prostitute named Hanaoka Ruriko, but also involves her wealthy patron, the tomato parvenu Ōmura; his rival, the trader Kurose; and a young Japanese man, newly arrived in Brazil, who is kept by Hanaoka. The story opens with an unnamed *vagabundo*—a “vagabond,” which was a common term for young Japanese men who had abandoned the life of an agricultural laborer in the countryside for the lures of the city—observing Hanaoka, as she ignores a group of young thugs who yell out an epithet at her (“whore” [売笑婦], glossed as *puta* [プ－タ]). It is a sight, the text tells us, he sees often. The story first tells us a little about her tastes; we are told she likes “men, *servete*, cinema, smelling the soiled flesh of farmers, perverted sexual desire, collecting cheap jewelry.”¹³ We are then shown Hanaoka plying her trade in the center of São Paulo:

She always weaves through the dizzying triangle (*triângulo*) as a single seductive Oriental insect. She moves endlessly as a point along the edges of that triangle, as she passes through the entangled races, through the city of flesh mixed with that of the Portuguese—Italian, French, Spanish, German, Russian, and black—in her single-cut dress and snake-skin shoes, the perfumed secret of her flesh, visible through her gauzy wrap.¹⁴

As she walks through this entertainment district, a new-model Ford suddenly pulls up in front of her. It is her lover, Ōmura, who (the text tells us, again) embraces her “with his soiled, farmer’s flesh, which she loves.”

The disgust in the narrative is palpable, and its objects are many. Even as the text disdains the proximity to (not to mention participation in) manual agricultural labor that is suggested by Ōmura’s “soiled flesh,” it is also repulsed by his immodest

displays of wealth, visible in its repeated mention of the parvenu's new-model Ford. It evinces discomfort not only at the presence of multiple races, but also by the potentially deleterious "entangling" (錯綜) of them. The text is also critical of the abusive urban youth who form the "Conde" gang, the beggars it describes populating the streets, and the "movie-crazy *señoritas*" Conrad Nagel woos from the screen of the Odeon Theater.

More than anyone else, though, the story's disgust seems directed at Hanaoka. She has placed her chastity up for sale, the text laments, offering herself to a filthy farmer and perhaps even to the men of assorted and blended races who fill São Paulo's streets; worse yet, she seems to desire them sexually. She indulges in other vices as well, be it ice cream or the jewels that we later learn are her main reason for being with Ōmura; after all, the text reminds us, "even a monstrous love requires certain appurtenances."¹⁵ All the while, she abuses (emotionally, verbally, and physically) the "stray dog"—a youth who has recently immigrated from Japan—who waits for her pathetically in her rooms (her "deviant playground") and lusts for her "lewd figure" even as (or perhaps precisely because) he knows that she has just been with other men. Most fundamentally, the text registers both derision and disbelief toward Hanaoka's body itself: when she finally takes a stand against Ōmura, the narrator opines that the fact (sic) "that Japanese blood circulated in Hanaoka Ruriko's rotting flesh was nothing short of a miracle."¹⁶ As a multiracial subject, Hanaoka becomes an extreme embodiment of acquired alterity, in which the ethnic compatriot is only momentarily recognizable as such, before its acquired alterity renders that racial affiliation irretrievable.

The text is at its most intense and experimental in the passages that describe Hanaoka and her overt sexuality; yet after the powerful opening section of the story, the narrative's attention is drawn to another object of disgust: the quest for profit at any cost, and the concomitant exploitation of Japanese by Japanese. This obsession with profit explains the somewhat-awkward title of the story. As Arata Sumu points out, "speculative farming" refers to the growing of crops (including tomatoes, potatoes, and onions) with an eye towards commodity speculation.¹⁷ Contemporary Brazilian society, the title seems to be suggesting, has entered into a period in which agricultural capitalists engage in a form of farming that speculates—literally, "gambles" (賭博)—on the market, rather than (one presumes) engaging in sustainable practices determined by organic demand. All of the people involved, the text tells us, make up a "band of crooks" (インチキの群); this is exemplified by Ōmura, who owns a vast tomato farm. Employing all manner of techniques—some of dubious ethicality—Ōmura has produced a large, out-of-season crop that he hopes to sell at market for a great profit. It is also a crop that is of little interest, as a food, to the Japanese laborers; instead, this is a tomato farm "operated by the clever *Nipponico* who encamped here and took advantage of the tastes of the meat-loving races."

In its criticisms of Ōmura's strategies, the text shows a nascent environmental conscience, seemingly concerned with practices that do not allow for sustained

cultivation by men and women (particularly Japanese men and women) in such a way as to provide them with dignified livelihoods. The story signals this early on through a scene in which laborers encircle a large vat as they make a pesticide known as Bordeaux solution:

One of the laborers dissolved quicklime into the solution, choking all the while on the cloud of dust in the air. He then combined the dissolved lime with just the right amount of copper sulfate. The Bordeaux solution that resulted from the combination became an extremely faint blue, like that of the autumn sky in the laborer's hometown, making him sentimental. The greedy history of the immigrants who preceded him became an opaque precipitate; the endless exploitative competition swirled in the mixture, disappearing into the Bordeaux solution.¹⁸

The text describes the tomatoes as unable to excite the appetites of the exhausted workers who “bore the insecticide sprayers on their backs like debt” as they dusted the plants for three straight months. It describes the sprawling farm as one made possible by the “reckless dumping of chemical fertilizers” such as nitratine and potassium chloride. Ōmura's greed has left the soil “impoverished from the immoderate application of artificial fertilizers.” In fact, “the rampancy of the macrosporum bacteria” and “the indignation of the soil” are explicitly given as two of the factors that eventually come to determine the fate of the Ōmura farm.

Ōmura's plans are foiled, however, by the machinations of the *comprador* Kurose, who arranges an unusually low price for tomatoes on the day Ōmura brings in his crop. Kurose has conspired with the other buyers at the Mercado Central—the giant wholesale market in São Paulo, now called the Mercado Municipal—to hold their offered price at 10 *mil réis* per crate, a price so low that its announcement leaves all of the farmers dazed. This is not simply a matter of collusion; the story informs us that Kurose has paid the buyers in order to secure their compliance, all with the goal of snubbing Ōmura in revenge for his refusal to accede to a deal Kurose had earlier offered him. Ōmura had been offended at Kurose's attempt to manipulate him, an attempt which insulted Ōmura's pride: “It would be one thing if I were one of those wretched tomato farmers, but he needs to think about who he is talking to!”¹⁹ The battle between these two egoists not only exacts a cost from each of them, but also wreaks havoc on the subsistence tomato farmers caught up in the price manipulations.

The only group not subjected to the narrative's unadulterated disdain—the agricultural laborers who had migrated from Japan, choosing the “frightening customs officers” over the “sounds of gunfire in Manchuria”—is instead subjected to its pity and condescension. These include workers with hands “perpetually stained by tomato juice” and farmers who “live under fear of malnutrition.” At one point the narrator laments spontaneously: “The bodies of agricultural laborers, bent by exhaustion!”²⁰ Some are themselves caught up in greed, including the “swarm of heroic *Nipponicos*” who vie with one another, “enslaved by their gambling ‘savvy’”—an imaginary savvy they begin to believe they too might possess when

they see Ōmura's profit. The story explains how "anyone who did not move quickly to seize his portion of the wealth by producing tomatoes soon became the object of derision, as one ignorant of the ways of the world."²¹ Despite this disdain toward their greed, the narrative voice finally sees all of these migrants as "merely ants," and thus pathetic rather than villainous. What is missing, the narrator suggests, is common purpose and unity of action: "When will the day finally come that those desultory ants gather and erect a towering anthill?"²² In despair that to wait for such a day would be in vain, despite the steady flow of shiploads of migrants from Japan, the narrative ends with a laborer (perhaps the *vagabundo* from the story's opening) taking in a deep breath and letting out a scream.

As the quotes above suggests, language in the story is marked throughout with value judgments and affective intensity. It is also filled with problematic terminology, almost all of which is maintained through to the DVD-ROM version. What is removed is unsurprising, given the examples from the previous story: while a reference to a "black woman" remains unchanged, the color of a "black doorman" is removed, as is Hanaoka's epithetic reference to him as a *kuronbō-me* when he tries to drive her off. Left unchanged are terms such as "mixed-blood child" (混血児)—though now without its similarly problematic gloss of "love child" (愛の子)—"beggars" (乞食), and "natives" (土人); a derogatory reference to physically impaired movement (ちんば、ちんばして) is removed, but not a reference to "slow" (鈍重な) Brazilians. We also have the term *caboclo* (カボクロ), which appears here without any apparent derogatory intent (at one point, the sounds of a *caboclo*'s *bandolim* can be heard in the background), but which had a complex function in Brazilian racial discourse at this time.²³ Finally, we have a non-Japanese gendered epithet, *puta*, which is left unchanged. Perhaps the editors felt that the term lost expressive potency as it crossed language barriers.

The overwhelming sense conveyed by the story is one of disgust and despair: over migrants who are weak of spirit and solidarity, over female bodies that are deviant through both their desires and their descent, and over the willingness of Japanese to exploit other Japanese, in ways that can transcend simple greed and enter into the realm of viciousness, with no concern for collateral damage. Since the implied, fictional interiority experiencing the emotional state that leads to this affective intensity is unclear—perhaps it is that of the *vagabundo* and worker character/s that frame the story—the disgust and despair cannot be confined to a single character; there is no point of detachment made available by the narrative. The result is a sense that the story itself is some sort of *cri de coeur*.

VALORIZING HETEROGENEITY

Furuno Kikuo's "Tumbleweeds" may be the only story written during the prewar period in Brazil that ever reached a significant reading audience in Japan.²⁴ After having been published in July 1940 in the journal *Shin Burajiru*, it was subsequently

republished in the June 1958 issue of the Tokyo literary journal *Bungei shuto*. The story takes place aboard a ship sailing westward from the Americas and focuses on a group of Japanese emigrants who are returning to Japan, most from Brazil but some from other countries, including Argentina and the United States. The story begins as the ship passes south of the Aleutian Islands and concludes just as it enters Japan's territorial waters. In this depiction of bodies in transit, we see the complexity of the process we know as "migration": in addition to the serial migration described in "The Death of a Certain Settler," we see diverse destinations of migration, multiple migration involving trips to and from Japan, and the ill-named "return migration" of people of Japanese descent who may never have set foot in the country before.

As with earlier stories, while "Tumbleweeds" does present some instances of racial alterity—we know that there are non-Japanese in the first-class spaces above, and we hear about non-Japanese living alongside Japanese in the *colônia* back in Brazil—the story is almost entirely dedicated to the Japanese passengers and crew in the third-class sections of the ship. As with the previous works, the story's attention is firmly focused on acquired alterity and intraracial interactions. Unlike the earlier works, however, "Tumbleweeds" explicitly asserts a positive valence to acquired alterity, and valorizes respectful coexistence.²⁵ There are limits to this, however; while the focal figures valorize alterity produced by familiar exogenous elements, variant acquired alterity resulting from unfamiliar exogenous elements is met with less enthusiasm. That is, while individuals altered by their connection to Brazil are encouraged to embrace that difference, individuals altered by their connection to the United States, for example, are met with critique that, while not particularly hostile, is negative. The story's strongest criticisms, however, seem to be reserved for Japan.

In the course of the story, we meet a number of characters: the siblings João (age seventeen) and Luísa (age eight); Wakabayashi and his wife, Makiko; Tani, a college student from California; an unnamed former gardener for a rich family in Buenos Aires; and Akita, the character who acts as the focal figure for most of the story. While the information we are given about each of the characters is incomplete, the recounting of fragments from their pasts comprises much of the story, which depicts the coincidental gathering of these diverse individuals as they are about to enter a space of symbolic importance to all of them.

We learn that Akita was born in Japan and lived there long enough to receive his education but has since lived in Brazil for years. We know from references to her accent that his mother, who emigrated with Akita, is from Kyūshū. We are told that they lived together in rural Paraná before he moved to the city of São Paulo. Finally, during the course of the voyage back to Japan we learn that Akita has decided to spend one month settling some affairs before returning permanently to Brazil to raise cattle in Sorocobana. Of the Wakabayashi couple, we learn that they spent more than five years in a *colônia* in the interior of the state of São Paulo,

where malaria and pneumonia took their young son's life and the husband's capacity to work. Despite wishing to remain in Brazil, where their child is buried, they have no choice but to accept their relative's offer of work in Hokkaidō. We learn little about the origins, destinations, or circumstances of the other characters.

The descriptions of João and Luísa's parents come from Akita's perspective. The mother is described as one of the many housewives "who work from dawn until late into the night with their dry, matted hair up, their bare feet caked in mud, and their toothless mouths hidden by their sealed lips."²⁶ In this regard, she resembles women Akita saw frequently in the *colônia*: one of those women "who has worked continuously for decades, like a draft animal, having lost any trace of sentiment, knowing only the world of virgin jungle, cotton fields, and thatched huts."²⁷ The description of the children's father differs dramatically: when we see him (through Akita's eyes), he is described as having "skin the color of *terra roxa* (purplish-brown soil) that was also flushed from alcohol and a torso like a camouflaged tank."²⁸ The difference between the husband and wife is then generalized, with men described as enjoying far different lives than women: "As for the men, every harvest they come out of the primordial forest, cross the cotton fields, and race their trucks to town, where alcohol, prostitutes, and dice await. The towns, which pop up near the Japanese collectives, are filled with cheap restaurants catering to Japanese. They resemble suppurations on filthy flesh."²⁹

Akita treats the couple as representatives of their genders, in a society with distinct roles that are profoundly unfair to women. Here we have a female body that is not the site of desires that lead to transgressions that in turn threaten the racial community, but rather one that is the worn vessel of a pitiable victim who has consigned herself to suffering through her own virtue; by contrast, the male body is the vehicle of a corrupt agency, which indulges itself regardless of collateral damage. The male's unwillingness to consider the well-being or desires of his family continues even as they leave Brazil: we discover that the family is only going to Tokyo because of the father; neither the children nor their mother wishes to go.

Despite not providing us much concrete information about their background, the text does spend significant time on the siblings João and Luísa and the ways in which they differ from the Japanese around them. The children are native Portuguese speakers but have some Japanese competency. They have acquired gestures that mark them as other: Luísa raises her eyebrows "like a foreigner" and is described by the narrator as a "young Brazilian woman." This latter description appears in quotes in the text itself, problematizing (or denaturalizing) the relation of the descriptor to the descriptee. The country of their birth has left an imprint on Luísa and João that differentiates them from their peers in Japan: Akita, Makiko, and Wakabayashi find the children raised in Brazil to "all be melancholic to the core" and attribute that to the adult responsibilities children are given in the *colônia*. Makiko adds that girls have it even worse than boys, with upbringings stricter than those of children on the outskirts of Tokyo.

At another point in the story, Luísa and João's father also addresses the fundamental differences in character that he sees in his children as compared to the way he remembers children in Japan; in his case, however, he considers his own children to be more "easy going" (鷹揚). This word, attributed to the father, is also in quotes, again suggesting some dissatisfaction with the word's precision. The siblings are not the only individuals raised outside of Japan to have this sort of acquired alterity. Tani, the university student from California, is frequently judged (from Akita's perspective, primarily) as behaving differently. Wakabayashi sums it up when he says, "Kids raised among Yankees sure are flashy (派手), aren't they?" In Tani's case, this excessiveness extends not only to his clothing (he is earlier described as wearing a flashy green jacket) but also to his physical size (he has to bend down his "tall frame" to enter the room they are in).

The one dramatic event in the story, a confrontation between Akita and a (presumably Japanese) waiter, occurs because of the treatment that Luísa receives from the people around her, who see her as a suitable target for ridicule. The waiter convinces Luísa, who is seeing snow for the first time in her life, that if she puts a snowball in her pocket and is careful with it, she will be able to take it to Japan. He then coaxes her over to the stove, in front of the first-class passengers. When she touches her pocket and discovers that the snowball has melted, she breaks into tears; the waiter and the passengers, both Japanese and non-Japanese, laugh at her ignorance. Upon hearing of this, Akita tracks down the waiter, brings him down to the third-class rooms, and slaps him hard across the face. Once he recovers his composure, Akita is angry about his reaction, which he considers to have been childish and excessive. This eruption of affect—a moment in which an emotional response prompts the body to act—is then interpreted by Akita himself, as he speculates about the source of the sentiment that had welled up in him: "Perhaps it was because I myself have some sort of inferiority complex as a migrant or something, but I felt as though all of us immigrants to Brazil were being ridiculed."³⁰ It is clear that Akita feels protective of Luísa and João, but this is more than mere sympathy; there is some process of identification occurring as well. The identification, I would argue, is not as "Japanese Brazilians"; Akita is clear about the difference he perceives between himself and these children. Instead, the identification seems to be between subjects who have been similarly thrust into specific peripheral, hardship positions vis-à-vis a normative center.

When we learn that João has never used chopsticks before, the narrator speculates on what awaits him (and his sister) in Japan:

The bridge to his life in Brazil had crumbled when he boarded the Japanese ship. Around him was in all ways Japan. To the individuals whose eyes pored over this dual-citizenship-holding youth of seventeen, he bore not the slightest handicap. Little did they know that the ceaseless, severe training that this child of nature, of that vast continent, would receive in Japan had already begun during this sea crossing, which

otherwise should have been fun. *He cannot use chopsticks. He doesn't even know conversational Japanese. Halfwit!* The cold glares that poured over João made him feel frightened of the table, as though he were some sort of thief, and led him to speak the language of his parents' homeland timidly and with a lisp, further muddying his thick accent. Luísa was in the very same situation.³¹

Akita rejects the position of abjection that he feels they are forced into vis-à-vis a normative notion of what it is to be Japanese. The action he urges upon them bears some similarity to the one he took in response to the waiter: an aggressive assertion of the value of their non-normative positionality. Akita urges the children to feel pride in their history, and to resist the self-hatred that this normative vision would cultivate within them:

Thrust your chests out with pride, João and Luísa! Throw away those chopsticks and eat proudly with your forks. Speak to any you encounter loudly in the language of your birthplace, Brazil. If you shrink before them like that, once in Japan you will have people convincing you to put snowballs in your pockets every day!

The story presents Japan, in fact, as a difficult place for more than just these children. Makiko, Wakabayashi's wife, describes her birthplace of Japan as an "unforgiving" country where she feels that she "can't let down my guard somehow."

Wakabayashi envies Akita's decision to return to Brazil and settle there permanently. By contrast he describes his and his wife's situation using the Latin phrase "*va (sic) victus*" (*vae victus*, Woe to the vanquished!); he doubts that happiness awaits them in Sapporo. Akita reminds him, though, that Brazil is not necessarily a solution, either:

My decision to live in Brazil permanently—no, not just me, sometimes I think every *issei*'s decision to live in Brazil permanently—represents the sad final stop on the journey of an individual who has tired of the search for a meaningful life. I think that it is impossible to choose permanent residence abroad without some tragic resignation.³²

Despite the critical attitude held by the key characters toward Japan, it is not the case that Brazil is held up as an ideal solution to an alienated existence either.

As with the earlier stories, a few changes have been made over the history of the text's reproduction. The editor's primary concern again seems to have been with terms involving blackness.³³ The fairly strong Portuguese epithet *puta merda* (プータ・メルダ) remains in the text, whereas "half-black" (半黒) women become "mulatta" (ムラト, mulatto) in one spot in the 2008 version and "mixed-bloods" (混血) in another. It is interesting to note the different value judgments conveyed by the terms in this story as compared to those conveyed in "An Age of Speculative Farming." Akita describes the legs of the mulatto women and those of women with "the blood of the people of the Iberian Peninsula" as being the more literally descriptive colors of chestnut and barley, respectively. While noting difference, his

gaze seems positive, desiring; more importantly, those individuals are not mere objects, but subjects who interact with him in a way he describes as playful (perhaps flirtatious). In “Tumbleweeds,” racial others are not merely potential romantic partners; they are also members of a functioning, heterogeneous community. At the funeral for Wakabayashi and Makiko’s child, “black, white, and mixed children of the *colônia* brought flowers” that ended up covering the grave. While we might wonder what category Japanese would join here, it is more important to note the image of a compassionate (though certainly not utopian) multiracial community, mourning the tragic loss of a child.

EXTREMES OF ALTERITY AND IDENTITY

Before drawing conclusions about these portrayals of acquired alterity and intraracial betrayal, it is worth noting two additional forms of alterity and identity: the imagined extreme alterity of the “uncivilized human” and the presumed organic identity of kinship.³⁴

The term *dojin* (土人, meaning “native,” “aborigine,” or “indigenous person,”) was often used prior to the Second World War in Brazil to represent the presumed indigeneity of an observed individual. It was often used with a derogatory (though perhaps not fully conscious) connotation, implying not only racial difference but a lack of civilization. This relates to the term *caboclo* (カボクロ), meaning an individual of mixed background including part indigenous Brazilian, which was borrowed from Portuguese into the vocabulary of Japanese-speakers in the colonies and often implied potential loss of civilization through miscegenation. The glossary in the 1975 anthology defines the term *caboclo* as “lower class natives in farming villages (racially speaking, primarily *mestiço*); ignorant hicks” and does not define *dojin*, which had a long history of use in Japanese discourse of racial and civilizational alterity.³⁵

Of the stories presented here, we see the term *dojin* appear in at least three: “An Age of Speculative Farming,” “Placement,” and “After We Had Settled.” In the first and second of those stories, it is used in passing to refer to the thatched huts of the poor workers; in the third, it is used to describe the children who come to meet the new group of immigrants from Japan. When “After We Had Settled” was reproduced, that reference to “native” children was changed to children of “mixed black and white” racial origin, presumably to eliminate a term now thought inappropriate. Additionally, in that story it is later revealed that four or five of the children are actually of Japanese descent, suggesting the ways acquired alterity can render these children of a civilized country, like Japan, indistinguishable from the poor, “native” children.

On the other end of the spectrum, however, is a form of identity that is presumably more intimate (and innate) than ethnonational identity: kinship. As ethnonationality is based in some imagined degree of consanguinity, it is also a form

of imagined kinship, though more diluted than that imagined to obtain between members of both nuclear and extended families. As was mentioned previously, Brazil encouraged migration from Japan by families, rather than individual laborers. The result of this was that kinship relations among Japanese-identifying subjects, and kinship relations that had originated in Japan rather than being formed in the destination country, were perhaps more common as immediate elements of daily life (as opposed to absent objects of nostalgia or desire) in Brazil than they were in other destinations of the Japanese diaspora. Such relations are depicted throughout the stories presented here.

There is a particular form of familial (or kinship) relationship that emerged in the context of migration to Brazil that is worthy of note, however: that of the “constructed family.” A paradigmatic (though not necessarily historically precise) representation of the phenomenon comes at the beginning of Ishikawa Tatsuzō’s “The Emigrants,” as groups are gathering at the Immigrants Assembly Center in Kobe in preparation for their journey to Brazil.³⁶ In one early scene, the prospective emigrants are being subjected to a number of administrative processes, including the trachoma test the Brazilian government demanded of all emigrants in an attempt to prevent the spread of this infectious disease. As they await their exams in the facility, a clerk calls out their names, one-by-one but grouped by family:

“*Sato Katsuji. . . . His wife Natsu.*” The clerk had called them in a loud voice. That was the first time O-Natsu had been called wife in the presence of her younger brother and strangers. [. . .] “*Sato Katsuji’s mother, Kadoma Kura. His younger brother, Kadoma Yoshizo. His wife’s younger brother, Sato Magoichi.*” [. . .] His elder sister O-Natsu and Katsuji were only nominally man and wife. Katsuji, Magoichi’s friend, had had his name entered in the Sato family register as O-Natsu’s husband. They had nominally married to receive the allowance to cover the cost of a family’s emigrating to Brazil. A family that included a married couple each of whom was younger than fifty years of age and another member who was at least twelve years of age were eligible for the allowance. The Kadoma family had comprised Katsuji, his old mother, and his younger brother, while the Sato family comprised Magoichi and his elder sister, Natsu. The nominal marriage joined the two families together temporarily to form a larger family eligible for the allowance.³⁷ Mago-san himself had not conceived of the idea of the nominal marriage: the idea had been suggested by Yamada-san, a member of the emigration agency. The officials concerned, who were accustomed to such cases, would probably praise rather than criticize the nominal marriage. The marriage offered a number of pluses: an increase in the number of emigrants and a concomitant easing of population pressure in Japan; the contribution of the increase in emigrants to the business of the emigration agency; and for Yamada-san an increase in his commission proportional to the increase in the number of emigrants he processed. Katsuta-san, a man of worldly wisdom, was even cleverer than Magoichi. He had sent 5,000 yen to Brazil through the emigration agency and now had 3,000 yen in his bosom. A wealthy man like him was ineligible for the allowance. Traveling expenses were estimated at 200 yen per capita, and there were eight in the Katsuta

family. So if he were to take his family to Brazil at his own expense, it would cost him 1,600 yen. But it had occurred to him to nominally marry his sixteen-year-old daughter to a young relative. The young man, who had yet to undergo the conscription examination, became the head of the family.³⁸ Since he was penniless, he was, of course, eligible to emigrate. And Katsuta-san was now his father-in-law. The nominal marriage brought him 1,600 yen—the passage for the Katsuta family, who were now the family of the emigrant man. Thus Katsuta had been clever enough to hoodwink the Emigration Ministry.³⁹

While exact numbers are understandably hard to determine, constructed families were not uncommon in prewar Brazil. As described previously, in order to receive financial assistance individuals had to migrate in family units that included three people of working age (between twelve and fifty), two of whom had to be married. As a result, individuals often misrepresented their relations in order to receive these subsidies. While this rule was nominally enforced by government officials, it is clear from this quote that they were familiar with the phenomenon of constructed families and did not overexert themselves to discover the misrepresentation.⁴⁰ The semi-governmental emigration agencies that were economically motivated to facilitate migration did not even bother with this sort of plausible deniability; in the story, for example, it was an employee of such an agency who recommended it to them in the first place.

Here, Natsu's "fictive" marriage to Katsuji has prevented a "real" marriage, though perhaps only temporarily; before leaving Japan, the foreman at her mill had proposed to Natsu and she imagines returning to Japan to be with him once her obligatory one-year labor contract has been fulfilled.⁴¹ One might read the decision to form a constructed family as a form of fraud, undertaken to take advantage of governmental resources, creating an artificial family unit that led to problematic bonds resulting in difficulties not present in "natural" family units. Subsequent scholars have gone so far as to claim that the colonies saw more marital problems than in Japan, partially because of the constructed families.⁴²

Given the centrality of this arrangement to "The Emigrants," the way these arrangements are portrayed in works written in Brazil around the same time (including the ten stories presented here) come as a surprise. To be sure, such arrangements are present and can be represented as obstructions to "real" bonds based on love. "After We Had Settled," for example, in depicting a group of recent immigrants arriving at a staging facility at the Sete Barras colony as they settle in to their new lives, centers on a young man who has come to Brazil with his uncle's family, nominally married to a young woman for the purpose of the stipend, but who is drawn to a young woman he meets during the journey. The stage is set for a conflict, with the young man torn between the arrangement and his true feelings, but as the story's planned second part was never written, that conflict remains unrealized.

A very different outcome, however, is presented in a story not translated here: “Wakareta hito e: futatabi kokoku no K-ko ni,” by Takahashi Saburō-sei.⁴³ The narrator, responding to a letter he has received from his beloved in Japan, expresses sadness about how circumstances a year earlier had forced them to separate, as she stayed home with her aging mother and he emigrated to Brazil. In the letter that forms the vignette, he describes how he sometimes finds himself imagining her face, only to have the red, jowly face of his now-wife superimpose itself on her image. Addressing the desire to come to Brazil that his sweetheart had apparently expressed in her most recent letter, the narrator dissuades her, reminding her of the obligations that kept her in Japan in the first place, and urges her to construct a new life without him. For his part, the narrator seems to imagine himself building a life with his now-wife, even if that thought does not seem to fill him with any joy. Here we have a constructed family—the marriage of convenience seems to have been treated as essential to migrating, whether for the subsidies alone or not—but this depiction raises the possibility that a constructed family based on convenience and circumstance might not be so different from the other practical decisions to marry that determine so many individuals’ choice of partners—particularly but not exclusively women’s choices.

Other representations remind us that constructed families often involved not entirely fictive relationships, but rather existing kinship relations that were represented as different in nature. Takemoto Yoshio’s “Ashes” seems to present just such a constructed family; the relations are not entirely fictive (a man, his legitimate wife, and his brother) but they have been pressed into a particular arrangement due to the stipulations that required them to migrate as one family, resulting in stresses in the family.⁴⁴ In the story, the brother is physically intimidating but mentally limited, while the wife is shrewd and manipulative. The husband tries to balance his love and sense of responsibility toward his brother not only with the frustrations that his brother’s ill-conceived actions cause him, but also with the regular criticisms from his wife, who now wants the brother out of their lives. The resolution of the story is uninspired—the brother finally takes the initiative and leaves the family, relieving the husband of a difficult decision—but the story is nonetheless significant to us both in that it reminds us of the impact of the family policy on interpersonal dynamics and in the reminder that the kinship bonds in constructed families were often not fictive. The anthropologist Maeyama Takashi describes the ways in which these constructed families were assembled not necessarily of complete strangers, but more commonly of “rushed marriages, nephews and nieces, younger brothers and sisters, [or] people from the same hometown.”⁴⁵ In most of the stories that I have found, in fact, existing kinship relations are recategorized, resulting in greater legal and domestic intimacies but not entirely artificial ones.

In addition, just as Natsu in “The Emigrants” has come to Brazil not out of her own desire, but in order to help her brother Magoichi, we should note the

difference in agency among the members of such constructed families. Maeyama points out that it was often the case that the head of the family (usually male) was the one who had driven the decision to emigrate, while the others followed him; in fact, many of them had attempted at one point or another to resist the migration process. As a result, many spouses came reluctantly and many youths came with so little awareness of what was happening that it bordered on, in Maeyama's words, "an abduction." To make matters worse, often this unit became one's only practically accessible kin in Brazil, with a corresponding high level of dependency on that relationship.⁴⁶

This reminds us that constructed families emerged in a state in which most "real" forms of kinship—in the sense of extended family relations—had been largely severed. As one character in "The Emigrants" puts it, "Where you work makes no difference. You know, emigrants all go to plantations they have never been to before. Most have no acquaintances in Brazil."⁴⁷ "The Emigrants" also stresses how frequently individuals entered into these constructed families precisely because they had lost the conventional kinship bonds that they needed to depend upon. Many of the characters have lost members of their nuclear families. Natsu and Magoichi, for example, had lost both of their parents. The biological kinship bond they share then motivates her to sacrifice herself in order to help her brother, migrating to Brazil as part of this constructed family.

In sum, these literary portrayals of constructed families not only remind us of this particular form of imperial kinship, resulting from a confluence of capitalist, heteronormative, and patriarchal imperialism, but also of examples of various particular formations these policies may have imposed on individual lives, with a variety of unforeseen consequences. The literary representations suggest a phenomenon that was perhaps not as common as one might expect, at least in the stark form depicted by Ishikawa; involved different degrees of agency for its participants; existed on a continuum with other decisions to form family units, which were often impacted by practical concerns; and resulted in a form of kinship at a moment when almost everyone's kinship bonds were being redefined.

We know that migration to Brazil was a process that ruptured many conventional notions of interpersonal connection. In "The Emigrants," Ishikawa presents this in a particularly stark image as the ship is leaving the port in Kobe. Natsu "flung the red paper streamer"—reminiscent of the red string that is thought to connect individuals—and wonders to herself, "Would anyone pick up the other end?"⁴⁸ As the ship pulls away, however, that question is answered: "The paper streamers were pulled taut in the wind. Then they snapped one after another. The mesh of streamers was being destroyed. So simply, each strand broke, arched in the north wind, and then fell."⁴⁹ At the same time, though, the three other stories I have described suggest that the process of migration necessitated interpersonal bonds that often became no less real than any other. We might note, in fact that this is true for "The Emigrants" as well; in the story's sequel, "Nankai kōro," Natsu

agrees to Katsuji's request that she become his wife in reality. These literary representations suggest that these were not always stories with happy endings, but neither were they bonds of such transient convenience.

JAPANESE LITERATURE AS POLITICAL PROJECT

We may speculate that the process of migrating from Japan to Brazil and the concomitant disruption of many more immediate kinship ties might have brought at least an amorphous notion of "Japanese-ness" to the forefront of many of the first-generation migrants' consciousnesses. The very idea of emigration would have likely been framed within a rhetoric of departure that implied spatial changes thought to be not merely quantitative, but also qualitative in nature; the nearly two-month-long sea voyage was described by many as a strange state of suspension and anxiety marking just such a transition.⁵⁰

If one's first sight of the port city of Santos did not sufficiently signal alterity, the bureaucratic procedures of migration surely would have. Travel documents, including many individuals' first passports, would have highlighted "Japanese-ness" as a legal status of citizenship that suddenly rendered the arriving migrants a minority population. Interaction with immigration officials once in Brazil, not to mention with non-Japanese-language speakers during the voyage, would also have reinforced a sense of "Japanese-ness" in terms of membership in a linguistic community. Once on the streets of Santos or São Paulo, migrants would have soon encountered an unprecedented level of variation in physical appearance, which many would have processed using racializing logic. Given the representations examined here, many migrants evidently also had their own sense of "Japanese-ness," this time as racial category, reinforced by this experience. This seems to be the one common element within these amorphous and multiple interpretations of "Japanese-ness": a sense of shared biological descent. Migration was surely experienced in radically diverse ways, but we should not be surprised if those undergoing it would have shared a heightened sense of themselves as "Japanese," however defined, surrounded now by so many who were not.

Yet what these authors chose to focus upon was not the difference of those they marked as non-Japanese, nor on the similarity of those they marked as Japanese. Instead, their focus is on the alterity they perceived in individuals they identified as racially self-same. The first form this took was "acquired alterity," in which a once-possessed selfsame-ness was lost through exposure to alien factors ranging from more intense exposure to the sun to the introduction of non-Japanese blood. The reactions to this acquired alterity vary here from apathy ("Settler") to dismay ("Farming") to valorization ("Tumbleweeds"). In all three cases, however, the changes are not to the implied alternate subject position with which the narrator beckons the reader to identify (one distanced from the depicted behavior, which the reader is invited to gaze upon critically, alongside the narrator), one whose

identity has not itself been destabilized. It is possible, then, that acquired alterity here may function to reassure such a reader of his or her own stability amid circumstances that invite anxiety.

The second, more common form of alterity among the racially self-same explored by these writers involved a deviation from a normative expectation for that group, an imagined racial solidarity. Each of the three stories revolves around one or more moments of shock at the behavior of a “Japanese” character towards his or her own kind: Kurose betrays Ōmura, who in turn has systemically exploited his Japanese workers. Ruriko betrays her young lover in order to enter into a mutually exploitative relationship with Ōmura. Daisuke, who was sold undesirable land (by a Japanese broker?), now exploits his Japanese workers relentlessly, even as his son has disappointed and abandoned him. The waiter who mocks Luísa is only the first of many Japanese who will persecute the siblings for (non-racial, as both their parents are apparently first-generation immigrants from Japan) deviations for which they cannot reasonably be held accountable.

The shock at these examples of inhumane or unethical behavior seems always to exceed the sin of commission itself; perhaps the shock has been amplified by the sense that an ideal (which up until that point may not have been consciously held) has been betrayed. Given the dominant global racist order, emigrants would likely have left Japan prepared for ill-treatment at the hands of the racial Other. Yet what the writers describe time and again is that identity fails to guarantee more ethical or compassionate treatment than one would have been led to expect from alterity. These literary representations of this unpleasant discovery suggest that the betrayal of expectations of racial solidarity may have left an impression as powerful as, if not more powerful than, interactions with more conventional forms of alterity. It is unclear why this was the case, though one can imagine that, in part, writers may have felt freer to express frustration toward their “fellow Japanese” than toward more powerful agents of institutionalized racism. Such psychological displacement would have allowed the resentment produced by systemic discrimination to be vented against the safer object of the perceived racial self-same.

Any examination of the origins, nature, and impact of such intraracial friction would of course need to move beyond this small sample of literary representations and into the history of lived subjects. It would also have to move beyond these manifestations the preceded the Second World War and consider the greatest phenomenon of internecine violence in the community of Japanese in Brazil: the Kachigumi-Makegumi conflict between those who believed Japan had won the War and those who believed it had been defeated. Though not causally linked to the frictions that appear in these stories, it is worth noting the emergence in the 1940s of the Shindō Renmei (臣道連盟), whose members would go on to commit a series of terrorist acts within the community against those who thought Japan had lost, ultimately killing 23 Japanese-Brazilians and wounding 147 others.⁵¹

While neither this violence nor the tensions described in this chapter could possibly be reduced to a displaced resentment over global and local racist structures, neither are they unrelated to them. Similarly, when we consider ethnos—peoplehood constructs—as the basis for aggregating literary texts, we must keep in mind the historicity (and thus politics) of that construct. As John Lie writes,

The categories of race, ethnicity, and nation all grope toward a social grouping larger than kinship (whether family or lineage) but smaller than humanity. They seek, so to speak, to divide people horizontally. They are categories salient in the modern era, in contradistinction to the preponderance of vertical, hierarchical categories, such as caste and status, in premodern civilizations. (. . .) Notwithstanding the salience of class stratification, the horizontal categories supersede the vertical ones in the transition from the premodern civilization, empire, or state to the modern nation-state.⁵²

The construct, therefore, cannot be taken as a self-evident given that naturally justifies such a grouping; rather, it is a contingent phenomenon that emerged within history, that was shaped by and consequently shaped that history, and that remains unstable. To apply it as the organizing logic of a “national literature” is not merely to reflect a historical phenomenon, but to reproduce a political project.