

# Re-Thinking the New Approaches: An Introduction

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It has long been a scholarly contention that the analysis of any particular country demands approaches not always applicable to other nations. The accuracy (or lack thereof) of the statement notwithstanding, it can be said with some certainty that discussing approaches to national analysis has not been an academic priority. The essays that appear in this special issue of *EIAL* seek to remedy this lacuna by focusing on Brazil.

Most of the articles were originally presented as part of a long, and somewhat contentious, roundtable session held at the annual meeting of the International Federation of Latin American and Caribbeanists, held at Tel Aviv University in 1999. The charge for the roundtable, whose title "New Approaches to Brazilian Studies" is mirrored in this collection, was for a group of "Brazilianists" from Brazil and the United States to reflect on the problems and possibilities that might be inherent to their approaches to research. The group of scholars whose work appears here is thus quite diverse, representing different disciplines, generations, and career stages. Even so, all the papers share a number of "approaches," including an attempt to examine Brazil via the eyes of the popular classes, a desire to examine how elite rhetoric shapes popular action (and vice-versa), and a belief that a careful examination of a topic can lead to the understanding of broad themes.

Daniel Linger and Jerry Dávila, whose articles open this volume, are most explicit in their discussion of approaches, and particularly the role that the scholar plays in creating analytical frameworks and interpretations. Both argue, from their own disciplinary perspectives, that the role of the researcher should become a more transparent part of the scholarly process. At the same time, Linger and Dávila represent the co-mingling of history and anthro-

pology, two disciplines whose love/hate relationship has titillated and frustrated scholars over the past quarter century.

Two of the essays in this volume examine approaches to understanding the Brazilian nation. Margareth Rago seeks to examine the role of sexuality (as differentiated from either sex or gender) in the making of modern Brazil, showing the new ways in which classic material can be interpreted from this perspective. James Green's essay asks why many Brazilians see a gay sexual orientation as detracting from the importance of national icons. In both cases, the contradiction between a narrow elite public construction of the acceptable nation, and private practices that would suggest a broader sense of national identity, is explored.

The two essays by Amy Chazkel and Roney Cytrynowicz are more cautious in their "new approaches" to Brazilian studies. Both suggest that a reinterpretation of documentation can radically change how scholars understand the present and past, as well as lead to new directions, and thus new documentation. Chazkel is interested in the street, that part of Brazil that straddles the border between acceptable and not. As she points out, the traditional use of published accounts of the "underworld" tends to problematize only the authors, but not the literary complexity of the stories. Cytrynowicz takes a different approach as he seeks to examine how World War II was used by the Vargas regime to mobilize its citizenry in São Paulo. Yet instead of looking only from the top down, his analysis of the quotidian – from Bela Lugosi films to "war bread" to standing in line– shows some of the ways in which Linger's "missing persons" can be found.

*New Approaches to Brazilian Studies* includes three long review essays, by Tzvi Tal, Fabiano Maisonnave, and Fábio Bezerra de Brito. Each is much more than a book review, seeking to deconstruct the broad topics of race, dictatorship and scholarship. In many ways, each is as much about an "approach" as it is about the books under consideration. Tal's critical look at Robert Stam's *Tropical Multiculturalism* asks whether the approach of comparing Brazil to the United States is inherently Eurocentric, if not imperialist. Maisonnave is also interested in U.S.-based "Brazilianists." He asks why recent scholarship on Brazil, with its focus on themes like gender and ethnicity, is so different from that in the past. Finally, Bezerra de Brito examines a series of recent books on Brazil's two decade long military dictatorship, asking why the surge in national self-reflection comes at this particular historical moment.

In addition to the authors, a number of colleagues worked very hard on this collection. Raanan Rein and Tzvi Medin generously invited me to propose the initial roundtable and then turn it into a volume. Rosalie Sitman, Gerardo Leibner, Eliezer Nowodworski, and Sonia García at the Tel Aviv University

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