JAPANESE SOULS AND BRAZILIAN HEARTS:
AN EXPLORATION OF THE ETHNIC IDENTITIES AND MENTAL WELLBEING
OF JAPANESE BRAZILIAN RETURN-RETURN MIGRANTS

A dissertation presented

by

Tainah Michida

to
The Department of Sociology and Anthropology

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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Abstract

Studies of immigration, identity, and culture have recently focused on examinations of transnationalism and transnational ties. Among these, explorations of “return” migration (i.e., a migration movement to one’s ethnic homeland) are of particular importance due to its potential effects on self-concept and mental wellbeing. Though a literature is emerging, the effects of return migration are understudied and populations of “return-return” migrants (persons who migrated to their ancestral homeland and subsequently returned to their country of origin) are virtually unexplored. This dissertation begins to fill a gap in our knowledge of return-return migration by examining Japanese Brazilian returnees’ migratory experiences and how they are associated with identity and mental wellbeing.

More specifically, this dissertation explores how Japanese Brazilian return-return migrants negotiate their ethnic identities in different social contexts and stages of migration. It also examines how sociocultural and environmental factors and identity formation processes affect their mental wellbeing. To understand these issues, I conducted in-depth interviews with 38 Japanese Brazilian return-return migrants in the metropolitan region of São Paulo – home to the largest concentration of Japanese descendants outside of Japan.

Findings suggest that most participants held a Japanese ethnic identity pre-migration. This identity was motivated and supported by familial socialization, involvement in ethnic activities, and ascribed positive minority status. In Japan, most participants failed to find their expected homeland and experienced disappointment, prejudice, and pressure to assimilate. In response, most developed a Brazilian counter-
identity, which allowed for greater psychological distance between themselves and the native Japanese. Upon return to Brazil, findings suggest that a new hybrid identity (coined the Descendente identity) emerged in response to sociocultural push and pull factors, and as the result of an accumulation of synergistic migration and identity factors.

Japanese Brazilian return-return migrants encountered many common migration stressors (e.g., loneliness and isolation, linguistic challenges) in Japan; however, they also experienced stressors that are directly related to their social identity as descendants and Brazilian nationals (e.g., prejudice associated with their families’ migration history, Brazil’s “Third World” status, and perceived cultural inadequacy). Depression, sadness, and loneliness were among the main expressions of emotional distress cited.

Post-return migration, some participants experienced elevated levels of self-esteem associated with their return to positive minority status in Brazil; however, most were adversely affected by processes of social comparison and appraisal and perceptions of the environment (e.g., lack of safety and organization). Findings suggest that these may be the product of an interaction between migration and identity factors and internalized anti-Brazilian prejudice. Participants expressed emotional distress (i.e., fear, low self-esteem) in response to the unique resettlement challenges they experienced.

By addressing the identity negotiation processes and mental wellbeing of Japanese Brazilian return-return migrants, this dissertation begins to pave the way toward a greater understanding of the final third of their migration journey. In doing so, it makes significant contributions to the immigration, identity, race and ethnicity, and mental health literatures, and contributes to a general understanding of return and return-return migrant populations beyond Japanese Brazilians.
Acknowledgments

This study would not have been completed without the patient and supportive guidance of my committee: Professors Alisa Lincoln, Matthew Hunt, Alan Klein, and Takeyuki Tsuda. I am thankful to each of them for their comments, suggestions, and words of support during the research and writing processes. I would like to thank Prof. Lincoln, in particular, for the encouragement that motivated me to stay on track and to complete my doctoral student career successfully. Thank you, as well, to the diligent staff of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology for their prompt assistance and patient answers to many administrative questions.

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Introduction

Most Japanese Brazilians Identify as Japanese before Migrating
Chapter One

Introduction

In recent years, academic research has turned its focus to explorations of transnationalism and the transnational activities of second-generation immigrants. More specifically, qualitative studies have begun to explore the concept of the return to one’s ethnic ancestral homeland – or a country from where one’s ancestors originate, yet where one has never lived – as a novel form of return migration. While such studies are slowly emerging (Tsuda 2003; Christou 2006; Wessendorf 2007; Fokkema 2011), the consequences and impacts of ethnic homeland migration movements to one’s self-concept are nevertheless understudied, and research on “return-return” migrants (individuals who migrated to their ancestral homeland and subsequently migrated back to their country of birth) is scarce. My research, therefore, aims to understand the ethnic identities and mental health of new “return” migrants – a research area that is sorely lacking. This study contributes to this emerging literature by focusing on Japanese Brazilians who have “return” migrated to Japan and subsequently migrated back to Brazil, thus becoming “return-return” migrants. By doing so, it addresses significant gaps in and contributes toward the larger immigration, mental health, race and ethnicity, and identity literatures.

Brazil is host to the largest population of Nikkei (foreign-born persons of Japanese ancestry) outside of Japan, with an estimated population of 1,500,000 (Miyasaka et al., 2002). In Japan, the more than 280,000 Japanese Brazilians who reside there currently account for approximately 14.5 percent of the country’s foreign population (Chitose
While living in Brazil, Japanese Brazilians strongly identify as “Japanese” and enjoy being seen as such, particularly due to their advantaged socioeconomic position and related status as a positive minority in Brazilian society (Tsuda 2003).

However, ethnographic and other qualitative data indicate that most Japanese Brazilians who “return” migrate to their symbolic homeland of Japan – primarily for economic reasons and temporarily – adopt a “Brazilianized” counter-identity in response to the subtle interpersonal antagonism and ethnic and socioeconomic marginalization they experience from the native Japanese population. This counter-identity, in turn, alleviates psychological pressures on their ethnic identity and, thus, serves as an important psychological buffer against potential stressors. By identifying as “Brazilian” as opposed to “Japanese,” return migrants are also better able to cope with their new status as immigrants and as a negative minority, which include a sudden change from middle-class status and skilled labor to working-class status and unskilled, manual labor (Tsuda 2003). While this downward social mobility shift from a positive minority to a negative one is undesirable, the decision to migrate is made attractive by pull factors, such as the prospect of earning higher wages in Japan, the “ethnic homeland,” relative to Brazil (Sasaki 2008).

A minority of Japanese Brazilians, however, particularly those who held a more negative view of “Brazilianness” in Brazil, adopt an “assimilation-oriented strategy of ethnic adjustment to their negative minority status in Japan” (Tsuda 2003:324). These individuals retain a strong Japanese identification and may attempt to pass as “Japanese” in Japan. Passing, in this context, refers to a type of racial change in which individuals “alter their presentation of self to conform to the behavioral norms of the more
advantaged population” (Saperstein and Penner 2012:682). While no conclusive statistics exist, Tsuda (2003) suggests that assimilation-oriented Japanese Brazilian immigrants experience a greater incidence of emotional distress and problems with mental health due to the psychological difficulties they encounter, such as isolation and intense solitude.

As temporary sojourners, some Japanese Brazilians eventually return to Brazil, even if only to go back to Japan later as a result of disillusionment and/or economic hardship. Because of a lack of definitive statistics, as many countries record information about incoming immigrants yet “fail to record [outgoing] migrants or their characteristics” (Baba and Sanchez 2012:3), the precise number of Japanese Brazilians who “return-return” to Brazil is unknown. The literature only goes so far as to recognize that a “large number of families do ultimately return to Brazil” (Sasaki 2008:61). Furthermore, the currently available academic literature on the “return-return” migrant population does not specifically address the impact on Japanese Brazilian migrants’ ethnic identities and the mental wellbeing issues they may encounter or develop as a result of possibly conflicting identities in Brazil.

Guiding Research Questions

The research aims for this dissertation focus on the effects of temporary, labor-oriented migration to Japan on the ethnic identification and mental wellbeing of Japanese Brazilians in Japan and after their return to Brazil. More specifically, this dissertation addresses the following guiding questions:
1. How do Japanese Brazilians negotiate their ethnic identities pre-migration in Brazil and in Japan? What are the social and contextual factors associated with how they self-identify?

2. How do Japanese Brazilians negotiate their ethnic identities after their return to Brazil? What are the social and contextual factors associated with how they self-identify?

3. In what ways do migratory factors and factors associated with social identity impact the mental wellbeing of Japanese Brazilians in Japan and in Brazil? How do these factors work separately and together to affect the mental health of Japanese Brazilians?

To address the research questions outlined above, this dissertation relies on data obtained from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 38 Japanese Brazilian men and women who previously lived and worked in Japan as temporary migrants but currently reside in Brazil. All participants were recruited in and around the city of São Paulo, the most populated city in South America and home to the largest concentration of Japanese Brazilians in Brazil, and its surrounding metropolitan areas.

Significance

This qualitative study makes significant contributions to the larger immigration, mental health, race and ethnicity, and identity literatures. Referring to the process of return migration, Gmelch (1980) noted more than 30 years ago that, “international migration today differs from that of the last century” (135). Likewise, current
international migration patterns differ from those described by Gmelch (1980), as immigrant communities become transnational in the context of a globalized world economy, and the children of immigrants, experiencing a renewed interest in their predecessors’ origins, decide to return to their ethnic ancestral homeland. Such “homecoming” migration movements have been the subject of academic interest in the past fifteen years, as studies of Japanese-Peruvians, Greek-Americans, second-generation Turks in Europe, Italian-Swiss, and several other populations demonstrate (Christou 2006; Fokkema 2011; Takenaka 1999; Wessendorf 2007).

While on a general level, this study contributes to the existing literature by addressing the migration process of Japanese Brazilians to their Japanese “homeland”, it goes one step further to also examine their return to Brazil – a process that has been, thus far, underexplored. Extensive ethnographic research has been conducted on the ethnic identification of migrants with ancestral homelands, including that of the Japanese Brazilian population residing in Japan. However, a review of relevant studies and investigations reveals a significant gap in the available literature regarding the ethnic identification of this same population following their return to Brazil. The well-documented switch in ethnic identification that most Japanese Brazilians experience in Japan only accounts for half of the development and change in this population’s identity-development process (Tsuda 2003). As such, it is equally important to investigate and to address the possible changes in ethnic identification that Japanese Brazilians may experience upon their return to Brazil.

This study, therefore, also contributes toward a theory of multiethnic identity development similar to that proposed by Rockquemore et al. (2009). As a number of
scholars (Rockquemore et al. 2009; Herman 2010; Saperstein and Penner 2012) explain, it is becoming increasingly important to reconsider the use of race as an all-encompassing construct. Instead, they argue, it is necessary to differentiate between racial identity (one’s self-understanding), racial identification (how the individual is understood and categorized by others), and racial category (the racial identities that are available and chosen in a given context). This differentiation is of particular importance in the study of mixed-race and multicultural populations, such as Brazilians, as situations may arise in which one’s identity conflicts with one’s identification.

In the United States, where multiracial persons comprise a growing demographic, the importance of these distinctions is similarly expanding in significance. Whereas, as Herman (2010) notes, assessing a monoracial person’s race is a relatively simple task, assessing a multiracial individual’s race can be considerably more challenging. While monoracial and some multiracial persons identify in manners consistent with their appearances, many do not—a fact that is problematized by observers’ tendency to “judge racial identification using only the physical cues they can see” (Herman 2010:61).

Indeed, in a study of the congruence between other- and self-identification of multiracial faces, Herman (2010) found low congruence levels in the identification of part-Native Americans who identify as Native American (four percent) and in the identification of part-Whites who identify as White (78 percent). Congruence levels for monoracial targets, in turn, were near perfect (between 90 and 99 percent).

Such discrepancies and differences in identification are significant to race relations, as race is often used to predict one’s status in a social group. Errors in identification, thus, can be detrimental to the mental health and self-esteem of multiracial
persons – particularly for those whose appearance “cause others to treat them according to stereotypes of low status groups” (Herman 2010:74). By applying the logic underlying past studies of racial identity toward an exploration of ethnic identity, this dissertation proposes an understanding of the ethnic identifications of Japanese Brazilians as mutable and driven by social context. Therefore, this study contributes toward the wider deconstruction of racial and ethnic identities as a combination of social and contextual factors, as well as self- and other-understandings.

Finally, this study contributes to the mental health and identity literatures by considering issues of self and identity, as pertaining to race and ethnicity, in conjunction with mental health. As Thoits (1999) notes, questions of identity change and reevaluations of one’s self-conceptions are generally unexplored issues in the literature – particularly questions regarding identities that are commonly considered to be immutable due to their imposition by others, such as gender, physical disabilities, and race and ethnicity. According to Thoits (1999), exploring such questions is important due to the potential of identities to serve as stressors on one’s mental health. Thus, by examining the mutable ethnic identities of Japanese Brazilians and their association with mental wellbeing, this study begins to fill an existing gap in the general literature. Additionally, while previous research (Tsuda 2003) has identified the mainly positive effects of developing and adopting a “Brazilian” ethnic identity on the mental wellbeing of Japanese Brazilians in Japan as well as the negative effects of becoming “ethnically” isolated, it is likewise important to understand how possible changes in ethnic identity following one’s return to Brazil may also be associated with a former migrant’s mental health.
Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter One of this dissertation articulates the rationale and motivation to examine the ethnic identities and mental wellbeing of Japanese Brazilian return-return migrants after their return to Brazil. It outlines the background and context that validate and motivate this investigation, states the guiding research questions, and explains the scholarly significance of this dissertation.

In Chapter Two, I provide an empirical and theoretical background that helps to situate and frame my research findings. Chapter Two, therefore, discusses the phenomenon of “return” migration and its association with issues of ethnicity and identity, examines the fluidity of the concept of race in the Brazilian context, provides a historical and social overview of Japanese immigration to Brazil and Japanese Brazilians’ social location in Brazilian society, discusses Japanese Brazilian return migration to Japan, and explores the associations between immigration, identity, and mental health.

Chapter Three presents my research design and methodology, including a comprehensive description of my 38 participants and of the participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis processes. In Chapter Three, I also reflect on my experiences and role as a Japanese Brazilian sociologist conducting research in a familiar setting with a somewhat familiar population.

Chapter Four summarizes and presents this study’s most significant findings concerning the ethnic identity of Japanese Brazilians in Brazil, before they decided to migrate to Japan. In this Chapter, I discuss the social, familial, and cultural elements that
encourage the ethnic identification of Japanese Brazilians as Japanese in Brazil. This Chapter focuses solely on the pre-migration period in order to provide context to Chapters Five and Six, as well as to serve as a point of comparison for the ethnic identities that emerge in later stages of my participants’ migratory experience.

In Chapter Five, I explore my participants’ experiences during and after migration and how these influenced their ethnic identity negotiation and formation process in Japan and in Brazil. Such experiences include personal encounters with disappointment at not finding the cultural homeland that they expected in Japan as well as social readjustment challenges in Brazil. In this Chapter, I discuss how my participants’ experiences led to the construction of the Brazilian counter-identity in Japan and the new hybrid Descendente identity in Brazil.

Chapter Six looks back at my participants’ experiences in Japan and in Brazil (post-return migration) and identifies specific migration and identity stressors, as well as factors that seem to promote mental wellbeing, that they have encountered during different stages of their migratory journey. Relying on the literature and on my participants’ accounts of their own mental wellbeing, I examine the association between the identified factors and my participants’ mental health.

Whereas Chapters Four, Five, and Six present the findings that address the guiding research questions listed above, Chapter Seven places my research results in the context of broader existent research. In Chapter Seven, I discuss how the mutability and flexibility of Japanese Brazilians’ ethnic identities provide support for situational and interactive perspectives of race and identity. Additionally, I explore how the protective
reasoning and effect of their constructed identities seem to confirm the buffering properties of identities that are held in high esteem.

Finally, Chapter Eight concludes this dissertation by briefly reviewing the findings discussed in Chapters Four, Five, and Six. It also discusses some limitations of this study, recommends directions for future research, and suggests potential implications of my research findings.
Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

To establish the theoretical framework that guides and frames this dissertation, this Chapter reviews the available literature relevant to our understanding of: 1.) The phenomenon of “return” migration and its association with issues of ethnicity and identity; 2.) The fluidity and subjectivity of “race” and ethnicity; 3.) A historical perspective of Japanese immigration to Brazil and the ethnic identity of Japanese Brazilians; 4.) Theoretical understandings of identity and its relationship to mental health status; and finally 5.) The associations between immigration and mental wellbeing.

“Return” Migration, Ethnicity, and Identity

Broadly defined as “the movement of emigrants back to their homelands to resettle” (Gmelch 1980:136), the process of return migration need not refer solely to a first-generation immigrant’s return to his or country of birth, as Japanese Brazilians and other migrant populations demonstrate, nor must it refer strictly to a process of international movement. Rather, as Stack (1996) documents, a large return migration process took place within the United States beginning in 1970, when more than half a million African Americans left the urban spaces of the North for the rural areas of the South: the “home of [their] ancestors” (18). Driven by economic push and pull factors, such as industrial decline, as well as by the prospect of a “safe haven from [northern] urban storms” and finding “a piece of earth to call their own” (Stack 1996:7), the African
Americans observed and interviewed by Stack (1996) return migrated to a homeland characterized by warm memories intermingled with the cold reality of starting anew in a different community.

Similarly to migrant African Americans in search of their homeland, some second-generation and, as is the case with Japanese Brazilians, third- and fourth-generation immigrants occasionally decide to return to their ancestral homeland in a process described in the current literature as a “return” migration, ancestral return, or roots migration (King 1986; Christou 2006; Wessendorf 2007). As Christou (2003) explains, the return migration of later generations of immigrants is often propelled by a sense of “longing and nostalgia for the ancestral home, [which] encourages the journey of self-awakening and the physical act of return” (117). Thus, despite not being born in the destination country and never even having visited it, return migrants believe themselves to be engaging in a symbolic and sentimental homecoming of sorts, or a return to their ethnic homeland.

Rather than concrete, first-hand experiences, return migrants are largely driven by abstract and emotional connections to the ancestral country and culture. Thus, while some migration scholars believe transnational attachments remain confined to the first generation of immigrants, it is unwise to assume that the children of immigrants are not socialized into the customs and rules of their parents’ countries, as return migration movements demonstrate. Children of immigrants often acquire social contacts, skills, and “cultural repertoires” which blur the “lines between the home and the host country […] making them one interconnected experience” (Levitt 2009:1226). Motivated by this “interconnected experience,” descendants of immigrants may choose to engage in a
return migration for several reasons: in search of better economic opportunities in a
country that may present the illusion of familiarity, propelled by wishes to fulfill their
parents’ dream of returning, or in search of a clear ethnic identity (Christou 2006).

A consideration of ethnicity and ethnic identity is fundamental to the examination
of return migration. While the generally accepted view in American society is that of
ethnicity as a “primordial, personal, inherited characteristic like hair color” and not a
“socially created or dynamic” (Waters 1990:17) notion, studies of return migrants
consistently demonstrate the fluidity and subjectivity of ethnic identification and
construction. Thus, the identity negotiation processes observed in return migrant
populations largely seem to support interactionist, reflexive, situational, and
constructionist approaches to identity development (Rockquemore et al. 2009; Goffman
1959; Giddens 1991; Omi and Winant 1994). This approach considers identity as a
concept that is constantly created and molded, unrestricted by pre-existent social
categories, and affected by larger structural factors such as globalization, as well as
smaller interpersonal dynamics, such as the validation of one’s presentation of self
(Giddens 1991; Malkki 1997; Goffman 1959; Cornell and Hartmann 2007).

As Christou (2003) notes, return migrants negotiate experiences and stimuli from
two different countries in a process of cultural production – a process that has been
observed to result in hybrid migrant identities, or a state of liminal “in-betweenness”
(Potter and Phillips 2006:902) that reflects the host country and the country of origin.
Such is the case of Bajan-Brits: British-born second-generation Caribbean immigrants
who describe their identities as suspended in mid-air (Potter and Phillips 2006). Despite
their darker skin tones, Bajan-Brits who return to Barbados find that their “British”
upbringing and accents award them a privileged, symbolic “white” status (Potter and Phillips 2006). Greek American and Bajan-Brit return migrants, thus, also embody the ethnic counterpart of Rockquemore and Brunsma’s (2002) notion of the protean identity: an identity comprised of a mixed-heritage or mixed-race background, which affords the individual specific benefits and exists in a state of racial identity in-betweenness. Not all develop a clear sense of self-concept, however: A Greek-American migrant, who returned to Greece in search of her ethnic roots, described herself as coming to the conclusion that she has no defined identity and belongs “in the Atlantic… like a global mailman” (King and Christou 2010:114).

As demonstrated in studies of Japanese Brazilians in Japan, migrants may also negotiate their identities in homecoming experiences by developing a counter-identity or by attempting to assimilate into the host country’s mainstream society (Tsuda 2003). This construction of “new” ethnic identities is often spurred by the disillusionment migrants experience upon returning to their ethnic homeland and not encountering the welcoming open arms they expected, as “experiences of return often invoke feelings of disillusionment and rupture” (King and Christou 2010:111). Whereas images of the ethnic homeland are preserved through the memories of migrants’ ancestors, these are often selective and create largely unfulfilled illusory expectations, as occurs with Japanese Brazilians and Greek-Americans (Tsuda 2003, Christou 2003, Christou 2006, King and Christou 2010). Among King and Christou’s (2010) sample of Greek-American and Greek-German return migrants, virtually all spoke of a “dream return” (112) that was tarnished by realities such as corruption, bureaucracy, and xenophobia.
The process of migration, thus, potentially creates a cultural hybrid: a person “living and sharing […] in the cultural life and traditions of two distinct peoples” yet who is unwilling to break with the past and is not entirely accepted in the “new society in which he [or she] now [seeks] to find a place” (Park 1928:892). While Park (1928) makes the argument for different physical traits as a potential barrier between migrants and the native population, his hypothesis does not hold in the case of return migrants. Despite physically resembling the native population and, in some cases, being nearly indistinguishable from it, return migrants often exist as individuals striving to live in two different cultures and two societies, which “never completely interpenetrated and fused” (Park 1928:892).

**The Fluidity of Racial and Ethnic Identification in Brazilian Society**

Despite the rising demographic of multiracial persons, a rigidly Black/White dichotomous system of racial classification continues to prevail in the United States, where “Black Americans […] are highly socially constrained to identify as blacks, without other options available to them” (Waters 1990:18) and where discussions of racial change tend to “revolve around macro-level, epoch-defining shifts” (Saperstein and Penner 2012:679; Herman 2010). Some degree of flexibility in identification, particularly ethnic identification, exists; however, it is available primarily to white middle-class Americans, who are able to choose from a variety of ethnic options (Waters 1990). Thus, whereas white ethnics enjoy relatively greater freedom of choice in selecting a symbolic ethnicity that fulfills the “particularly American need to ‘be from somewhere’” (Waters 1990:150) and which, more likely than not, does not have important social and political
consequences, non-whites face the detrimental costs of their ethnicity in a society where hypodescent is the norm. In other words, “whites are always free to remember their ancestry, and Blacks are never free to forget theirs” (Nagel 1995:949).

Classifications of racial identity in Brazil, conversely, are defined by their everyday fluidity and ambiguity among most skin tone and racial groups. In Brazil, the term “cor” (color), is more commonly used to describe oneself than “raça” (race), as it is believed to capture the “continuous aspects of Brazilian racial concepts in which groups shade into one another” (Telles 2004:79) more accurately. Accordingly, then, one’s color is believed to be defined not only by the shade of one’s skin, but also by a combination of other physical characteristics, including hair type, nose shape, and lip shape. When inquired about their race in an open-ended question, Brazilians may answer with as many as 500 different terms that describe their skin color, including “tostada” (toasted) and “leite” (milk). Some may prefer to be even more specific in their answers, distinguishing between very fine color nuances by describing themselves as “morena café” (coffee-colored tan) or “morena canela” (cinnamon tan) (Travassos and Williams 2004).

Further complicating the issue of race and color in Brazil, studies have argued that the way in which Brazilians choose to self-identify may not be based solely on physical appearance: other factors, such as markers of social rank and education, can potentially play an important role in subjective racial classification as well (Lovell and Wood 1998). Thus, it cannot be assumed that Brazilians will identify with a specific skin color for the entirety of their lives: skin-color identity over time is unstable and, therefore, mutable. In an estimate of the number of men and women who reclassified themselves between 1950 and 1980, according to Brazilian national census data, Lovell and Wood (1998) found a
deficit of 38 percent among black men and 39 percent among black women. Lovell and Wood’s (1998) data indicate, therefore, that 38 percent of men and 39 percent of women who identified themselves as black in 1950 no longer did so in 1980. Skin color or race is, evidently, an extremely fluid and ambiguous issue among Brazilians, thus rendering self- and other-classifications of racial identity extremely subjective and, therefore, questionable sources of data.

The literature reviewed identified two main strains of thought which may explain changes in skin-color identity over time among Brazilians: the mobility hypothesis and the notion that particular group identities are associated with material advantages, such as is the case with social programs.

The mobility hypothesis proposed that a significant number of Brazilians reclassified themselves racially, moving from darker to lighter skin color categories in the black-white continuum, as a consequence of the rise in income and education that occurred in the country post-World War II (De Carvalho et al. 2004). This idea is supported by Harris’ (1970) finding that money does indeed have the power to lighten one’s racial classification in Brazil by allowing individuals to be racially reclassified after “they manage to climb the social ladder” (Saperstein and Penner 2012:685). Regardless of phenotypic contrasts, Harris (1970) observed that individuals of similar socioeconomic ranks tend to categorize themselves in similar skin-color groups: lower socioeconomic status was associated with darker skin colors, while higher socioeconomic status was associated with lighter skin colors. Though the national representativeness of Harris’ sample, drawn mostly from the relatively poor Brazilian Northeast, is debatable, his findings are further confirmed by Schwartzman’s (2007) study of intergenerational
changes in racial classification in Brazil. Schwartzman’s (2007) analysis of data obtained from a national household survey revealed that a rise in socioeconomic status among nonwhite parents was significantly associated with their children’s racial classification as white, therefore leading to the conclusion that, “money whitens, while poverty darkens” (942).

A similar phenomenon of racial change occurs in the United States, albeit to a lesser extent and in spite of common perceptions of rigid racial boundaries in American society (Saperstein and Penner 2012). While levels of racial fluidity are significantly lower in the United States relative to Brazil, Saperstein and Penner (2012) nevertheless found markers of social status and social factors – such as long spells of unemployment and incarceration – to be associated with changes in racial classification and identification for a considerable minority of Americans. Reflecting hierarchical patterns of inequality, Saperstein and Penner (2012) found low social status and negative life experiences to be associated with Black identification and classification, whereas higher social status and positive life experiences were found to be associated with White identification and classification. Living in the inner city, for instance, increased one’s odds of being classified as Black by a factor of 1.7 and having been unemployed for longer than four months doubled one’s odds of identifying as Black (Saperstein and Penner 2012).

In addition to changes in social status, the government’s endorsement of social inclusion programs and other policy decisions, such as affirmative action, may similarly prompt groups to modify their color affiliations in order to benefit from these programs’ advantages. This acquisition or assertion of a “new [non-dominant] ethnic identity by
reclaiming a discarded identity, replacing or amending an identity in an existing ethnic repertoire, or filling a personal void” (Nagel 1995:948) is known as ethnic renewal or ethnic switching – a process that can occur at the individual and collective levels. To illustrate the collective process of ethnic renewal, De Carvalho et al. (2004) provide the example of a proposal to move Hawaiians from the “Asian and Pacific Islander” category to the “American Indian” category – a change that would allow them to benefit from gambling concessions available to some Native American tribes. At the individual level of the ethnic renewal process, Nagel (1995) notes that American Indian ethnicity is “largely a matter of individual choice” (950), thus contributing toward a three-fold growth in the number of Americans reporting American Indian as their race between 1960 and 1990.

There are, therefore, no objective racial group boundary markers in Brazil. As explained by Bailey (2009), “an individual’s racial identity today clearly is what he or she says it is, especially in the survey context” (40). Thus, he argues, asking about one’s racial identification is, essentially, an attitudinal question – one that is clearly embodied by the change in ethnic identification undergone by many Japanese Brazilian migrants in Japan. Demographic censuses and annual household surveys are the only sources of national-level information on the color composition of Brazil’s population; however, the validity and reliability of the data obtained is questionable and the subject of much debate (Lovell and Wood 1998). As Lovell and Wood (1998) explain, the simplified racial classification used by surveys forces mixed-race respondents into rigid categories which might not adequately capture the various dimensions of one’s identity. Additionally, one’s racial classification depends primarily on who makes the classification.
According to Telles (2004), a reflective process of self-identification in a color or racial category occurs when respondents are asked to identify themselves. This process, coined “internal definition” by Bailey (2009), consists of “dynamics in which actors signal to in- or out-group members a self-definition of their nature or identity using language, religion, or culture to create a sense of belonging” (47). To these factors, Telles (2004) adds one’s descent and “characteristics transmitted during socialization” (89), including the rejection or acceptance of symbols, traditions, and lifestyles associated with certain skin-color categories. In Brazil, he argues, there is likely to be an avoidance of nonwhite categories; however, as already mentioned, this may change as affirmative action and quota policies may provide respondents with greater incentives to adopt nonwhite identities.

Categorization by others conversely relies strictly on one’s phenotype, as interviewers have no prior knowledge of the respondent’s internal characteristics (Telles 2004). This process falls under Bailey’s (2009) explanation of “external definition,” or “the way one person or group of persons defines another […] through several different strategies” (47), one of which includes official labeling through the national census. Among the factors constituting one’s appearance for the purpose of categorization, Telles (2004) identifies status markers, such as dress and perceived level of education. Such factors, however, may be purposely manipulated by the persons being categorized for the sake of impression management, as Japanese Brazilians in Japan demonstrate in their management of any characteristics that indicate ethnicity (e.g., dress, language, and general demeanor) in order to deliberately convey a distinct Brazilian or Japanese image (Tsuda 2003).
Social Determinants of Racial Classification in Brazil

While previous research has suggested the importance of social class in predicting the extent to which inconsistencies between classifications may occur, Telles (2004) delves deeper into the determinants of self- and other-categorization in a particular skin-color group by identifying and examining the effect of four factors on racial classification: education, racial composition, sex, and age.

In an analysis that predicts the probability that white, brown, or black respondents will be classified consistently by interviewers according to their education, Telles (2004) found highly-educated persons who self-identify as white to be more consistently classified than persons with lower levels of education, thus noting its “whitening” effect. Women and men were found to be seemingly equal in the consistency with which they are classified as white and brown; however, women, especially those who are highly educated, were less likely to be classified as black by interviewers despite self-classifying as such. According to Telles (2004), this may be due to the “greater cordiality afforded to women,” which leads interviewers to “seek to avoid offending dark-skinned women of high status by labeling them as black” (99).

Levels of consistency were also found to vary according to different regions’ racial compositions: While higher levels of ambiguity were found in the North and Northeast (where miscegenation occurred more extensively), classification in the white and black categories appeared to be relatively more consistent in predominantly white areas, such as the southeastern city of São Paulo. Finally, Telles (2004) found younger cohorts to be more inclined to disregard the brown category, choosing to identify as either black or white, though interviewers frequently categorized them as brown.
Telles’ (2004) findings are supported by empirical research conducted by other scholars, including Schwartzman (2007), De Carvalho et al. (2004), Lovell and Wood (1998), Harris et al. (1993), and Harris (1970). Much of their research, however, focused primarily on markers and determinants of social status, thereby neglecting the effects of other potentially significant variables. Previous research, therefore, provides a useful glimpse into some of the social dimensions that shape racial self- and other-classifications; however, much of the “silence” regarding possible determinants of racial classifications in Brazil still remains. As noted by Winant (1992), “in Brazil, the full range of racially salient socio-political and cultural dynamics has not yet even been identified. Language, geography, science, dress, […] media […] medicine religion, the military – all these topics contain a wealth of hitherto unidentified racial dimensions, even those which have attracted significant research” (192). As Japanese Brazilian return migrants and their processes of identity construction demonstrate, it is important to examine the sociocultural factors involved in one’s self-identification and to consider the overlaps and interactions between race and ethnicity in order to understand a population’s identity more comprehensively.

In stark contrast to the United States’ Black/White dichotomy, the system of racial classification in Brazil is a very fluid process dependent on contextual, socioeconomic, and cultural factors. Japanese Brazilians and their processes of ethnic identity negotiation suggest that the same fluid dynamic likely applies to the concept of ethnic classification as well.
Japanese Brazilians in Brazil

The migration movement by the Japanese to Brazil began in 1908 when, following the abolition of slavery in 1888, Brazil experienced a severe labor shortage in coffee and sugar plantations while Japan suffered from an excessively dense population and consequently high unemployment rates. From 1908 to 1941, Japan contributed 188,985 immigrants to Brazil, most of whom arrived in the decade after 1925 (Reichl 1995). This movement resulted in Brazil becoming home to the largest population of Nikkei (foreign-born persons of Japanese ancestry) outside of Japan, with an estimated population of 1,500,000 (Miyasaka et al., 2002). An overwhelming majority of the Japanese Brazilian population (73 percent) reside in the southeastern and southern states of Brazil. In 2000, the state of São Paulo alone was estimated to be home to 693,495 Japanese Brazilians – the largest concentration of Japanese Brazilians in Brazil. The second largest concentration of Japanese Brazilians is found in the southern state of Paraná, with a population of 143,588 (Sakurai and Coelho 2008).

Most arrivals during the prewar period consisted of temporary migrant workers whose goal was to accumulate savings through contract labor on farming estates and, eventually, return to Japan (Yamanaka 1996). However, with the realization that plantation wages were insufficient to accumulate substantial amounts of capital, the Japanese gradually came to settle in the country by becoming small landowning farmers, aided by a system of economic cooperation between families in the purchase and development of land. Thus, by 1923, more than one-third of the 10,501 Japanese agricultural households in Brazil owned farmland and, by 1933, 53 percent of the farming Japanese were independent farmers (Reichl 1995).
Slowly, the Japanese began the process of assimilation to Brazilian culture, evidenced by their adoption of western garb and by the blend of Japanese cuisine and Brazilian dishes that began to emerge (Hastings 1969). Nevertheless, prior to Japan’s defeat in World War II, Japanese immigrants living in Brazil still maintained strong ties to their homeland, refusing to “give up any of the rights or responsibilities of Japanese nationals” (Reichl 1995:39). Manifestations of the immigrants’ conscious Japanese ethnic identity were evident in traditional practices and customs such as worshipping the Japanese emperor – a sentiment that was, interestingly, experienced more intensely by the Japanese immigrants in Brazil than by the Japanese in Japan. Similarly, as a way of maintaining their Japanese ethnic identity salient while simultaneously adapting to their new Brazilian settings nonetheless, the Japanese started Japanese-language newspapers, Japanese restaurants, stores, banks, and other ethnic organizations (Reichl 1995).

A new and harsher stage began for the Japanese in Brazil, however, during Japan’s political crisis, which culminated in its defeat in World War II (Sasaki 2008). In 1942, the Brazilian government stripped Japanese immigrants of their freedom to travel within and from Brazil, the right to assemble, and the liberty to use the Japanese language in spaces other than their homes – thus leading to an intragenerational ethnic-identification crisis in which maintaining one’s ties to Japan became increasingly difficult (Reichl 1995). This crisis was further intensified by persistent, yet false, rumors among the loyal Japanese that vessels were being sent to Brazil following the nation’s victory in the war in order to transport them back to Japan, where they would be offered land in the Japanese empire. None of this occurred, however, and as the Japanese in Brazil learned of the true political and economic disarray predominating in Japan and understood the
consequences of the restrictive policies that made travel to Japan virtually impossible, many realized they were to remain in Brazil permanently (Reichl 1995). Following this realization, the Japanese in Brazil experienced a trend of urbanization propelled by a desire to provide their children with middle-class status, which has, generally, proved to be successful. Currently, the ethnic community is no longer the primary center of most Japanese Brazilians’ everyday context and integration; however, they nevertheless continue to maintain Japanese ethnic ties through their involvement in community activities and organizations. Most Japanese Brazilians also continue to maintain, to varying degrees, their Japanese ethnic identities, which are supported by processes of both self- and other-categorizations (Reichl 1995; Yamanaka 1996; Tsuda 2003).

Positive Minority Status

Minority groups are often presumed to suffer “prejudice, discrimination, injustice, and low-socioeconomic status” (Maeda 2006:197), thus giving rise to their perception as “negative minorities” in the academic literature. However, most Japanese immigrants in Brazil experienced significant upward social mobility in the urbanization period that followed their modest beginnings as agricultural workers. Currently, Japanese Brazilians display high educational status, as approximately 20 percent hold at least a college degree – a statistic that is more than three times the national average – and are overrepresented in Brazil’s most prestigious universities. Furthermore, Japanese Brazilians’ largely professional, managerial, and white-collar occupations solidify their position as middle-class members of Brazilian society, whose salaries are well above the national average (Tsuda 2003). Hence, despite their minority status, Japanese Brazilians experience higher
socioeconomic status than the majority of the Brazilian population, as evidenced by their educational and professional achievements, and are largely integrated into Brazilian society and culture, thus rendering them a positive minority (Tsuda 2003). The positive minority status enjoyed by Japanese Brazilians resembles that experienced by many Asian Americans, who display significantly higher levels of education, lower levels of segregation relative to other immigrant groups, and health advantages such as lower overall mortality rates relative to whites (Williams and Sternthal 2010).

Socioeconomic success, however, is not the exclusive factor responsible for Japanese Brazilians’ advantaged position as a positive minority in Brazil. Brazilians generally tend to hold very favorable opinions and perceptions of Japan as a respected global power and so-called “First World” country. As Tsuda (2003) notes, this is often reinforced and promoted by agents of the mass media, which offers overwhelmingly positive images and impressions of Japan and promotes a sense of admiration and high regard that is particularly directed toward Japanese products in Brazil. According to Tsuda (2003), even ordinary products, such as Panasonic batteries, are labeled “tecnologia japonesa” in order to increase their appeal to the consumer.

Media influence and the coveted quality of Japanese products also extends into the realm of traditional Japanese culture, which many Brazilians see as “refined, fashionable, chic, and exotic” (Tsuda 2003:71). In addition to manifesting an interest in learning the Japanese language as well as demonstrating an appreciation for Japanese cuisine and religions, many Brazilians view stereotypes of Japanese Brazilians as positive and intrinsically connected to their cultural ancestry. As Tsuda (2003) notes, the consensus among Brazilians is a generalized and stereotypical image of Japanese

1 Japanese technology
Brazilians as “hardworking, honest, intelligent, trustworthy, and responsible” (72) group. Additionally, Brazilians commonly perceive them to be more “timid, reserved, and calm” (Tsuda 2003:72) than the general population – characteristics that are associated, in the minds of most Brazilians, with traditionally “Japanese” qualities. The only prominent negative perception of Japanese Brazilians that Tsuda (2003) was able to identify was a sense of aloofness toward ethnic outsiders.

The Ethnic Identity of Japanese Brazilians in Brazil

Most Japanese Brazilians living in Brazil benefit from their positive minority status and positive collective image as descendants of a hardworking and intelligent people as well as from their distant relation to an admired First World country by adopting a “Japanese” ethnic identity that, as Tsuda (2003) describes, often takes “precedence over their identities as Brazilian nationals” (83). Adopting this identity is facilitated by, as Linger (2001) notes, growing up in families that emphasized the “distinctness and even superiority of Japanese culture and blood” (25). Thus, aided by their Japanese phenotypical traits, Japanese Brazilians in Brazil not only define themselves as ethnically Japanese but often come to view themselves as the generalized stereotypes held by most Brazilians as well. As Tsuda (2003) describes, most Japanese Brazilians, even those of mixed descent, agree that they are more hardworking, educated, and honest than most Brazilians. Interestingly, Tsuda (2003) goes on to note that Japanese Brazilians’ comments about their own qualities were commonly followed by negative stereotypes of Brazilians as lazy, easygoing, and dishonest – a possible attempt
to differentiate themselves from the general Brazilian population and to assert their Japanese identities more strongly.

Despite their adopted Japanese ethnic identities, however, most Japanese Brazilians are extensively assimilated into Brazilian society and have lost much of the cultural distinctiveness exhibited by previous generations. In order to continue to assert their Japanese identity and position as a positive minority group, therefore, Japanese Brazilians maintain and develop their ethnicity through “family socialization processes and the internal dynamics of the ethnic community” (Tsuda 2003:78). Such processes and dynamics include family pressure to learn Japanese and to adopt certain values and behaviors associated with the culture, as well as participation in ethnic events organized by associations and clubs (Tsuda 2003). Attempts to maintain their “Japaneseness” also involve occasionally consuming traditional Japanese dishes and selecting Japanese names for their children as a “badge of community membership” (Linger 2001:25).

A positive minority status, familial socialization processes, participation in the ethnic community, Japanese physical traits, and an emphasis on the Japanese ethnic identity as a self-concept that makes them distinct from the general Brazilian population, lead many Nikkei to believe that they will fit well into Japanese society. Once in Japan, however, Japanese Brazilians experience a negative change in socioeconomic status as well as a change from a positive to a negative minority – a category justified by the Japanese through constant reminders of their current low-status occupations in Japan and their ancestors’ migration history, which is often perceived to be shameful (Maeda 2006).
Prejudice and Discrimination in Brazil

While Japanese Brazilians in Brazil were the targets of discriminatory actions during periods in which Japan’s international status was unfavorable, particularly during World War II, their rise to a positive minority was accompanied by a decrease in prejudiced acts. Currently, as Tsuda (2003) explains, the emphasis placed on Japanese Brazilians’ “racial” differences in Brazil is one that is rarely accompanied by overt disparagement or prejudice. Rather, he notes, gestures that would be typically considered to be insults in the United States – such as pulling one’s eyes upward to recreate slanted eyes – are often made in playful or neutral contexts. Brazilians’ potentially offensive words and actions, therefore, are described by Tsuda (2003) as merely recognitions of difference and not a “prejudiced reaction in which difference is negatively perceived” (61). Given Brazilians’ awareness of and sensitivity to racial characteristics, such as minor differences in skin tone, the attention they give to Japanese Brazilians’ “different” physical characteristics is, therefore, not surprising (Travassos and Williams 2004).

As Saperstein and Penner (2012) note, studies of discrimination often assume one’s race to be fixed and “self-evident” (708). By this logic, as individuals with Japanese facial features, Japanese Brazilian return migrants in Japan would be unlikely victims of prejudice and discrimination by the native Japanese population. However, while discriminatory acts and prejudiced attitudes require that one first classify an individual as belonging in a particularly category, from which potentially erroneous stereotypes and beliefs then arise, such classifications may not always be accurate (Saperstein and Penner 2012). The existence of prejudice against Japanese Brazilians in
Japan, therefore, serves as an ideal example of the social construction of race and ethnicity and its potential for fluidity.

**Japanese Brazilians in Japan**

Nearly a century after the first Japanese migrants stepped on Brazilian soil, an economic crisis spurred yet another migration movement between Japan and Brazil in the late 1980s. This time, however, the process was reversed, with second- and third-generation Japanese Brazilians returning to their ethnic homeland as unskilled workers in a movement known as *dekasegi*\(^2\) (Miyasaka et al. 2002). While most arrive with the intention to work from two to three years in Japan and to return to Brazil after meeting their financial objectives, many choose to stay for longer periods of time (Tsuda 2000). The “push-pull” theory of international labor migration is useful in explaining the migration movement of Japanese Brazilians to Japan. As Yamanaka (1996) notes, the degree of economic inequality between one country and another creates a “gradient of difference” (66) that outlines the choices surrounding migration. From this, push and pull factors emerge: While factors such as economic difficulties and political unrest may push individuals away from their home countries, pull factors such as perceptions of a better life or desire to join a certain community may attract individuals to move to a specific place. In other words, according to push-pull theory, migration is a product of the calculations and evaluations made by migrants in search of better opportunities (Yamanaka 1996).

As in the first migratory movement from Japan to Brazil, the economic situations of the two countries were once again conveniently complementary and auspicious for

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\(^2\)To work away from home.
migration. Throughout the 1980s, the Brazilian economy suffered from inflation rates exceeding 100 percent: In 1988, the inflation rate reached 682 percent and 1,769 percent in 1989 (Higuchi 2006). The Brazilian urban middle-class was hit particularly hard by the soaring rates, leading some to view migration as a viable path to economic survival. While some left Brazil for Canada and the United States, Japanese Brazilians headed to Japan (Yamanaka 1996). During Brazil’s period of economic crisis, Japan prospered from an economic boom, thus rendering it a significantly attractive destination for Japanese Brazilian migrants (Higuchi 2006).

The cultural migration process undertaken by Japanese Brazilians was, and continues to be, largely facilitated by several actors and factors, including recruiting agencies that serve as labor bridges between Brazil and Japan. Because most Nikkei decide to migrate only when they have secured a concrete job opportunity upon arrival, recruiting agencies have grown to experience great demand in Brazil (Higuchi 2006). The return by Brazilian Nikkei to their ethnic homeland was, additionally, partially propelled by the Japanese Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act in 1990, which allowed Brazilians of Japanese ancestry to enter the country and to work legally with no restrictions. Under the Act, Japanese Brazilians were granted renewable visas as long-term residents with theoretically unlimited access to labor markets (Chitose 2006). When the Act was passed, Japan was in need of manual labor and, by recruiting Japanese descendants, the Japanese government believed it would be able to maintain its ethnic and cultural homogeneity (Howell 1996; Goodman et al. 2003).

The years following 1990, therefore, saw a great increase in the Brazilian population in Japan, evidenced by a threefold growth from 56,429 in 1990 to 176,440 in
1995 (Higuchi 2006). Estimated at over 280,000, Japanese Brazilians currently represent about 14.5% of the foreign population in Japan and 0.2 percent of the general population (Chitose, 2006; Asakura et al. 2008).

Japanese Brazilians in Japan are most likely to be employed in the manufacturing industry – more specifically as production process laborers (Higuchi 2006). Thus, the workplace is one of the main settings in which Japanese Brazilians are made acutely aware of their new status as a negative minority and as ethnic outsiders. According to Tsuda (1999), Japanese Brazilians generally believe they are given the least desirable jobs and that they are forced to work harder than the Japanese – an ethnic exploitation of sorts. Indeed, Nikkei in Japan generally have an excessive workload of 12 to 14 hours per day that is exacerbated by an unhealthy change in sleeping habits due to alternating day and night shifts (Miyasaka et al., 2002).

Most recently, as a result of the global recession that saw Japanese unemployment rates rise in 2009, the Japanese government adopted a “pay to go” program, in which unemployed Latin American migrant workers were given $3,000 – enough for a one-way airplane ticket – to return to their home country. Migrant workers who accepted the government’s offer, however, were not allowed to reenter Japan until an undetermined date, which would be determined when the country’s economic and employment conditions improved (Masters 2009; Tabuchi 2009).

*Expectations of a Dream Return to the Homeland*

An overarching theme of “return” migration across populations is the “dream of returning” and a “strong nostalgia for the homeland” (Wessendorf 2007:1089) –
sentiments that build toward largely unfulfilled expectations of an ethnic homecoming.

Japanese Brazilian return migrants experience similar hopes and disappointments, as the migration process is accompanied by much disillusionment concerning the Japanese culture and society among the migrants, who realize the idealized visions they created of their ethnic homeland are not an accurate reflection of reality in Japan. Instead of the warm welcome they expect to receive from the land of their ancestors, Japanese Brazilians are generally met with cold and subtle, yet nonetheless prejudiced, reactions by the native Japanese. Instead of the advanced and highly developed society they anticipated, they experience the narrow streets, small houses, and poorer neighborhoods of the country (Tsuda 1999). Such unfulfilled expectations of a modern, welcoming homeland are further exacerbated as Japanese Brazilians struggle to adjust to their decline in social status from a positive minority in Brazil to a negative minority in Japan (Tsuda 2003).

The emotional process undergone by Japanese Brazilians returning to their ethnic and cultural homeland is comparable to the experience of migrants returning to their true homeland. According to Gmelch (1980), while some migrants readjust quickly because they are already familiar with their destination, others are unhappy, disillusioned, and disappointed about life in their homeland. Gmelch (1980) explains migrants’ negative reactions by citing their “unrealistic expectations of what the home society would provide” (1980:145), for their memories are nostalgic and frequently idealized, with positive experiences standing out and negative aspects of their homeland receding from memory.
As second- and third-generation Japanese Brazilians, their images and expectations of a Japanese ethnic homeland are constructed primarily from stories and accounts passed down from their parents and grandparents, as well as from ethnic activities organized by local communities (Tsuda 2003). The idealization of one’s ancestral homeland is a common occurrence in ethnic communities and immigrant families. Indeed, second-generation Italians in Switzerland undergo an experience that strongly resembles that of the Brazilian Nikkei, as members of the first generation often describe the Italian homeland as an idealized place, and “sites of belonging” (Wessendorf 2007:1089), such as Italian schools and clubs, support and encourage an Italian identity.

Among Japanese Brazilians, the media is an additional, significant source of information for their construction of an idealized Japan. Global mass media networks (e.g., NHK World TV), in particular, contribute heavily to the Japanese Brazilians’ positive perceptions of the country, as information comes directly from Japanese primary sources, which affords them greater credibility. Reports and stories about Japan in the Brazilian national media, furthermore, consistently focus on favorable images and impressions of the country, particularly its economic accomplishments and technological innovations, as well as on its people, by emphasizing their dedication to hard work, intelligence, diligence, and obedience. Additionally, high-quality Japanese products, such as electronic equipment and automobiles, often serve as Japanese Brazilians’ tangible proof of the country’s admirable modernity (Tsuda 2005).

Through socialization processes, ethnic ties, and the media, Japanese Brazilians develop a personal sense of attachment to Japanese society and perceptions of what the society is like. These are, in turn, accompanied by the expectation of social acceptance in
their ethnic homeland. While most do not expect to be embraced and welcomed as a
Japanese-born citizen, many still anticipate a relatively high degree of receptivity from
the Japanese in what would resemble an ethnic homecoming of the Nikkei. Such
expectations, however, are often far from met, thus resulting in a profound sense of social
alienation among Japanese Brazilians and a severe negative status transition that often
leads them to reconsider their positive views of Japan (Maeda 2006; Tsuda 2005).

Peruvian Nikkei who temporarily migrate to Japan to work undergo a similar
process of cultural and social disenchantment. Despite having Japanese facial features
and names like the Japanese Brazilians, they are often disappointed to find they are
treated as foreigners. Consequently, contrary to the stories told by their grandparents
about how wonderful Japan is, the Japan that is experienced by Japanese Peruvians is
found Greek-American return migrants also undergo a similar experience of social
awkwardness and exclusion, which she describes a state of being of “strangeness” (839)
in Greece, or as a participant described it, as a “stranger […] a foreigner in my own
country” (838).

As a negative minority in Japan, the native Japanese’s general collective
perception of the Nikkei – even those who are generationally distant from their
immigrant ancestors – seems to be heavily associated with images of poor rural farmers
and low socioeconomic status (Linger 2001; Tsuda 2003). The stigma attached to the first
generation of Japanese immigrants in Brazil continues to be applied to the younger
generations due to familial ties, as “they were supposedly raised by poor, uneducated
parents and thus come from a low family background” (Tsuda 1998:326). Negative
ethnic perceptions of return migrants are even more intense, as they are perceived as social failures who could not survive economically in a country to which their ancestors immigrated for the same reason in the past. Therefore, return migrants are seen as “poor people who could not survive in Brazil” and, consequently, have to “constantly migrate to avoid poverty” (Tsuda 1998:326).

Because immigrants did not initially populate Japan, unlike most Western countries such as the United States, it can be a challenge for some native Japanese to learn to interact with foreigners in their daily lives. The ethnic prejudice experienced by Brazilians is, therefore, not based entirely on perceived differences of social class and status but on national and cultural distinctions as well. As second- and third-generation Japanese Brazilians, most migrants primarily speak Portuguese and have little first-hand experience with the Japanese culture. Their difficulty in speaking Japanese fluently, hence, is one of the most salient reasons why the native Japanese look down on Nikkei as socially insignificant or inferior (Asakura and Murata 2006).

Preconceived notions of Brazil as a backward, Third World nation also translate into Japanese perceptions of Japanese Brazilian behavior in Japan. In factories and other workplaces, they are often seen as “irresponsible and completely lacking in company loyalty because they frequently quit their jobs and move to firms offering higher wages” (Tsuda 1998:335). Outside of the workplace, the average opinion of the Japanese Brazilian community’s behavior is not much different. Among the most frequent complaints by Japanese natives is the excessive noise they produce in apartment complexes, for Japanese Brazilians are stereotypically known to turn up the volumes of their stereos too loud and to hold parties until late hours of the night. Additionally, native
Japanese interviewed by Tsuda (1998) expressed unease, discomfort and fear toward groups of Japanese Brazilians in public because of their “alien” behavior, such as dressing in a “strange” manner that deviates from the Japanese style of dress, speaking loudly in Portuguese, and walking in groups. Accordingly, Asakura and Murata (2006) found high levels of perceived racial discrimination among Japanese Brazilians in Japan, who also described experiencing psychological pain, social isolation, and verbal abuse through name-calling and statements such as, “Foreigners go home.”

The Ethnic Identity of Japanese Brazilians in Japan

While previous generations of researchers have viewed immigrants as persons who “uproot themselves, [and] leave behind home and country” (Schiller, Basch, and Blanc 1995:48), immigrants are currently seen as individuals who engage in transnational social relations that link their societies of origin and settlement, thereby often reconstructing their identities. The current academic consensus is that the dislocations occasioned by migration can have significant effects on the ethnic identities of migrants, such as the development of an ethnic minority counter-identity. When migrants relocate to other countries, they frequently undergo some degree of ethnic marginalization and discrimination, which can lead to a reaction of resistance. According to Tsuda (2000), an ethnic counter-identity is a demonstration of such resistance and opposition to the dominant majority group, which is motivated by a desire to oppose cultural norms in response to cultural differences. Such manifestations of resistance, he explains, are not unconscious or unintended and can vary from open acts of cultural defiance to “modest demands that one’s cultural differences be acknowledged and accepted” (Tsuda 2000:57).
The counter-identity developed by migrants is often a nationalized one, as the treatment they encounter in the host nations is believed to cause them to react by “reaffirming and renewing their national loyalties to their country of origin” (Tsuda 2001:413) and to distance themselves psychologically from the host country (Tsuda 1999). Phinney et al. (2001), describe national identity as a defining characteristic of minority and immigrant group members, emphasizing the dynamic association that exists between recent immigrants’ attitudes and the host country’s official policies toward immigration and levels of immigrant acceptance. As they note, “ethnic identity is a dynamic construct that evolves and changes in response to developmental and contextual factors” (496); thus, when there is pressure toward assimilation, the group’s national identity is likely to become stronger. Furthermore, if migrants are strongly pressured to assimilate to the dominant culture and to leave behind their own ethnicity, they may react with anger, depression and, possibly, violence. It is important, however, to note that Phinney et al.’s (2001) conclusions draw from studies of populations with clearly delineated in- and out-group statuses, whereas the Japanese Brazilian population is characterized by often hazy boundaries between insiders and outsiders.

The ethnic identification processes undergone by many Japanese Brazilians in Japan thus accurately reflect the findings outlined in the current literature on migration and identity. In response to the disappointment and discrimination Japanese Brazilians encounter in Japan, the feelings of Japanese pride that previously motivated them to identify as Japanese begin to weaken and, in their place, a sense of Brazilian nationalistic pride emerges, and the Brazilian counter-identity appears. A similar phenomenon occurs among Greek-Americans in Greece: While Christou’s (2006) interviewees reported
feeling and being Greek in the United States, they also reported becoming more “American” in Greece in response to social and cultural disappointments.

Japanese Brazilians are a unique migrant group whose ethnic adjustment is more complicated than that observed in other comparable groups. Because they are ethnically related to their host society, they experience more cultural pressure from the dominant group to assimilate and are, thus at higher risk of psychological distress, as research has consistently demonstrated (Pumariega et al. 2005). Nikkei are expected to comply with Japanese cultural standards because of the myth of Japanese homogeneity, a widespread and government sanctioned expectation that their Japanese blood would grant them a certain degree of cultural facility to adapt (Howell 1996). When they do not meet such assumptions, Nikkei encounter ethnic discrimination and become acutely aware of their cultural differences despite a supposedly Japanese upbringing in Brazil. Japanese Brazilians often respond to this through a resurgence of Brazilian national sentiment in Japan, thereby strengthening their national identity. As one Nikkei relayed to Tsuda (2000), “We came to Japan in search of money but found our Brazilianness instead. In Brazil, we were proud of being Japanese and always talked about how we were different and better than other Brazilians, but in Japan we’ve become Brazilian nationalists.”

Brazilians who are not of Japanese descent, conversely, feel more freedom in Japan, as Japanese cultural standards generally do not apply to them (Tsuda 2000).

According to Berry’s (1997) model of acculturation, therefore, Japanese Brazilians who adopt a Brazilian counter-identity in Japan have a separated identity, as they have developed a strong ethnic self-concept but do not identify with the new culture in which they find themselves (Phinney et al. 2001). The ethnic identity redefinition
undergone by Japanese Brazilians living in Japan may, furthermore, be a contemporary example of the phenomenon of ethnogenesis, or the process whereby new ethnic groups come into being (Taylor 1979). This dissertation will examine this possibility.

Interestingly, Peruvian Nikkei, unlike Brazilian Nikkei, react to the disappointment and disillusionment of finding an unexpectedly cold and different Japanese society through assimilation instead of separation, as defined by Berry’s model (Berry 1997; Phinney et al. 2001). According to Takenaka (1999), the first stage of the transformation of Japanese Peruvians’ ethnic identity involves a denial of their Japanese identity and social distancing from the Japanese. However, instead of a Peruvian national identity, a “Nikkei identity” soon emerges to replace it, one that is “strategically manipulated as a combination of cultures” (Takenaka 1999:1472). Moreover, this new Nikkei identity among Japanese Peruvians can be observed in communities not only in Japan, but in Peru and the United States as well. The available literature does not address the possible reasons for the discrepancy between Peruvians and Brazilians in the development of their ethnic identities. However, it is likely that social and cultural factors pertaining to the Brazilian and Peruvian national identities, as well as elements of their ethnic communities in Japan influenced the identity negotiation processes.

The development of a Brazilian ethnic counter-identity facilitates the migrants’ psychological adjustment by creating a sense of self-consciousness that they are Brazilian foreigners and not Japanese, therefore allowing them to resist Japanese cultural pressures. As a Japanese Brazilian woman living in Japan relayed to Linger (2001), embracing one’s Braziliananness was like a “road to freedom […] [that] enabled one to be taken for what one was” (311). Japanese Brazilians, consequently, often choose to behave in
conspicuously Brazilian ways to show that, despite their appearance, they should not be expected to comply with Japanese standards (Tsuda 2000). In behaving conspicuously, Japanese Brazilians ensure that they have the attention of their main intended audience: the Japanese.

When enacting their Brazilian counter-identity in Japan, Japanese Brazilians generally ensure that their ethnic identity is conspicuous and highly visible, in an easily observable shunning of Japanese cultural standards. According to Tsuda (2000), the most common manner in which Nikkei display their Brazilian side is through their choice of clothing. Jeans worn by Nikkei women, for example, display more colorful ornamental features and are tighter around the hips than those worn by Japanese women. Japanese Brazilian men often wear shirts with loud, strong colors or t-shirts featuring the Brazilian flag, the country’s name, or simply in Brazil’s national colors of yellow, green, and blue. Additionally, Nikkei display their Brazilian identities by choosing to speak loudly in Portuguese and greeting each other affectionately in public by embracing or kissing, as they would normally do in Brazil. Even Nikkei who speak fluent Japanese sometimes choose to speak solely in Portuguese in order to capture the Japanese’s attention. Tsuda (2000) also found some Nikkei even exaggerate their Brazilian behavior, acting more Brazilian in Japan than they did in Brazil. More subtle ways used by Japanese Brazilians to express their identities as Brazilians include writing their Japanese last names in katakana (a Japanese phonetic alphabet used for foreign names) and using their Brazilian first name instead of their Japanese name, as most Japanese Brazilians have both.

Japanese Brazilians also engage in highly visible collective ritual performances of Brazilian culture, such as samba parades organized in communities with high
concentrations of Nikkei, thereby not only expressing their identities as Brazilians but alleviating their homesickness as well. Interestingly, however, most Japanese Brazilian migrants never participated in samba in Brazil and may even have scorned it as a lowly activity. Therefore, because of their lack of knowledge of samba, the festival that is actually produced in Japan would most likely be barely recognizable in Brazil. However, it is an effective collective expression and assertion of their Brazilian counter-identity in Japan nonetheless, which also provides a certain degree of unintentional cultural authentication by curious Japanese spectators (Tsuda 2000).

Not all Japanese Brazilians adapt to their new surroundings by developing a Brazilian ethnic identity, however. For those with assimilationist tendencies, being “Japanese” continues to retain a fairly positive meaning – particularly when contrasted with being “Brazilian.” Thus, assimilation-oriented Japanese Brazilians, in order to avoid the stigma associated with Nikkei and with the Brazilian ethnic identity, feel the need to “adjust to Japanese customs and standards to a certain extent” (Tsuda 2003:326). They do so by self-consciously modifying their behavior: assimilation-oriented Japanese Brazilians “attempt to speak Japanese properly, wear appropriate clothes, remain quiet on the streets and in their apartments, and even watch out for their gestures” (Tsuda 2003:326).

Prejudice and Discrimination in Japan

In Japan, despite the existence of ethnic prejudice against Japanese Brazilians due to their negative minority and outsider statuses, Tsuda (2003) notes that it is, interestingly, rarely made known through discriminatory behaviors: He identified the
most explicitly negative treatment of Japanese Brazilians in Japanese workers’ general unwillingness to interact with them in the factory. Outside of the factory workplace, however, Tsuda (2003) observed generally courteous and polite treatment of Japanese Brazilians in stores, restaurants, and other businesses. Moreover, Tsuda (2003) notes that negative attitudes toward Japanese Brazilians tend to be expressed in more socially acceptable actions, such as expressions of sympathy and pity for a population they view as unfortunate victims of an impoverished “Third World” country, which they were forced to leave. The Japanese, therefore, seemingly express their prejudice only at the first two levels of Allport’s (1979) scale of five types of rejective behavior: antilocution and avoidance.

Given the general subtlety of anti-Brazilian prejudice and discrimination in Japan, the Japanese Brazilian population is one that is “rather poorly regarded but politely treated” (Tsuda 2003:141). As Tsuda (2003) explains, a “social veneer of politeness is generally maintained” (136) in interactions between Japanese Brazilians and Japanese natives. This apparent discrepancy is more appropriately explained by Merton’s (1949) typology of prejudice and discrimination, in which, by outlining four different types of discriminators and non-discriminators, he notes that prejudice is not always accompanied by discrimination and vice-versa. According to Merton’s (1949) typology, the generally non-discriminating yet prejudiced Japanese population may be categorized as timid bigots. Similarly, and in support of the notion of “timid bigots,” LaPiere (1934) demonstrated that racial attitudes do not necessarily mirror one’s social conduct: Despite observing the mostly courteous treatment of a foreign-born Chinese couple by Americans as they traveled across the United States, attitude surveys of employees of the
establishments they visited nevertheless revealed an “intense prejudice towards the Chinese” (233).

Tsuda (2003) explains the discrepancy between ethnically prejudiced attitudes and polite behavior toward Japanese Brazilians as a reflection of the strong sense of distinction placed by the Japanese between one’s social (omote) and private (ura) selves. According to this distinction, one’s social self should be self-consciously controlled and separated from one’s private self for fear of revealing socially unacceptable and inappropriate personal opinions. Thus, the ethnic prejudices held by the Japanese against Nikkei reflect their true inner feelings and attitudes (honne), or “natural, real, or inner wishes and proclivities” (Lebra 1976:136), and are an integral part of their private selves. Their social veneer of politeness, in turn, is a reflection of the standard or “rule by which one is bound, at least outwardly” (Lebra 1976:136) (tatemae). While Tsuda (2003) recognizes that this distinction is not culturally unique to Japan, he notes that the extent to which the “private self remains hidden is greater” among the Japanese than in other societies (142). Similarly, Lebra (1976) notes the predominance of a strong cultural pressure for situational discrimination among the Japanese, which is generally interpreted as an indication of maturity and moral discipline.

**Mental Health, Stress, and Identity Theory**

Closely related to the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism (Mead 1934) and to Cooley’s (1902) looking glass self, identity theory proposes that social structures affect one’s self and, similarly, that the self influences one’s social behavior
(Stryker and Burke 2000). As Owens (2003) explains, the self is a social product that is created and altered by one’s interactions with others, affiliations, experiences, and location within a particular culture and social structure. Similarly, the self is also a social force that influences one’s “cognitions, emotions, and behaviors” (Owens 2003:210).

According to identity theory, persons have as many “identities as distinct networks of relationships in which they occupy positions and play roles” (Stryker and Burke 2000:286). Thus, each person is believed to draw on a certain identity, or internalized role expectations, in order to play specific roles, or expectations attached to positions. The salience of each identity and one’s commitment to it is an important component of identity theory: Salient identities are those which are most likely to be invoked across a variety of situations, while identities to which one is most highly committed are those on whom one’s relationships to others most depends (Owens 2003). Stryker and Burke (2000) argue, therefore, that commitment to an identity shapes its salience, which, in turn, shapes one’s behavior. Consequently, people behave in accordance with a group with which they identify – even if this group is a low-status, negative minority group such as the Japanese Brazilians in Japan. As Stets and Burke (2000) explain, individuals who use a group label to describe themselves are likely to “participate in the group’s culture, to distinguish themselves from the out-group, and to show attraction to the group in their behavior” (226).

Furthermore, according to Stryker and Burke (2000), identities and their salience may be mutable across time and situations. As an example, they note the experience of new university students who, upon seeking new relationships and student organizations to join, give preference to those that allow them to behave in accordance with their salient
identities. When they succeed in doing so, their identity remains stable; however, when they are unable to find such opportunities, the salience of their identities may change or they may act to alter or create a new situation in order to bring it into agreement with their identity standard (Stryker and Burke 2000). A mismatch between the self-meanings associated with one’s identity and the perceived self-meanings of a situation may, ultimately, lead to negative emotions.

As Thoits (1999) notes, one’s mental health is “at least partly influenced by positive self-conceptions, high self-esteem, and/or the possession of valued social identities” (345); therefore, it is useful to consider the notion of identity and the self along with a discussion of mental health and identity-related stressors. Thoits (1999) argues that individuals derive significant psychological benefits from their social identities, for by investing in a particular identity, they gain a sense of who they are as well as what they should do and how they should behave. As with Goffman’s (1959) notion of the validation of one’s presentation of self, Thoits (1999) argues that one’s reactions of legitimation or disapproval serve as feedback on how well they are performing. Thus, individuals’ encounters with stressors that damage or threaten one’s self-conception or identity, such as “signals to the self about the adequacy of one’s ‘person-environment fit’” (351), are likely to predict psychological problems. As Stryker and Burke (2000) note, failure to meet others’ expectations regarding a particular identity as well as failure to meet one’s self-generated standards may result in anxiety and depression.

Conversely, factors that support one’s self-concepts – such as others’ positive regard for one’s performance and high self-esteem – can serve as resources that buffer or lessen the damaging psychological impact of stressors (Thoits 1999). The benefits of a
positive self-identity are demonstrated in Mossakowski’s (2003) study of a sample of Filipino Americans, in which she found that high levels of ethnic identification may serve as a buffer against discrimination-related stressors. However, a consensus has not yet been reached regarding the positive or negative effects of ethnic identity on mental health, as different studies point to results that both support and contest the protective effects of a strong self-concept (Mossakowski 2003; Kiang et al. 2006; Yip et al. 2008; Yoo and Lee 2008).

Stressors and stress experiences do not necessarily result in psychological problems, however. According to Linville (1987), greater self-complexity may serve as a protective buffer against stress-related illness and depression. In other words, persons with several differentiated self-aspects – mother, friend, wife, and journalist, for instance – may be able to confine the impact of a negative event, such as negative criticism at work, to a small proportion of their self-representation. When this occurs, the unaffected self-aspects serve as buffers against negative feelings associated with stressors (Linville 1987). Furthermore, as Thoits (1999) notes and as Stryker and Burke (2000) similarly touch upon, individuals may also turn to changing the way they view themselves as a coping mechanism. As an example, Thoits (1999) cites individuals who may “self-protectively deemphasize the importance of work as an identity or as a source of self-evaluation” (360) in order to reduce the perceived stress of chronic failures in the workplace – a situation that is very similar to Japanese Brazilians’ diminished emphasis on their Japanese identity. The imposition of identities (by others) that are not considered by the individual to be positive or self-descriptive have been hypothesized to be damaging to self-esteem and mental wellbeing. Assimilation-oriented Japanese
Brazilians, in turn, may encounter significant barriers and stressors related to their inability to fulfill the expectations associated with a Japanese identity. This dissertation will address the potential effects of one’s self-aspect by examining the ways in which processes of self- and other-identification can impact mental wellbeing.

**Immigration and Mental Health**

Migration does not necessarily represent a risk to physical and mental health; however, certain elements surrounding the migration process may increase the vulnerability of migrants to threats to their mental wellbeing. An international relocation frequently entails the immersion of the individual in what is likely to be a very different socioeconomic and cultural system in the host nation, thus possibly resulting in significant psychological strain (Pumariega et al. 2005). Such strain may include encounters and interactions with unfamiliar customs and beliefs, a shift in socioeconomic status, linguistic barriers, experiences of major life events, the draining of emotional and social resources, and perceived prejudice and discrimination. Additionally, the loss of “culture-related protective factors” (Viruell-Fuentes 2007:1524), such as closely-knit networks of social support, may lead to the deterioration of immigrants’ psychological health. Similarly, studies of voluntary immigrants demonstrate that some migration stressors, such as challenges to one’s economic survival and feelings of isolation, present significant risk factors for mental health (Pumariega et al. 2005). As a result of this physical and psychological journey, some studies have found immigrants to be at higher risk for mental wellbeing issues relative to the general population. More specifically, adult migrants, relative to children and teenagers, are more likely to undergo a
significantly difficult cultural transition process due to their “relative cognitive inflexibility and their solidified ethnic identity” (Pumariega et al. 2005:587).

Several studies have identified the potentially negative impacts of migration on mental wellbeing; however, understanding of the mental health effects of the migration experience and nativity is mixed. While first-generation Latino immigrant groups in the United States tend to report worse mental health status than their native-born peers, this pattern is not the same across immigrant groups: Other populations, such as Filipinos and Puerto Ricans, report better psychological health than the native-born, while Asian groups such as the Vietnamese, Japanese, and Chinese do not differ significantly from their native-born counterparts (Williams and Sternthal 2010). Possible explanations suggested for a seemingly contradictory association between the low socioeconomic status of immigrants and their advantageous health status include the “healthy migrant hypothesis,” or the selection of immigrants on the basis of their health (Williams and Sternthal 2010; Messias and Rubio 2004). However, the “healthy migrant” effect disappears by the second generation as the children of migrants come to exhibit the “expected associations in health” according to their social status (Williams and Sternthal 2010:S21).

Rates of substance abuse among immigrant populations in the United States provide further confirmation for the healthy migrant hypothesis. Relative to the native-born population, immigrants exhibit lower rates of past year and lifetime substance abuse (i.e., alcohol, illicit drugs, and prescription drugs). In a more specific analysis of subgroup populations, Kandula et al. (2004) found Black, Latino, and Asian immigrant groups to be less likely to have used alcohol in the past year relative to Caucasian
immigrants. However, the protective effect of nativity status weakens with time, as rates of alcohol and illicit drug usage are positively associated with length of residence in the United States. After fifteen years in the United States, Kandula et al. (2004) found immigrants’ rate of illicit drug usage to be comparable to that of the native-born. Children of immigrants, furthermore, have been found to be at higher risk of substance abuse than first-generation immigrant youth (Pumariega et al. 2005).

In addition to the healthy migrant hypothesis and SES-based explanations of the mental health of immigrants, scholars have also proposed socio-cultural arguments, such as acculturation, as possible explanations of the poor health status of later generations of immigrants. Berry’s (1997) acculturation model suggests that each individual acculturates differently to the host society by generally following one of four different strategies: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. Research indicates that the assimilationist approach is likely to be detrimental to mental wellbeing: As immigrants adapt and integrate themselves into American society, they lose cultural protective factors, such as ethnic networks of social support, which may lead to the deterioration of their psychological health (Viruell-Fuentes 2007). Indeed, as Williams and Harris-Reid (1999) identify in their review of the literature, studies have shown that individuals who are “high in acculturation” are more likely to suffer from low self-esteem and general psychological distress, as integration into the host culture may lead to “self-deprecation or self-hatred and isolation from traditional support systems” (313).

Similarly, marginalization, a strategy that entails the shunning of the host culture and isolation in ethnic enclaves, may have negative effects on migrants’ mental wellbeing. As Pumariega et al. (2005) discuss, marginalization occurs most commonly
among older immigrants; however, it significantly affects their young offspring, for whom marginalization is not a viable choice. While children and adolescents interact daily with the mainstream culture at school and other social activities, they are nevertheless encouraged by marginalized older relatives to remain loyal to their own culture. Thus, signs of integration or assimilation are understood as a “familial and cultural betrayal” (Pumariega et al. 2005:586). Pumariega et al. (2005) further suggest that, in response, children may grow to become marginalized like their parents, or alienate themselves from their families and peers. This, in turn, may lead to depression and substance abuse.

While abundant evidence suggesting a negative association between acculturation and immigrant health status exists, the precise effects and pathways of this process are far from clear, as some studies have also identified a positive relationship between acculturation and health (Williams and Harris-Reid 1999). Conversely, others have found no relationship (Arcia et al. 2001). It is also important to note that these associations vary by population and generation, and this literature speaks to general migrant populations and not specifically to return migrants or return-return migrants.

Viruell-Fuentes (2007) also calls attention to the stigmatizing “othering” process that is experienced by some migrants, along with perceived discrimination and low levels of social acceptance. Experiences of discrimination are significant predictors of mental health status: Studies have found that Mexican-American women experience high levels of racial discrimination that, in turn, predict higher levels of psychological distress (Williams and Harris-Reid 1999; Finch et al. 2000). In the United States, the differential health outcomes of descendants of immigrants relative to earlier generations is likely to
be the result of a process in which they learn and interpret American racial dynamics and, consequently, their subordinate ascribed status in the social hierarchy. The stigmatizing messages perceived by Viruell-Fuentes’ (2007) sample of second-generation Mexican-American women, for instance, often emphasized their use of language and phenotype as obvious markers of difference. Contrastingly, few of the first-generation Mexican immigrants Viruell-Fuentes (2007) interviewed explicitly identified discriminatory incidents in their own lives, thereby suggesting that the second generation is more likely to be acutely aware of racist interactions. Similar experiences of perceived prejudice were identified by Arcia et al.’s (2001) respondents, who understood discrimination to be the result of being “visibly identified as Latino” (50).

Although individuals are exposed to several factors that may potentially affect their mental wellbeing negatively, they may also turn to resilience factors and coping mechanisms in order to alleviate or protect themselves from emotional distress. As discussed earlier, cognitive coping resources such as positive group identities may have stress-buffering effects on mental wellbeing (Thoits 1999; Mossakowski 2003; Kiang et al. 2006). Other discussions in the sociology of mental health often revolve around mechanisms of social support as one of the main coping resources available. Perceived emotional and social support, in particular, are cited as significant buffers against the impact of stress on one’s mental wellbeing (Aneshensel et al. 2012). Thoits (2011), in a more specific discussion of social support, proposes that seven different mechanisms may beneficially link social support to mental health, including processes of social comparison, self-esteem, a sense of belonging and companionship, perceived availability of support, and a sense of purpose and meaning. Additionally, Thoits (2011) argues that
social support can be provided in two different ways – emotional sustenance and active coping assistance – and that it can be provided by significant others and by sympathetic others who have undergone similar experiences. The availability of and access to coping strategies, however, is structurally determined: Those in positions of social disadvantage are at higher risk of poor mental health, which may in part be explained by their limited access to coping resources (Aneshensel et al. 2012).

As the literature demonstrates, migrants, specifically, turn to sources of social support and cohesion in order to protect themselves from potential stressors or to alleviate signs of emotional distress. Such sources may include migrants’ religious faith and rituals, which provide potentially stigma-free environments where distress can be expressed and shared (Bhugra 2004). Furthermore, immigrants also establish “ethnic social support networks” (195), which allow them to live separately from the larger host society, thereby maintaining their own culture and ethnic traditions while simultaneously adapting to the host society (Noh and Avison 1996). In an analysis of the stress process undergone by Korean immigrants in Canada, Noh and Avison (1996) found higher levels of ethnic social support to be directly associated with fewer depressive symptoms. They note that this association can be explained by the importance of sociocultural similarity between the provider and receiver of social support. Thus, support from a similar other who shares common life experiences and understands the difficulties of the migration process contributes positively to the mental wellbeing of migrants. Contrastingly, support offered by members of the larger host community may be perceived as inappropriate due to a lack of awareness and sensitivity (Noh and Avison 1996).
The Mental Wellbeing of Return Migrants

A significant gap exists in the literature concerning the effects of return migration on the health of returnees (Davies et al. 2010; Siriwardhana and Stewart 2013; Barrett and Mosca 2013). Despite the growing transnationalism of migrant populations, studies examining the health of migrants who have returned to their origin country are surprisingly scarce. Accordingly, this literature review was only able to identify a limited number of published studies on the association between return migration and returnees’ health status. While Barrett and Mosca (2013) explore some of the health effects of return migration on Irish returnees, the remaining studies discuss the health of other return migrant populations (e.g., labor migrants and internally displaced persons) in more general terms.

Barrett and Mosca (2013) found a high degree of social isolation to be the main resettlement challenge encountered by Irish return migrants over the age of 50 after their return to Ireland. Social isolation was particularly high among recent returnees who spent longer periods of time abroad. Despite high levels of social isolation, however, Barrett and Mosca (2013) did not find high degrees of loneliness among their sample of return migrants. To explain this apparent discrepancy, they suggest that Irish return migrants may have developed a coping mechanism in the form of self-sufficiency during the migration process, which entails low levels of participation in social activities and fewer intimate relationships and social ties. As they have grown accustomed to social isolation during migration, they do not believe they are depriving themselves of important social connections in Ireland.
In a more general discussion of health and return migration, Davies et al. (2011) explore the migratory elements that may affect the health of migrants after returning to their country of origin. While mental health is not explicitly addressed, they note the presence of various potential stressors during all phases of migration. As Davies et al. (2011) note, return migrants are affected by a “cumulative exposure” to risk factors and social determinants throughout the entire migration process (i.e., during migration, during the return, and after the return). Migrants who held good jobs in the destination country and had appropriate access to healthcare and social services are often healthy; however, they may have nevertheless acquired harmful habits and developed unhealthy lifestyles during the process of acculturation. After their return, their socioeconomic status and the origin country’s level of development determine whether return migrants will able to afford the necessary health services. Migrants who held low-paying jobs, lived in poor housing conditions, and encountered challenges accessing healthcare services, conversely, were likely exposed to risk factors for ill health and generally return in poorer health than when they left. Following their return to their country of origin, they may not be able to afford healthcare, or the necessary healthcare may not exist. Labor migrants, specifically, may not seek medical care immediately after their return due to a limited availability of health services, which could potentially lead to poorer health outcomes (Davies et al. 2011).

In addition to labor migrants, examinations of return migration often include discussions of internally displaced persons (IDP) and their return to the area of origin. While the literature concerning the mental health of IDP returnees is also limited, the available evidence suggests that return migration has mixed effects on the mental
wellbeing of IDPs. Negative experiences and trauma during displacement, hopeful expectations of homecoming, and broken social and cultural ties with the host community may contribute to negative mental health outcomes among returning IDPs. Additionally, IDPs generally return to find increased levels of daily stressors and challenges when they return to their origin region, as these often face greater socioeconomic challenges than the host community (Siriwardhana and Stewart 2013). However, Siriwardhana and Stewart (2013) note that extended periods of displacement may also be associated with improved mental wellbeing among some IDPS, as feelings of hope of rebuilding their lives contribute to their adjustment and recovery, thereby leading to “increased post-traumatic growth of the returnees” (3).

The available literature suggests that an association exists between return migration and the mental wellbeing of returnees. This association is seemingly mediated by an accumulation of experiences and stressors encountered during different phases of migration, socioeconomic conditions, and differential access to healthcare. Greater attention should, therefore, be given to the health of return migrants as they resettle in their country of origin. This dissertation begins to fill this significant gap in the literature.

The Mental Wellbeing of Return-Return Migrants

After a review of the literature on return migration, I was unable to identify any studies that specifically examine the mental health and wellbeing of return-return migrant populations after their return to the country of origin. Given the increase in return migration and, consequently, a likely increase in return-return migration, it is essential that we understand the mental wellbeing of return-return migrants and their needs. While
much attention is paid to the health of migrants during the migration process, it is in the best interest of the origin countries to understand the risk factors, stressors, and social and cultural elements that affect the mental wellbeing of migrants during and after the return phase as well. By doing so, the negative cumulative experiences of migration (as noted by Davies et al. 2011) can be addressed and access to health and social services can be improved.

*The Mental Wellbeing of Japanese Brazilians*

Migrant populations are exposed to numerous stressors as they leave their country of birth and attempt to adapt to an entirely new society. Nikkei immigrants are a distinctive example of such a population, as they undergo a very particular and significant type of stress due to multiple migrations: in Japan as culturally and ethnically Japanese individuals returning to their ancestral homeland and, later, as “return-return” migrants in Brazil, their country of birth. In addition to common migratory stressors and challenges, Japanese Brazilians also experience a drastic social status shift from positive to negative minorities, as well as the possibility of an ethnic identity crisis (i.e., failure to commit to a specific identity), brought upon by realizing that their expectations of an ethnic homecoming are not met (Erikson 1980; Miyasaka, et al., 2002; Tsuda 2003).

Language barriers are identified by the literature as one of the migration-related obstacles that are closely related to social isolation, psychological distress, and patterns of service utilization, and are among the main challenges encountered by Japanese Brazilians in Japan (Pumariega et al. 2005; Davies et al. 2010). As second and third-generation Nikkei educated primarily in Portuguese, the majority are not comfortably
fluent in Japanese, though self-reported surveys may indicate otherwise. In a study of Japanese Brazilian psychiatric outpatients in Japan, Miyasaka et al. (2007) found most of their respondents to possess a basic level of Japanese language skills, despite indicating fluency in self-reported surveys. This deficiency is an important disadvantage, as it not only complicates their chances of obtaining better jobs and, consequently, of improving their overall status as unskilled workers in Japan but, additionally, poses significant barriers in expressing their feelings and symptoms to Japanese physicians (Asakura and Murata 2006).

Interestingly, however, Asakura and Murata (2006) found that proficiency in Japanese did not improve Japanese Brazilians’ adaptation to Japanese society. In fact, those fluent in Japanese reported facing greater difficulties in psychologically adapting to Japan, for they felt stronger pressure to assimilate – a sentiment described by Tsuda (2003) as the “assimilation blues.” Furthermore, as Japanese Brazilians’ understanding of Japanese improved, they became increasingly aware of discriminatory comments made by their colleagues and others. A similar association was found by Finch et al. (2000) in a sample of Mexican immigrants in California: As the immigrants’ levels of English use increased, the more likely they were to perceive discrimination, which, in turn, increased the likelihood of depression. Therefore, both extremes of the language proficiency spectrum serve as a significant source of anxiety and distress for Japanese Brazilians.

The absence of networks of social support may also significantly contribute to the deterioration of immigrants’ mental health (Pumariega et al. 2005; Bhugra 2004; Davies et al. 2010). Absence of social support is often experienced by Japanese Brazilians in the form of loneliness, sadness, and homesickness. Particularly among assimilation-oriented
Japanese Brazilians or otherwise ethnically isolated individuals, who might not enjoy the benefits of belonging to a “cohesive ethnic social group” (Tsuda 2003:206), such issues are likely to be more common during to periods of acute loneliness and isolation.

In interviews with Japanese Brazilians, Tsuda (2003) also identified feelings of frustration associated with their perceived low status and consequent inability to voice “opinions, suggestions, and complaints at work” (308), as well as annoyance at being ignored and having their opinions rejected because of their status as Nikkei migrant laborers and foreigners. If Japanese Brazilians do not have adequate social support from family members, friends, co-workers or social groups, which encourage cathartic interactions, such mounting feelings of frustration and resentment may ultimately result in self-destructive behavior as well as in aggression directed toward others. Furthermore, lack of social support in the work environment may exacerbate the already detrimental effects of stress and pressure on their mental wellbeing (Netterstrøm et al. 2008; Stansfeld and Candy 2006; Tausig 2013).

Ethnic discrimination against Japanese Brazilians by their Japanese counterparts is another important stressor to consider in understanding the mental wellbeing of this population. Vega and Rumbaut (1991) describe ethnic minorities as vulnerable to a number of stressors, including physical hardships and perceptions of unfair treatment, both of which shape one’s future life experience. Additionally, Kessler, Mickelson, and Williams (1999) found the association of perceived discrimination and mental health to be comparable in magnitude to the associations of mental health with previously identified major life stress events, such as the death of a loved one and divorce. Similarly, in a review of 32 studies of racial discrimination including at least one measure of mental
health outcomes, Williams, Neighbors and Jackson (2003) found all but one to report a positive association between discrimination and psychological distress, manifested through feelings of anger and depression as well as lower levels of life satisfaction and happiness.

Indeed, in a survey of 300 Brazilian workers in Japan, Asakura et al. (2008) – using the 12-item General Health Questionnaire, which mainly measures psychological problems related to anxiety, depression, and social dysfunction – found ethnic discrimination in the workplace to be associated with “more psychological problems, lower self-rated health, and more somatic symptoms” (747). Interestingly, the strength of this association was weaker for mixed-ancestry and non-Japanese Brazilians than for “pure” Japanese Brazilians – an inconsistency that is explained by Asakura et al. (2008) through the “black sheep effect.” According to the black sheep effect, in-group members are judged more severely than out-group members when something unfavorable occurs. Therefore, Japanese Brazilians, due to their Japanese phenotypes and “pure” blood heritage, are likely to be considered closer to the in-group and, consequently, may be treated with more prejudice. Furthermore, as predicted by Miyasaka et al. (2007) and Asakura and Murata (2006), Asakura et al. (2008) found perceived discrimination and its effects on mental wellbeing to be positively associated with fluency in Japanese.

Finally, the mental wellbeing of Japanese Brazilian migrants with assimilationist tendencies may be particularly vulnerable to identity crises and other psychological difficulties. Perhaps due to their higher Japanese proficiency, as well as their hopes of being ethnically accepted by the Japanese, “Japanized” Japanese Brazilians are prone to react more negatively to the subtle discrimination and ethnic exclusion they experience in
Japan (Tsuda 2003). Additionally, they may suffer from feelings of inadequacy and inferiority upon realizing that, because of their Brazilian background and non-native Japanese language skills, very few of them can fulfill the myth of Japanese homogeneity and live up to Japanese cultural and behavioral expectations and standards. Consequently, they may perceive greater psychological pressure to adjust so that their Brazilian cultural traits are not exposed. Indeed, as Williams and Harris-Reid (1999) identify in their review of the literature, immigrants to the United States who are “high in acculturation” are more likely to suffer from low self-esteem and general psychological distress, as attempted integration into the American culture may lead to “self-depreciation or self-hatred and isolation from traditional support systems” (313). Furthermore, as Tsuda (2003) notes, assimilation-oriented Japanese Brazilians are prone to identity diffusion, or the inability to commit to a specific identity, which may result in an “uncentered or incoherent self” (325).

In studying the mental wellbeing of Japanese Brazilian migrants, it is also important to take into consideration the cultural meanings of mental health in Japan and in Brazil. As established in the literature (Sugiura et al. 2000; Desapriya and Nobutada 2002), levels of stigma associated with mental health and help-seeking are particularly high in Japan, and the Japanese are socialized to feel a “sense of shame” if they are perceived to lack the will power to exercise mental self-control. The stigma surrounding mental health in Japan is, therefore, likely to affect Japanese Brazilians in Japan by hindering disclosure of emotional distress and discouraging them from seeking professional help for issues surrounding their mental wellbeing.
Again, the literature regarding the cultural meanings of mental health and stigma in Brazil is surprisingly scarce. The existent literature is primarily based on studies conducted in the city of São Paulo and are, therefore, not generalizable to the Brazilian population. However, because São Paulo is home to the largest concentration of Japanese Brazilians in the country, the available studies are relevant for the purposes of this dissertation. In a household survey of São Paulo residents, Peluso (2008) found that less than half of respondents recognized the existence of depression. Peluso’s (2008) results suggest, therefore, that the general population tends to view depression as a temporary and individual life situation that occurs as a result of psychosocial stressors, including job loss and divorce. As depression is not recognized as a “real” issue by a majority of São Paulo residents, it is reasonable to hypothesize that high degrees of stigma are associated with depressive symptoms.

As migrants in a foreign, illusory homeland in which prejudice, albeit subtle, is a common attitude, Japanese Brazilians may experience worse mental health outcomes relative to the population in Japan. Thus, the stigma surrounding issues of mental wellbeing in both populations in Japan and in Brazil adds yet another complicating layer to Japanese Brazilians’ adaptation to their host country.

Japanese Brazilian return-return migrants undergo a unique and significant journey as they migrate to their ethnic homeland of Japan and eventually return to their “true” homeland of Brazil. While familial socialization processes, positive minority status, and sociocultural elements such as involvement in the ethnic community in a racially fluid Brazil encourage their identification as Japanese, thereby inspiring dreams of an ethnic homecoming, their hopes are dashed by a foreign and cold Japanese society.
In response to feelings of cultural inadequacy and incompetence, as well as experiences of perceived prejudice and discrimination, many Japanese Brazilians develop a Brazilian counter-identity that replaces the Japanese identity they once held in Brazil. This counter-identity serves to elevate the self-esteem of Japanese Brazilians in Japan and has a buffering effect against perceived discrimination. What happens to the identity of Japanese Brazilian return-return migrants after their return to Brazil is still largely unknown, however, as are the potential associations between identity-related factors and their mental health. This dissertation aims to begin to fill this significant gap in our knowledge and to encourage greater attention to populations of return and return-return migrants.
Chapter Three
Methodology

This dissertation uses qualitative methodology to understand the ethnic identities and mental wellbeing of Japanese Brazilian return-return migrants during different stages of the migration process. Given the lack of existing survey data, the exploratory nature of this study, and its focus on the lived experience of Japanese Brazilian migrants, a qualitative approach to this research is ideal. As Marshall and Rossman (2006) note, “human actions cannot be understood unless the meaning that humans assign to them is understood” (53). Qualitative methodology, therefore, allows this study to explore, in rich detail and depth, the meanings and mechanisms pertaining to issues of ethnic identity and mental wellbeing, as proposed by my guiding research questions. Thus, through in-depth interviews with 38 Japanese Brazilian return-return migrants, this study addresses their deeper perspectives through face-to-face interaction.

Data Collection

Research Setting

The research site of this study was the state of São Paulo: a significant geographical area for this dissertation, as it is home to Brazil’s largest concentration of Japanese Brazilians. More specifically, my research participants were recruited in the metropolitan area of São Paulo city (the capital city of São Paulo state), where a significant portion of the Japanese Brazilian population resides (Sakurai and Coelho 2008).
An average Paulistano\(^3\) will cross paths with more than a few Japanese Brazilians in a typical day in São Paulo; however, the Japanese presence in the city is visible in ways beyond its Nikkei population. Japanese and Japanese-inspired restaurants – from a Michelin starred establishment to a fast food Japanese restaurant chain – are as abundant as traditional Brazilian *churrascarias*\(^4\), streets and public spaces are named after prominent Nikkei individuals, and large scale Japanese cultural festivals take place several times throughout the year. Additionally, several neighborhoods across the city are home to a local Japanese cultural association (popularly known as *kaikan*\(^5\)), where Japanese descendants gather for social activities and other forms of entertainment and where children typically attend *Nihongaku*\(^6\).

Despite the traces of Japanese culture that are spread throughout São Paulo, nowhere is more visibly “Japanese” than the district of Liberdade. Located in downtown São Paulo and constantly bustling with tourists and locals alike, Liberdade is home to a concentration of Japanese and other Asian commercial establishments, such as grocery stores, restaurants, bakeries, and general stores. Its many commercial buildings are also home to legal offices, travel agencies, and small business owned and operated primarily by Brazilians of Asian descent. On a typical weekday, foot traffic on Galvão Bueno Street (the district’s main commercial street) is hectic, as persons rush to their destinations, pushing through the crowds. On weekends, however, Liberdade is transformed with the arrival of its weekly open air market. While still crowded, a sense of leisure hangs in the air as visitors enjoy the food stalls – serving Japanese comfort food

\(^3\) A resident of the city of São Paulo  
\(^4\) Brazilian steakhouses  
\(^5\) Japanese for “assembly hall”  
\(^6\) Japanese language school
such as takoyaki, yakisoba, and bifun — browse for handmade crafts, and enjoy live music. In the shopping galleries, it is not uncommon to hear non-descendants use Japanese words, such as kawaii and sugoi, as they point to small Japanese action figures and colorful t-shirts printed with images of anime characters and photos of Japanese bands.

Japanese Brazilians in São Paulo also have the opportunity to keep in touch with the Japanese culture through several ethnic activities, such as karaoke competitions and other artistic pursuits. Karaoke competitions generally take place weekly on Sundays and holidays, and contestants of all ages sing accompanied by Japanese melodies — from traditional enka to soft pop. Every July, these competitions expand beyond São Paulo to include Nikkei communities across the country as Japanese Brazilian contestants travel from different regions of Brazil to participate in the three-day event. For those less interested in singing, all-day events showcasing traditional Japanese dance, taiko drums, kendo, and minyo performances occur several times a year in different cultural spaces in São Paulo.

Thus, the presence of a sizeable Japanese Brazilian population and the strong, visible presence of Nikkei culture make São Paulo an ideal location for sample recruitment.

Sample Description

In order to obtain multiple, yet deep and culturally rich perspectives of the issue, 38 Japanese Brazilians were recruited to participate in this study. While my initial

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7 Ball-shaped snack filled with minced octopus, stir-fried noodles, and rice noodles
8 Cute
9 Amazing
10 A Japanese martial art that incorporates the use of bamboo swords
11 Traditional Japanese folk music genre
objective was to recruit a minimum of 30 Japanese Brazilians, this number was flexible and increased as fieldwork unfolded. As Patton (2002) notes, “there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry” (244); rather, I interviewed participants to the point of saturation and/or redundancy. By recruiting participants to the point of redundancy, I ensured that the information obtained for this dissertation was maximized (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

This study aimed to recruit a sample that is diverse and flexible in terms of gender and age. A total of 22 females and 16 males were interviewed, ranging from 23 to 76 years of age, with a mean age of 46 years. Marital status, educational attainment, employment, and other sociodemographic variables were not included in the recruitment criteria, though data were collected. A majority of participants (N=25) were married, while six were single and never married, seven were separated or divorced, and one was a widow. One of my 38 participants held a post-graduate degree, twelve held a bachelor’s degree or were currently attending college, three held an associate’s degree, ten began their university education but never graduated, eight were high school graduates, and four did not graduate high school. Most (N=12) self-described as possessing basic Japanese skills (defined in the questionnaire as, “I can understand and speak some words and expressions in my day-to-day routine”); however, ten described themselves as fluent, and the remainder claimed to have intermediate skills (“I can sometimes have a conversation in Japanese”). Despite the challenges my participants described encountering during their readjustment in Brazil, most held professional, middle-class jobs (e.g., high school teacher, business owner, technology analyst) at the time of our interview.
Additionally, it was not required that participants be “full” Japanese descendants (i.e., of exclusively Japanese descent) in order to take part in this study. Persons of mixed descent may, in fact, yield very interesting observations, as demonstrated by Tsuda (2003). Among this study’s 38 participants, four were of mixed descent (one Nikkei parent). It is important to note, however, that Nikkei of mixed descent were underrepresented in my sample: São Paulo’s Center for Japanese Studies estimated that, in 1988, 6.03 percent and 42 percent of the second and third generations of Japanese Brazilians, respectively, were “mixed.” Among fourth-generation Nikkei, this statistic rises to 61.62 percent.

Given the proposed research aims, it was required that participants had lived in Brazil for a majority of their lives and lived in Japan for a minimum of three months. Including length of residence in Japan as a recruitment criterion ensured that participants would have stayed in the country long enough to surpass the “honeymoon stage” proposed by the intercultural adjustment model (Ting-Toomey and Chung 2005). According to Ting-Toomey and Chung (2005), during the honeymoon stage, migrants are excited about their new cultural environment, frequently perceiving people and events through “rose-colored lenses” (128). My participants’ length of stay in Japan ranged from six months to 20 years.

*Recruitment*

Because this study focuses on a very specific subgroup of a minority population that may be difficult to identify on a superficial level, it relied primarily on snowball,
or chain sampling, strategies as well as opportunistic or emergent sampling methods – both of which allow for the selection of “information-rich cases” (Patton 2002:242).

The recruitment process began by speaking with well-situated key informants at the Núcleo de Informação e Apoio aos Trabalhadores Retornados do Exterior\(^\text{13}\) (NIATRE), which from 2011 to 2014 served as an important source of assistance and support for Japanese Brazilians who had recently returned from Japan. I discussed the study with the leaders and staff members of NIATRE and was graciously provided with a list of recently returned former migrants, who had previously given their permission to be contacted for research purposes.

I contacted each potential participant via an introductory e-mail that explained how I had obtained their contact information, described the dissertation and its goals, and, finally, asked for their participation. Additionally, I made myself available via phone and e-mail to address any questions and concerns, and stressed that their participation was completely voluntary and that their identities would remain anonymous. When a participant agreed to be interviewed, we met in a public space that was convenient for my interviewee at a mutually agreed upon time.

Following each interview, I asked participants if they knew of any friends or acquaintances who might be similarly interested in speaking with me. As different sources were recommended, my chain of informants eventually diverged and came to represent a spectrum of characteristics that made for a heterogeneous sample.

In addition to snowball sampling, I followed the opportunistic sampling strategy: Participants were recruited by taking advantage of “new opportunities during actual data collection” (Patton 2002:240) and, additionally, of the “unexpected” (Marshall

\(^{13}\) Center for Information and Support for Workers who Have Returned from Abroad
and Rossman 2006:71). I attended traditional Japanese Brazilian events and locations, such as the Liberdade\textsuperscript{14} district in São Paulo, where I mingled with attendees and passersby and explained the study and its aims. Whenever interest was expressed, I asked the potential participant if he or she would be available and willing to grant me an interview.

Furthermore, in order to extend the recruiting efforts of this study, I placed approved fliers at sites commonly frequented by Japanese Brazilians in the São Paulo metropolitan area, such as ethnic clubs and organizations. The fliers contained a brief description of the study as well as my contact information, should any interested persons wish to participate. This recruiting method, however, did not yield any positive results.

\textit{Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews}

I conducted individual, in-depth semi-structured interviews in order to offer each participant the opportunity to express their personal perspectives and to use their own words to respond to my questions. The interviews combined two different strategies by using informal conversational strategy within an interview guide approach. As Patton (2002) explains, informal conversational interviews allow questions to flow from the immediate context, thereby increasing the salience of the questions and allowing the researcher to match them to each different individual’s circumstances.

The interview guide approach, in turn, consists of the preparation of a guide that lists the topics and subject areas to be addressed during the interview, thereby making the

\textsuperscript{14} Liberdade is the Brazilian equivalent to Little Japan due to its high concentration of Japanese commercial establishments, including restaurants and grocery shops, and its hosting of ethnic events.
interview process more systematic and consistent for each respondent (Patton 2002). This combined approach allowed for a level of flexibility and structure that addressed each individual strategy’s weaknesses.

Each interview was conducted in Brazilian Portuguese and lasted for approximately one hour at a mutually agreed upon location (a neutral public space), date, and time. Prior to beginning each interview, each participant provided informed consent. All interviews were audio recorded with the participant’s permission. All 38 participants agreed to have their interviews recorded.

Immediately following the interview, a “critical time of reflection and elaboration” (Patton 2002:384), I wrote brief field notes making note of the interviewees’ general demeanor and the quality of their responses. As suggested by Patton (2002), I also recorded details about the setting in which the interview took place and my observations about the interview, such as the rapport established between the interviewee and myself and how well I posed the questions. Post-interview field notes provide a “context for interpreting and making sense of the interview later” and also ensure that the data obtained will be “useful, reliable, and authentic” (Patton 2002:384), thus contributing to the rigor of this qualitative study’s methods.

The interview questions\textsuperscript{15} inquired about the participants’ ethnic identification in Japan and in Brazil. Additionally, the questions probed for the participants’ perceptions of potentially conflicting ethnic identities in Brazil as well as their mental wellbeing. In order to address the participants’ ethnic identities, some questions

\textsuperscript{15} Please refer to the Appendices section for a copy of the interview guide, questionnaire and recruitment materials.
adapted from Waters’ (1990) interview protocol such as, “Would you say that being Japanese/Brazilian is important to you?” and “Do you participate in any Japanese/Brazilian clubs or organizations? How often and why?” were posed. To address perceptions of conflicting ethnic identities, questions such as, “Do you consider yourself Japanese sometimes and Brazilian at other times? When does this happen? Why do you think this happens?” and “Have you ever felt you were treated unfairly because of how others see you?” were asked. Finally, to address the participants’ mental wellbeing, more general, less specific questions were posed in order to avoid eliciting the negative cultural perceptions of mental health issues held in Brazil and by the Japanese culture. Such questions included, “How did you feel when you arrived in Japan?” and “How did you feel after returning to Brazil?”

Questionnaire

For the purposes of data analysis, respondents were also asked to fill out a brief sociodemographic questionnaire following each interview. The questionnaire inquired about their gender, age, marital status, number of children, highest level of education attained, occupation, city of residence in Brazil, city of residence in Japan, proficiency in Japanese, age at first migration, number of migrations, and length of stay(s) in Japan.

Data Analysis
I transcribed and translated all interviews from Portuguese to English – a process that allowed me to immerse myself in and become acquainted with the data (Patton 2002). Individual, password protected Microsoft Word files were created for each interview and saved in a password protected external hard drive. As a precaution, master copies of all files were also saved in a password protected cloud storage account. After all interviews were transcribed, I reviewed each transcript and listened to the corresponding recorded interview in order to ascertain accuracy and consistency. All files were imported into the HyperResearch software program for data analysis.

The coding and analysis process were inductive in order to ensure that the study was open to the data: I examined the data by discovering emergent “patterns, themes, and categories” (Patton 2002:453) with no prior assumptions or hypotheses. After significant themes were identified, I proceeded to analyze the data deductively in order to coincide with the study’s proposed research questions and the theoretical and empirical background material that inform this dissertation.

Prior to beginning extensive qualitative data analysis using HyperResearch, I selected five interview transcripts and underlined portions that represented any emerging themes in the participants’ answers. As the primary aim of this study is to explore the ethnic identities and mental wellbeing of Japanese Brazilian return-return migrants in Brazil, I then read the five transcripts a second time, focusing specifically on interview excerpts that apply to the study’s research questions. I proceeded to review the underlined transcripts and place summary tags – or brief phrases or words that summarize the participant’s comments – in the margins. By summarizing rather
than interpreting sections of the interviews, the analysis remained true to the inductive analysis approach.

The summary tags were then organized into groups of like tags, which were then given descriptive titles. The list of descriptive titles were, in turn, converted into a codebook draft containing codes, their clarifying definitions, and examples. I used the codebook draft to code three additional interview transcripts in order to evaluate the codes’ suitability and to determine whether additional codes should be added to the list. The codebook was revised and finalized.

The finalized codebook was used to code the remaining 30 transcripts using HyperResearch. This was done by reading each transcript carefully and in its entirety without coding and then re-reading each transcript while applying codes. Finally, the transcripts were read a third time in order to check that codes were applied properly and correctly. During the analysis process, I also continued to write field notes as well as analytic memos in order to facilitate my comprehension and interpretation of the data, as suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2006).

Following the coding process, I began the process of interpretation, which brings “meaning and coherence to the themes, patterns, categories, developing linkages and a story line that makes sense and is engaging to read” (Marshall and Rossman 2006:161-162). During this process, several significant themes that address this dissertation’s guiding questions emerged.

Broadly summarized, the findings presented in Chapters Four and Five are organized around two main themes that address the first two guiding research questions of this dissertation. These themes are: 1) How Japanese Brazilians self-
identify and are other-identified and 2) How social, contextual, and cultural factors affect how Japanese Brazilian return-return migrants self-identify. The findings presented in Chapter Six are structured around five themes that correspond with this dissertation’s third guiding research question. The themes present in Chapter Six are:

1) Common migration stressors that affect Japanese Brazilians during return migration and post-return migration; 2) Identity-specific factors that affect Japanese Brazilians during return migration and post-return migration; 3) How migration and identity-related stressors affect my participants well-being in Japan; 4) How the interaction of migration and identity-related stressors work in synergy to affect my participants’ well-being post-return migration; and 5) How my participants cope with emotional distress in Japan and in Brazil.

The Role of the Researcher

As Patton (2002) explains, the “human being is the instrument of qualitative methods” (64). Therefore, as the researcher, it is important to acknowledge my identity as a fourth-generation Japanese Brazilian doctoral student so that the reader can interpret this dissertation’s findings within the context of my identity. As this study aimed to examine the subjective, personal views of my participants regarding their experiences as Brazilians of Japanese descent in Brazil and in Japan, my personal background and identity served as important assets during fieldwork.

As a Japanese Brazilian who was born and raised in the city of São Paulo, possesses moderate Japanese skills (though is, by no means, comfortably fluent in the language), is occasionally involved in Japanese cultural events in Brazil, and is
currently and temporarily residing in a foreign country, the similarities I possess with
Japanese Brazilian return-return migrants granted me relatively easy entry into the
field. While moving to the United States for educational purposes is, in numerous
ways, different from returning to your cultural homeland as a temporary laborer,
living for an extended time in a foreign country nevertheless constitutes an experience
that is shared between the participants and me. This expectation was confirmed prior
to and during interviews with my participants, who demonstrated spontaneous and
unprompted interest in comparing their experiences in Japan with mine in the United
States. Furthermore, there is one important characteristic that I share with participants
and that helped to develop rapport: As a temporary migrant in another country, I have
also experienced personal questions of ethnic identity and confusion.

Whereas I initially expected differences between the participants and myself to be
problematic, I did not find that they interfered negatively in the data collection
process. As mentioned, the circumstances under which I have chosen to reside in
another country are different from those of Japanese Brazilian temporary labor
migrants. While I feared that this could be a potential barrier to rapport, my academic
objectives generated more interest and curiosity than expected. Additionally, while I
have visited Japan and have, to a certain degree, personally experienced the “ethnic
awakening” described by Tsuda (2003) while there, my three-month stay in the
country was motivated by leisure as opposed to financial objectives. Again, this did
not negatively affect my interactions with participants; rather, it highlighted yet
another similarity between us. Thus, as someone who, perhaps to a lesser extent,
personally experienced the same perceptions of cultural and physical difference that
was frequently mentioned by participants and who is similarly discouraged by the social and neighborhood environment in Brazil every time I return, I found that my participants were generally eager to stress our likenesses. This greatly facilitated rapport and even led to new friendships.
Chapter Four

In Brazil They Call Us Japanese, In Japan They Call Us Gaijin:\n
Understanding the Ethnic Identities of Japanese Brazilians in Brazil and Japan

Introduction

This chapter examines how Japanese Brazilians negotiate their ethnic identities pre-migration in Brazil and during their stay in Japan as temporary labor migrants. More specifically, in order to understand their process of ethnic identification, it explores how Japanese Brazilians’ self-identity is shaped and influenced by the social and contextual factors in each country. This chapter does so by addressing the following questions:

1. How do Japanese Brazilians negotiate their ethnic identities in Brazil prior to migrating to Japan?

2. What are the social and contextual factors associated with how Japanese Brazilians self-identify in Brazil prior to migrating to Japan?

3. How do Japanese Brazilians negotiate their ethnic identities in Japan?

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\(^{16}\) Japanese word for “foreigners”
4. What are the social and contextual factors associated with how Japanese Brazilians self-identify in Japan?

While prior research has examined the ethnic identities of Japanese Brazilians as they relate to their processes of migration to Japan, it is nevertheless valuable and necessary to consider the ways in which this study’s sample of Japanese Brazilian migrants resembles – but also differs from – what has been described by prior studies. Additionally, it is essential that this sample’s pre-migratory and migratory ethnic identities be established prior to delving into the questions posed in Chapter Five, in which I examine Japanese Brazilians’ ethnic identity in Brazil post-return migration, and in Chapter Six, regarding the potential relationship between ethnic identities, migration and resettlement stressors, and the mental wellbeing of Japanese Brazilians.

I Identified as Japanese in Brazil

When asked to recall how they self-identified ethnically in Brazil before migrating to Japan, most of the Japanese Brazilians interviewed for this study proudly asserted their voluntary (i.e., self-identified), pre-migratory Japanese ethnic identity. A small minority, however, expressed some dissatisfaction and even feelings of shame toward their Japanese identity pre-migration, which they explained as partially derived from being involuntarily (i.e., other-identified) ascribed the Japanese identity label by others and experiencing perceived negative discrimination.
Fortunately, I Was Japanese in Brazil before Going to Japan

Before migrating to Japan, all of my participants reported self-identifying as Japanese in Brazil. According to this study’s findings, most assumed the Japanese identity proudly, as doing so seemingly connoted one’s association with a modern, developed country, which they expressed by engaging in community events and interacting with other Japanese Brazilians.

A consistent theme in qualitative responses to the question, “How did you see yourself before leaving Brazil?” was my participants’ frequent contact with the Nikkei culture and with other Japanese descendants, which they largely discussed as elements that validated and strengthened their Japanese identity in Brazil. This is demonstrated in Gabriela’s explanation of how and why she self-identified as Japanese before migrating to Japan. Gabriela\(^{17}\), a 42-year old Nisei\(^{18}\) woman, explained:

> Oh, I considered myself Japanese [before I went to Japan]. At least in my traits, I did. I used to go to Avenida Liberdade\(^{19}\), [and] I took Japanese lessons, so I was always in touch with the Japanese culture. And besides, [among] my friends at school there were many Japanese [descendants]. So, I considered myself Japanese in Brazil.

In addition to their involvement with elements of the Japanese culture in Brazil, my participants often mentioned the positive image that is generally associated with Japan and the native Japanese in descriptions of their ethnic self-identity prior to

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\(^{17}\) Pseudonyms are used in this study to preserve my participants’ anonymity.

\(^{18}\) Second-generation Japanese

\(^{19}\) A major avenue running through the Liberdade neighborhood in São Paulo.
migrating. Some noted, in particular, the pride that they derive from their association with
the perceived positive collective image enjoyed by the Japanese in Brazil:

[I identified as] Japanese. Very, very Japanese, because Japan is a First World
country. I am proud to be a Japanese descendant. I never thought, “Oh, crap. I’m
Japanese.” [I felt] nothing like that. I’m grateful because Japan gave us the
opportunity to work there.

- Luis, 50 years old, Nisei

Unfortunately, I Was Japanese in Brazil before Going to Japan

My findings suggest that most participants happily chose to self-identify as
Japanese before migrating to Japan; however, it is also important to take notice of the few
whose Japanese self-identification occurred less willingly. While these participants
similarly self-identified as Japanese in Brazil, they nevertheless expressed displeasure
and, in some cases, even annoyance (as opposed to most participants’ pride) toward this
identity. These data indicate that this seemingly grudging acceptance of the Japanese
identity is influenced or shaped by experiences of perceived negative discrimination and
involuntary patterns of other-identification in Brazil.

As Paulo, a 41-year-old Nisei man, described, the Nikkei occasionally stand out
in Brazil due to their minority status and non-Western phenotype: “This is kind of cliché,
you know, but every person who lives in Brazil is used to saying, ‘Look at that Japanese
guy over there!’ You’re like a reference point in Brazil, right?” Evandro, a 37-year-old
Nisei man, recounted an experience similar to Paulo’s: “The strange thing is that, when
you’re in Brazil, people start referring to you as, ‘Japanese.’ I used to get offended by that. [I’d respond,] ‘Don’t call me Japanese! Call me by my real name!’”

Some Japanese Brazilians remembered this often unwanted attention as occurring particularly during their childhood years and in the school setting. Katia, a 56-year-old Nisei woman, recounted: “[I considered myself] Japanese; especially in school, right? At school, when I was growing up… Wow, they made a lot of jokes about the Japanese.” Bianca, a 50-year-old Nisei woman, described a similar experience, along with how it affected the reasoning behind her self-identity:

I think I was more Japanese [before going to Japan]. [I was] much more Japanese and, hey, that’s something that I didn’t even want to be! Why’s that? Because of school. We went through so much teasing… We were different from everyone else […] Since I started going to school, there was always that kind of thing where they’d call you, “Japanese, Japanese!” They laughed at my name, you know? [They laughed at] my Japanese name, right? They’d always find a way to make a joke… “Oh, Japanese!” It’s a kind of prejudice that they have. They think that prejudice exists only against Blacks, but it isn’t true. There’s a lot of prejudice against Asians, too. Of course, you won’t come across any issues at a bank because they think we are honest, hardworking, and all that. We’re intelligent, we have this reputation, but … At school they didn’t include me in things, they treated me differently.

While previous studies (Tsuda 2003) suggest that the differential treatment of Nikkei in Brazil often occurs in settings that are “basically neutral or playful” (61) and that, “few were bothered by it” (62), some of the recollections relayed by the Japanese Brazilians I interviewed suggest that this is not always the case. Most of the accounts of such events were presented in response to the question, “Have you ever experienced discrimination in Brazil?” and indicated that differential treatment by Brazilians was
occasionally interpreted as discrimination. My interviews with Japanese Brazilians suggest that, despite the positive image that is commonly associated with Japan and the Japanese, the benefits accompanying a Japanese self- and other-identity may, in some cases, be overshadowed by negative experiences, such as constantly being made to serve as a “reference point” in Brazil, as Evandro noted, or by being teased as schoolchildren for being of Japanese descent and/or having a Japanese name.

**I Identified as Brazilian in Japan**

Before going to Japan, I always felt a little bit Japanese, right? It was only when I went to Japan that I found that I was Brazilian […] Over here in Brazil, they call us Japanese. In Japan, they call us gaijin or Brazilian. If you look at it, we are very different culturally, right? We’re kind of like water and wine. So, that’s why we [Japanese Brazilians in Japan] soon come to realize that we really are Brazilian.

- Marcos, 38 years old, Sansei

Findings suggest that, despite their self-adopted Japanese identity in Brazil, most participants distanced themselves from this identity in Japan and replaced it with a newfound nationalized Brazilian identity. This new Brazilian self-identity was often described by my participants as a novel sense of awareness they acquired in Japan; one which allowed them to realize they are not truly Japanese but, rather, simply descendants

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20 Third-generation Japanese
of the Japanese with Japanese facial features. Vicente, a 44-year-old Sansei man explained:

To be honest, what happens is: We are descendants of the Japanese. We were born here [in Brazil]. Although we have Asian physical features, we – in our hearts – are Brazilian. So, Nikkei arrive in Japan and feel different from the others. Me, too. I also felt different because… We are Brazilian. You’re [in Japan], and you realize you’re not Japanese. You’re just a descendant of the Japanese. It’s just your ancestors’ homeland. In my mind, I was certainly aware of these differences.

Marcela, a 36-year-old Sansei woman, echoed a similar sentiment as she described how she realized she was Brazilian in Japan:

When you get [to Japan], you understand that you’re not Japanese. You just have the traits, the Asian physical features. These are features that I get from my grandparents but, internally and culturally, we’re Brazilian in all ways. All ways. We’re virtually foreign. We weren’t part of Japanese society, even if we did have all the physical features.

Two important themes emerged from my participants’ accounts of their identity-related experiences in Japan that shed light on our understanding of their adjustment to a new host country. Among the most relevant themes are those that point to potential factors involved in the emergence of the Brazilian national identity among a population that previously and, for the most part, proudly identified as Japanese. More specifically, these themes are: 1) The rise of a Brazilian national identity as a counter-identity occurred in response to perceived discrimination in Japan; and 2) Awareness of perceived
physical and cultural differences between Japanese Brazilians and the native Japanese contributed toward the development of a Brazilian national identity.

As noted by Tsuda (1999; 2001) and Phinney et al. (2001), migrants often develop a nationalized counter-identity in their host nation as a resistant and defiant response to any ethnic marginalization and discrimination they may face. Tsuda (2003) found this was the case of Japanese Brazilians in Japan: In response to ethnic discrimination, they sought to psychologically distance themselves from the native Japanese by affirming and asserting that they are not Japanese but, in reality, Brazilian. My participants presented a very similar story in accounts of their own personal experiences with discrimination and exclusion. They reported perceiving discrimination primarily in two different forms: Discrimination attributed to their national ties to Brazil Brazilian and, interestingly, discrimination attributed to their perceived cultural and social inadequacy in Japan – particularly in light of their Japanese ancestry.

I Experienced Discrimination in Japan Because of My Brazilian Nationality

My participants largely suggested that Brazil and, by association, Brazilians, are not regarded very favorably by the Japanese. When asked about how they believed Brazil and those who live there were perceived in Japan, several participants related first-hand experiences in which conversations with a native Japanese person revealed their negative perceptions of the country. Generally, images of Brazil as a retrograde Third World country seemed to prevail among the Japanese, as a question posed to 43-year-old Nisei Fernando demonstrated:
The image that the Japanese have of Brazil is that of a jungle. That’s how they see it; even nowadays […] A Japanese person once asked me, ‘Are there alligators loose on the streets?’ [The Japanese] ask some absurd questions.

Similarly, Rodrigo, a 41-year-old Sansei of mixed descent, humorously recalled, “In the factory, they were very curious about us. They’d ask, ‘What is Brazil like? Do you wear clothes there?’” Sabrina, a 58-year-old Nisei woman also recounted: “The people at the factory asked me, ‘How do you guys do it? Do you eat with your hands?’” In response to their questions, Sabrina described showing her Japanese co-workers photos of the city of São Paulo printed on postcards and telling them, “It’s just like Tokyo.” She remembered her surprised co-workers exclaiming, “Oh, I didn’t know! I thought Brazil was just the Amazon Forest!”

Tsuda (1998) suggested it is possible that the native Japanese’s negative notions of Brazil as a retrograde and somewhat uncivilized country translated into their perceptions of Japanese Brazilians as well. Accordingly, most participants reported feeling discriminated against in Japan not only because of the foreign, negative images often associated with Brazil, as noted above, but also because of their Brazilian nationality. This discrimination was often observed and felt in moderate and subtle demonstrations of prejudice, such as in questions posed about Brazil and in perceived invisible barriers that negatively affected interactions between the native Japanese and Brazilians. Daniela, a 34-year-old young mother of mixed descent, recounted a negative experience that occurred while attending a parent-teacher meeting at her young son’s
Japanese pre-school. At the meeting, Daniela noted that all mothers were Japanese, with the exception of another Brazilian woman and herself:

I attended one [meeting] and that was enough to take him out of the school. Parents go there to learn their children’s routine, but I went there and I was – I saw that the other Brazilian girl and I were isolated. The Japanese talked to each other, but they wouldn’t even think about talking to us Brazilians. You’re there, playing with your child but they’re there, talking to each other because they know each other. I asked myself, “Will my son be isolated [at the school], too?” I didn’t want that for him so I took him out of that school and enrolled him in a Brazilian school. It was something else. I didn’t really like it. I didn’t want to leave him in that kind of culture.

While not explicitly discriminatory, Daniela’s experience is consistent with what Tsuda (2003) describes as the “social veneer of politeness” (136) adopted by the Japanese and may be considered an expression of Allport’s (1979) avoidance form of rejective behavior. While not precisely polite, ignoring or marginalizing Japanese Brazilians, as Daniela experienced, is an arguably more subtle form of discrimination when compared to Japanese Brazilians’ memories of outright name-calling and jokes in school. Carlos, a 31-year-old Sansei man, similarly described another experience of perceived discrimination in which the native Japanese’s preference for avoidance behavior (as opposed to explicit, vocal discrimination) was clearly illustrated:

One day, I was in a depato\textsuperscript{21} […] and a Japanese lady came up to talk to me, and we started to talk. I spoke Japanese well, you know, almost fluently, but I had a

\textsuperscript{21} Japanese department store
slight accent when I talked. And the lady […] began to wonder about my accent. “Wow, how strange, you’re not from here, right?” I was a bit apprehensive to say I was Brazilian, but the lady kept insisting, and I ended up telling her, “I am Brazilian.” She simply looked at my face and went, “Oh, you’re Brazilian…” And she picked up her things and walked away just like that. She left me talking to myself. Wow, I was very embarrassed.

Many participants also discussed the negative image of Brazil that is presented by the media to the Japanese public and its effects on Japanese Brazilians living in Japan. As Marcela explained, Brazil is often depicted not only as a backward, Third World nation but also as a “country of impunity [where] people kill and are set free.” This perspective was also shared by Sandra, a 47-year-old Nisei woman, who expressed the similar view that there exists an excessive focus on violence in the media’s depictions of the country. Dolores, a 68-year-old Nisei woman, further suggested that as a result of this negative depiction of Brazil, the violent and criminal label associated with the country is also applied to Brazilians in general. According to Dolores, the Japanese “think that, because we’re Brazilians, we’re all thieves.”

My participants expressed the belief that Brazil’s violent and crime-ridden reputation was, therefore, also translated into discriminatory attitudes against them – particularly in the decision by some Japanese establishments to announce the arrival of Brazilians on their loudspeakers, a phenomenon documented by Shipper (2005). While most Japanese Brazilians reported hearing about these announcements, very few reported actually having heard them in person. Fifty-seven-year-old Nisei Diego is one of the few who reported hearing the announcement first-hand:
The Japanese treat us well but not so well at the same time. This was in 1994 [...] My brother, myself, and two friends went to a store, and they immediately made an announcement on their intercom system: “Brazilians have arrived. Beware.”

Most, unlike Diego, reported hearing about these announcements from friends and family members, such as Cecilia, a 36-year-old Sansei woman of mixed ancestry:

I never heard [the announcement] myself, but other Brazilians mentioned that, whenever they went to the mall, they’d play an announcement: “Ah, be careful because there are Brazilians in the establishment.”

Interestingly, while most participants primarily described these store announcements as unreasonable and prejudiced, not all of them were entirely in disagreement with the content of the messages, thereby suggesting that anti-Brazilian prejudice had become internalized to some extent (Jones 2000). Some Japanese Brazilians expressed a preference for distancing themselves from other Brazilians, albeit not negating their Brazilian identity. Thirty-three-year-old Flavia, a Nisei woman, described this sentiment as follows: “For me, it was... I could even say that it was a little embarrassing to look Brazilian because of the bad reputation that they have in some Japanese cities.” Osvaldo, a 52-year-old Nisei man, described a similar feeling of embarrassment, which translated into an occasion in which he pretended he was not Brazilian:
There was a group of drunk Brazilians on the train. The way they were dressed was horrible; they were making a racket. You could tell they were Brazilian. I think they were returning from a party, and they were struggling to purchase something on the train. The people I was with asked, “Should we help?” I said, “No, leave them.” I told the Brazilians, “Wakarimasen.” I pretended I was Japanese so that we didn’t get into trouble.

Therefore, prejudice due to associations with Brazil was, interestingly, also present among my participants.

In addition to reporting experiences of discrimination attributed to their Brazilian nationality and the often negative images associated with this identity, some Japanese Brazilians also described having experienced discrimination because of their position as manual laborers in Japan. Sandra described their status as workers in Japan as almost inherently linked to their position as Brazilian nationals for, in the eyes of the Japanese, “everyone who goes there for work is from abroad.” My participants, therefore, reported suffering greatly due to this double discrimination. Sandra explained:

Among the workers, I felt a little like a slave, right? Because in fact, they think we went there just to work, so the pressure is great on us. There are some who don’t even talk to you; they look at you with a strange look on their face. Others say they’re afraid of us.

Being a Brazilian national, therefore, was perceived by most Japanese Brazilians as a trigger for prejudice and subtle discrimination in Japan for several reasons:

22 “I don’t understand,” in Japanese.
commonly held images of Brazil as a backward, undeveloped, and violent nation, associations of Brazilians with crime and impunity, and a belief that Brazilians’ sole objective in Japan is to work. My findings largely suggest that discrimination due to Japanese Brazilians’ nationality may function to encourage the development of a Brazilian counter-identity as migrants attempt to distance themselves psychologically from the prejudiced Japanese. Nevertheless, my data also indicate that my participants may have internalized aspects of anti-Brazilian prejudice during their time in Japan. While this internalized prejudice does not significantly affect their Brazilian counter-identity in Japan, it shapes my participants’ experiences in Brazil after their return, as will be discussed in Chapter Six.

*I Experienced Discrimination in Japan Because I Am a Japanese Descendant*

Japanese Brazilians’ distinctive position as descendants returning to their ancestral homeland poses a challenge that comes in addition to those already faced by most migrants, as Japanese Brazilians must also contend with adjustment issues pertaining to their identity. As noted in Chapter Two, the popular notion that having “pure” (i.e. racially unmixed) Japanese blood is synonymous with a Japanese identity appears, at first glance, to be beneficial for those Japanese Brazilian migrants who believe a warm, familiar welcome awaits them in Japan. As Paulo explained, “You think you know the culture [and] that you’re going to do well in Japan because you have your Japanese family. You think […] you’ll be well received.” However, it is sometimes forgotten that this presumed Japanese identity is almost inextricable from the common
Japanese assumption that Japanese blood is equivalent to cultural knowledge and ease in adaptation. Osvaldo provided evidence of this in describing his superiors’ reaction to his job resignation: “When I quit my job, [the Japanese] asked me, ‘Are you a coward? Are you giving up? You’re Japanese; you have Japanese blood!’” Thus, the Japanese face and Nikkei upbringing that some migrants believed would grant them easier entry to and acceptance by Japanese society instead revealed itself to be a hindrance and, occasionally, a motive for perceived discrimination. In Paulo’s words: “It was all an illusion. On the first day this idea [of a familiar homeland] had already fallen apart.”

Therefore, as Tsuda (2000) noted, because of their Japanese ancestors and Japanese physical characteristics, Japanese Brazilians often experience greater pressure to assimilate in Japan. Accordingly, most participants recalled experiencing pressure by the Japanese to speak and understand the language fluently as well as to adjust to cultural expectations such as that of psychological strength, which Osvaldo’s experience demonstrated. Some participants also described this pressure as occasionally expressed in the form of outbursts of frustration by the native Japanese, as Diego recalled: “They got mad at me because, sometimes, I couldn’t understand them. And they’d say to me, ‘Yeah, you’re Japanese! How come you don’t understand?’ So, sometimes, I was scolded at work.”

In some occasions, the native Japanese’s disappointment at my participants’ lack of knowledge of the language was also expressed through avoidance – a form of behavior that is, once again, consistent with the Japanese culture of subtle discrimination:
You have a Japanese face, but you don’t speak, read, or write Japanese. You could say, “Oh, but my parents were Japanese, etc.” They’ll go, “Oh, yeah, yeah…” They’ll turn away and leave you there, talking to yourself. I spent a whole year eating alone, doing everything alone. Loading a five-ton truck alone. [They left me to] fend for myself.

- Osvaldo

In addition to experiencing marginalization and even admonishment for their lack of fluency in Japanese, my participants also reported perceiving their status in Japan as that of a negative minority, which occurs in stark contrast to their positive minority status in Brazil. They largely attributed their negative minority status to past and current factors, such as immigrant ancestors who the Japanese believed to be guilty of fleeing Japan and their current position as Japanese descendants who returned to their ethnic homeland as manual laborers. This is illustrated in 46-year-old Nisei Fabio’s description of how he believes the native Japanese view the Brazilian Nikkei:

Just by mentioning you’re Brazilian, they think, “These Nikkei.” They think we fled [Japan] and that we’re cowards. [They think] that we fled to Brazil during the war. So, they have this image of us descendants as losers […] In Nihon, when a Brazilian descendant goes there, he is seen as a loser or something along those lines. Sometimes, I feel that because we went to Nihon to work, the nihonjin think, “Instead of going to college, they come here to do manual labor?” That’s how I feel the nihonjin feel about the dekasegi.
By [your] style of dress and hair, everyone can tell that you are not Japanese. You can tell, because the Japanese, they have their hair dyed brown, blonde… And they apply a lot of foundation to their face, right? And they’re very skinny. The body, it speaks.

- Cecilia

My data reflect the findings of prior research and suggest that the perceived prejudice associated with my participants’ national ties to Brazil and with their identity as descendants of the Japanese is an important element in the process of ethnic identity shift that most experience in Japan. Accompanying these perceptions of prejudice is another important factor in the redefinition of their identity: my participants’ seemingly inevitable realization that Japanese Brazilian migrants are not Japanese because of cultural and, interestingly, even physical differences.

Whereas in Brazil the Nikkei self-identify as Japanese and are ascribed the Japanese identity partly because of their physical appearance (Linger 2001), this study’s findings suggest that it is precisely physical appearance that sets the Brazilian Nikkei apart from the native Japanese in Japan. Though this finding is seemingly incongruous, it is also unsurprising, as Travassos and Williams (2004) note that Brazilians are especially sensitive to racial and physical characteristics, including minor differences in skin tone. Physical differences between Japanese Brazilians and the native Japanese are noticeable
in two different ways, according to my participants: In one’s manner of dress and in the characteristics of one’s own body, such as weight, skin tone, and hairstyle.

As noted by Tsuda (2000), a common way in which Japanese Brazilians intentionally or unintentionally express their Brazilian identity in Japan is through their manner of dressing and sartorial choices. While some Japanese Brazilians may consciously choose to exaggerate their Brazilian identity through clothing, dressing as they would in Brazil was a seemingly natural and unplanned daily habit for most participants. Thus, when asked to describe what they would wear on a regular day in Japan, nearly all Japanese Brazilians responded with similar descriptions of what is seemingly a Brazilian “uniform” and often by presenting their answer as a contrast to the Japanese style of dress:

Brazilians looked at me, and they knew that I was Brazilian from the way I was dressed. I lived in T-shirts; always a T-shirt and jeans, or I would throw on a T-shirt and shorts and sneakers […] The Japanese don’t wear sneakers – just shoes and sandals.

— Stella, 29, Sansei

The strange thing is that you can tell who is Japanese and who isn’t, even among the Japanese descendants. You can tell, by the way they’re dressed, who’s Brazilian and who is not. You can tell. For example, the Japanese normally don’t wear Nike Shox. I’ve never seen the Japanese wear them, at least. Even in Tokyo, I never saw it. Now, if you see a Japanese-looking person with slanted eyes and wearing a T-shirt, jeans, and Nike Shox, you know he’s Brazilian. You can tell by what he’s wearing. It’s amazing, but you can tell.

— Evandro
My findings suggest, therefore, that the way Japanese Brazilians dressed themselves in Japan served as a visible marker of their Brazilian identity. Additionally, despite their negative minority status as Brazilians, none of the migrants interviewed for this study attempted to conceal their identity by consciously and purposefully adapting to the Japanese way of dressing. Rather, comparisons between the Japanese and Brazilian styles yielded some interesting opinions on Brazilians’ perceived superiority in matters of fashion and style, as Gabriela exemplifies:

Everyone who looked at me could tell I wasn’t Japanese by the way I dressed. You can clearly tell a Brazilian woman from a Japanese woman. I think Brazilians know much more about what looks good, you know. The Japanese women don’t really care, no. They have their own style, [they’re] very fashionable, but Brazilians are much more so.

These findings demonstrate that Japanese Brazilians adopt and embrace a Brazilian identity in Japan and often express it in the way they dress, as it is the most conspicuous marker of their ethnic identity. However, in addition to dressing differently from the Japanese, Japanese Brazilians also described feeling that their own physical characteristics contributed toward a distinction from the native Japanese population, thereby reinforcing their Brazilian identity in Japan. Many participants noted differences between the Japanese and Brazilian body types: while the native Japanese were described as having leaner, thinner physiques, Japanese Brazilians were noted to be noticeably less slim. As Maria, a 44-year-old Nisei woman explained, “If you go to Japan, they won’t
say you’re Japanese just because you have the same features. Despite having the same slanted eyes, we’re chubbier. The Japanese are very, very skinny.” Japanese Brazilians also identified a general difference in the Brazilian Nikkei’s skin tone in comparison to the Japanese. Marcela noted, “We are darker. The Japanese are very pale; they wear SPF 50 sunscreen. They’re so afraid of the sun that they even look like Michael Jackson!” Sabrina expressed the belief that this difference in skin tone might have even led others to regard her as neither Brazilian nor Japanese, but as Peruvian – an idea she found humorous:

They didn’t think I was a Japanese person because of my skin color […] My father’s from [the Japanese city of] Kumamoto and people from Kumamoto are darker. There were a lot of Peruvians in Japan, so I was always mistaken for a Peruvian (laughs).

My participants often mentioned the Japanese’s choice of hair color as another physical feature that serves to differentiate between the two groups. Whereas most described themselves as preferring to maintain the naturally black color of their hair, the Japanese were perceived to be fond of dyeing their hair brown or blond. After having her shoulder-length hair dyed a copper shade of brown, for instance, Gabriela reported receiving comments about how she looked, “really Japanese.”

My findings suggest, therefore, that a barrier of physical appearance also exists between the native Japanese and the Japanese Brazilians. As was found to be the case with the Japanese style of dress, none of the Japanese Brazilians interviewed for this
study reported making a conscious decision to alter their physical appearance in order to emulate the Japanese’s outward appearance, though it appears it would, for the most part, be easy to do so. Rather, Japanese Brazilians portrayed the Japanese style as less visually appealing than the Brazilian style, as Gabriela explained earlier in this discussion, and described the Japanese preference for pale skin by amusingly referencing Michael Jackson. These emerging themes are in support of the notion of the Brazilian national identity serving as a counter-identity, as the attitudes expressed by my participants may be interpreted as a resistance to comply with Japanese standards.

I Said “Onaji,” they said “Isshou”: Perceptions of Cultural Difference

Despite Japanese Brazilians’ expectations of an ethnic homeland in which they would encounter a familiar Japanese culture similar to the one passed down by their parents and grandparents, migrants actually reported experiencing a very different reality. What they anticipated would be a cultural bridge connecting the native Japanese to Japanese Brazilians was often described as a cultural barrier dividing the two populations, which, along with experiences of perceived discrimination and perceived physical differences, reinforced the awareness of a national Brazilian ethnic identity among many of my participants.

A consistent and important theme in my participants’ descriptions of this cultural barrier is the obstacle posed by difficulties associated with the Japanese language. In addition to the issues of perceived discrimination already discussed, Japanese Brazilians noted that not knowing how to speak Japanese or, in some cases, believing they knew the
language only to realize the Japanese they learned in Brazil is very different from the one generally spoken in Japan, served to marginalize and isolate the Brazilian Nikkei from the general Japanese population. As Evandro explained, several Japanese Brazilians were surprised to find a different kind of Japanese being spoken in Japan, which posed a challenge for some:

I thought I [knew Japanese] (laughs). I took lessons from my grandfather, and my parents always mixed Portuguese and Japanese. [The Japanese] use some words that you don’t understand. It’s very different, but I was able to take care of myself. In the beginning, I suffered a little; I had to study hard. It took me a couple of years or so to be able to carry a conversation normally.

Pedro, a 52-year-old Nisei man, attributed this linguistic difference to learning Japanese from grandparents and parents whose vocabulary remained static and did not accompany any linguistic developments in Japan:

We, Nikkei in Brazil, use an old vocabulary: the vocabulary of our ancestors. So, we have a dialect, right? We say, “benjo” right? Today, it’s an old word actually, because the current Japanese [language] has modernized and the word has turned into *toire*. This word comes from the United States, so it’s a chic term now, right? If we talk to several [Japanese] descendants of a certain age, they’ll say, “onaji,” “oni.” It is the [modern] Japanese’s *isshou*, right? I used to say, “onaji,” but it was not *onaji*. It was *isshou*. Weird, right? I thought it was

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23 The term *benjo* is commonly used among Brazilian Nikkei to refer to the toilet.
24 *Toire* is the Japanese word for “toilet.”
25 Among Brazilian Nikkei, *onaji* is used to denote sameness or similarity.
26 Among Brazilian Nikkei, *isshou* is believed to mean, “together.”
strange. They’d say, “isshou,” and I thought it meant together with other people. But no, it meant similar. I said, “onaji;” they said, “isshou.”

Thus, it is not surprising that most participants – including those who reported some knowledge of Japanese prior to migrating – cited linguistic barriers as a significant challenge in Japan. Moreover, difficulties associated with speaking the language were described as a factor that made establishing friendships with the Japanese a problematic endeavor. Stella, for instance, explained that her interactions with the native Japanese occurred primarily in the factory and work settings, where the environment was not particularly conducive to developing friendships. While she expressed an interest in inviting her Japanese co-workers to join her in leisurely activities outside of work, Stella explained this never happened because of linguistic difficulties:

We never invited the Japanese girls to hang out with us […] They didn’t feel comfortable around Brazilians because they couldn’t understand what we said, and we often didn’t really know how to talk to them. So, we didn’t even invite them. Both sides felt out of place and couldn’t understand the other, so… We interacted mostly at the factory. It was easier.

Additional findings also suggest that challenges in linguistic comprehension were not the only way in which the Japanese-Portuguese barrier posed a significant obstacle to social interaction between the two groups, as Stella described above. In addition to difficulties understanding each other’s language, some Japanese Brazilians’ scarce knowledge of Japanese, combined with feelings of perceived prejudice, contributed
toward a self-imposed barrier against interactions with the Japanese. As my participants discussed, language difficulties were occasionally associated with feelings of suspicion regarding the Japanese’s words and motives. Renata, a 39-year-old Sansei woman who reported understanding very little Japanese, described how the language barrier affected her social life in Japan:

[In Japan], you don’t speak the language, so you assume everything. Like, "Oh, I think that person is saying this." So, you come up with a pessimistic story in your head; you create this scenario in your head and you live according to what you believe, right? If you're in Japan, you aren’t able to approach a Japanese woman and ask her what she's talking about. So, you can only guess she said this and that’s it. […] And then you become antisocial in Japan, right? You [become] antisocial because you can’t talk to the people who live there, because [you don’t know] the language.

Monica, a 64-year-old Nisei woman, addressed this issue further by explaining how an outdated knowledge of Japanese and doubts associated with perceptions of prejudice negatively affected her interactions with the native Japanese:

There was a very nice gentleman who lived near me. He always greeted me. He was nothing like… He wasn’t racist, he wasn’t. But you know, the Japanese will always be Japanese. We would get a little suspicious of them. Is he being sincere when he greets me or not? So there are doubts like these that block friendships between them and us. If we were able to speak to them normally, it wouldn’t be this way.
As these quotes illustrate, though some Japanese Brazilians may have wished to engage the native Japanese in conversation or in social activities, insufficient or old-fashioned knowledge of modern Japanese, along with precipitate suspicions of prejudice, hindered such interactions.

Further establishing their outsider status, difficulties with the language often forced Japanese Brazilians to identify themselves clearly as foreigners or Brazilians to the Japanese person with whom they were speaking. Among my participants, this seemed to occur most frequently when they required assistance with directions and/or with reading kanji characters. Because of their Japanese facial features, my participants explained that the native Japanese frequently assumed them to be proficient in the language; thus, they were often confused and occasionally indignant upon being asked for directions when a sign containing the answer to the Japanese Brazilians’ questions was noticeably visible nearby. Guilherme, a 52-year-old Nisei man recalled:

Because I have this Japanese face, they assumed I knew Japanese, right? When I approached the man and asked him for directions in Japanese, he looked at my face and went, ‘Huh?’ Like I was fooling him or something. He said something like, ‘Hey, your answer is right over there, in writing. All you have to do is read.’

Following this encounter, Guilherme explained that he came to understand how to approach the Japanese in a manner that would not lead them to assume he was fluent in Japanese: From that incident onward, he began every request for help by saying, “Sumimasen, gaikokujin dakara...” or, “Excuse me, I’m a foreigner…” Luis recounted a
similar strategy for overcoming communication challenges associated with erroneous assumptions regarding his Japanese face. Whenever he approached a Japanese person for assistance, Luis explained, he would begin by saying, “Look, I’m Brazilian. I’m a foreigner, and I need help.” Similarly, Fernando also reported identifying himself as *gaikokujin*\(^{27}\) in conversations with the Japanese – a practice he adopted after a difficult visit to a candy store:

> I went to the *mise*, to the candy store, and wow, I really wanted to try that candy! My stories are always about food (laughs). Anyway, I asked the *nihonjin* [in Japanese], “How much is this candy?” and “What is this candy called?” And he said, “Can’t you read? It says so right there!”

As these examples illustrate, some Japanese Brazilians had very few options but to recognize and admit to their own foreignness and non-Japanese identity in Japan in order to function productively within its society and consequently experience less conflict with the native Japanese.

In addition to linguistic differences, most participants also noted some differences in the generalized personality traits of Brazilian Nikkei and the native Japanese, as a constant theme in my participants’ discussion of interactions with the Japanese is the perception that they are quieter, colder and more closed-off relative to the Brazilian Nikkei. Noticeably soft-spoken and a self-described shy and quiet man, Luis noted with a laugh that, “next to the Japanese, you’d think I was extroverted.” Painting a contrasting

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\(^{27}\) Foreigner in Japanese
image between themselves and the native Japanese, most participants were consistent in their description of Brazilians as a group of people characterized by the warmth they exhibit toward others, including strangers. Furthermore, Japanese Brazilians perceived Brazilians to benefit from a natural ease in communicating with and helping others, along with enjoying a predisposition toward excitement, happiness, and a sense of typically Brazilian perseverance. This general description of Brazilians is in stark dissimilarity to Japanese Brazilians’ depiction of the Japanese, who 36-year-old Marcela described as, “extremely polite, extremely disciplined, but cold.” Among the examples Japanese Brazilians cited to illustrate the Japanese’s seemingly cold behavior were a perceived lack of hospitality toward outsiders, weak sense of attachment to family members, avoidance of physical touch, and preference for minimal conversation. Evandro used personal experience to illustrate this perceived cultural difference between Japanese Brazilians and the native Japanese:

I think my communicative side is Brazilian. For example, in the elevator with a stranger, [I’ll] greet them, try to engage them in small talk, anything. This is something that the Japanese don’t do. The Japanese will hardly come up to a stranger and start talking. At most, they’ll say good morning but continue facing forward. They don’t engage in conversation. At least not the ones I met… It was very difficult […] The Japanese I had contact with were very cold.

Such cultural disparities, therefore, reinforced the distinction between the native Japanese and Brazilians by not only exposing their differences but by obstructing friendships across both groups as well. The Japanese, Rodrigo noted, “aren’t really used
to Brazilian behavior,” thereby impeding Japanese Brazilians’ smooth integration into the host society. As Guilherme explained:

We’re used to Brazilians. Brazilians meet people on the street and strike up friendships. And pretty soon you’re sitting down with that person, talking, going out and everything. So, it’s totally different. In Japan, it’s not like that. The Japanese aren’t like this. So, when it came to relationships, I thought they were a little distant.

In addition to the personality distinction that is perceived to exist between Japanese Brazilians and the native Japanese, as well as the hindrance it poses to friendly social interactions between the two groups, it is also important to note how participants framed and presented these comparisons. While the Japanese were generally described as a cold and quiet people that are not very fond of conversations with strangers, Brazilians described themselves as almost the exact (and more favorable) opposite: warm, caring individuals who are always ready to help out a fellow stranger. Once again, in these opposite comparisons, it is possible to find confirmation of my participants’ psychological and social distancing from the Japanese in a manner that exalts their own qualities while lowering those of the native Japanese. This is in line with Tsuda’s (2003) notion of the Brazilian national identity as a counter-identity, as by presenting themselves as the Japanese’s more social counterparts, Japanese Brazilians demonstrated their self-consciousness as Brazilian nationals and their unwillingness to conform to Japan’s cultural standards and expectations.
Assimilationist Tendencies and a Mixed Ethnic Identity

Tsuda (2003) noted that, despite the Brazilian counter-identity that most Japanese Brazilians come to develop in Japan and the resistant attitude toward Japanese culture that often accompanies it, a minority of Brazilian Nikkei migrants are assimilation-oriented. In other words, a small number of Japanese Brazilian migrants prefer to assimilate to the Japanese culture, possibly as a way to diminish cognitive dissonance or to evade the stigma that is generally attached to the Brazilian identity in Japan. While, as Tsuda (2003) notes, those with assimilationist tendencies eventually come to acknowledge and even affirm their Brazilian identity in Japan, the period preceding this is generally characterized by some confusion regarding their ethnic identity in Japan.

Only three of my 38 participants demonstrated being assimilation-oriented. One such assimilation-oriented migrant is Monica who, prior to migrating to Japan, was immersed in the Nikkei culture as a Japanese language teacher at a Nikkei association. Her father, a Japanese teacher himself, had educated his children primarily in Japanese and would entertain them with Japanese legends and stories about his prior life in Japan. His stories, along with his accounts of the superiority of the Japanese, Monica explained, made her feel pride in her ethnic origin from a very young age. Therefore, in search of her father’s Japan and a better financial situation, Monica migrated to Japan in 1999, where she remained until her return to Brazil in 2014. Speaking with a strong Japanese accent and interspersing Japanese words and phrases in an otherwise Brazilian Portuguese account of her time in Japan, Monica expressed indecisiveness toward her
ethnic identity. At times asserting her Japanese identity and at other times contradicting herself by affirming she was Brazilian, Monica explained her belief that Brazilians should assimilate to the prevailing culture in Japan:

There’s a saying that goes, “Gou ni itte, gou ni shitagae.” When in Rome, do as the Romans do. If you’re in Japan, you have to adapt to their culture and abide by the Japanese law [...] Brazilians have to be aware of all of this. You can’t do things in Japan the same way you did them in Brazil, because it won’t work. You can’t go there and make a mess, make churrasco, make all of that smoke, throwing your garbage away wherever you please, whenever you please. That’s what’s wrong [with Brazilians]. You have to have a lot of respect for the Japanese. You can’t fight back. You have to be polite.

Monica also seemingly continued to retain the positive image that is associated with the Japanese in Brazil, as she described the Japanese as “gentler and more polite” than Brazilians. She explained how she sought to absorb and preserve these characteristics in herself as a part of her Japanese identity that she did not want to lose and also as a way of differentiating herself from the Brazilians in Japan, who she described as acting “stupidly.”

However, while Monica appeared to attempt to separate herself from Brazilians in descriptions of her experiences in Japan, she nevertheless also described often participating in Brazilian activities with Brazilian friends, including preparations of churrasco, as well as keeping in touch with the Brazilian culture through a Brazilian cable channel and Brazilian magazines and newspapers. Furthermore, she rejoiced in the

\[28\] When in the village, do as the villagers do.
\[29\] Brazilian barbeque.
availability of Brazilian restaurants, such as *pastelarias*\textsuperscript{30} and *churrascarias*, where *coxinhas*\textsuperscript{31} were readily available. Similarly, she expressed appreciation for Brazilian get-togethers and parties, which make migrants feel “like we’re in Brazil.”

Despite her self-described involvement in and attempts to stay in touch with the culture, however, Monica also surprisingly expressed her dissatisfaction with some celebrations of Brazilian culture in Japan, such as Carnaval:

Brazilian Japanese descendants dancing samba, wearing those things… It doesn’t look good (laughs). I felt so strange. I thought it was kind of ridiculous, too. They don’t do that here in Brazil. If they were here in Brazil, they wouldn’t be doing it. Why were they doing it in Japan? In Brazil, people find these celebrations beautiful, but it’s one thing to see a beautiful brunette woman dancing samba… Japanese descendants, the Japanese doing these things… It doesn’t look good. I felt kind of weird.

Monica is, therefore, a prime example of a Japanese Brazilian migrant with assimilationist tendencies and experiencing what Erikson (1980) described as identity diffusion, or the inability to associate oneself with a single identity. As she explained, “I never felt Japanese in Japan. I’m Brazilian. But I liked Japan; I only spoke Japanese there. Ah, I’m very divided [when it comes to my identity]. I can’t be entirely Brazilian or entire Japanese either.”

\textsuperscript{30} Casual fast food shops that primarily serve *pastel*, or deep-fried rectangular pockets of thin dough with assorted fillings.

\textsuperscript{31} Chicken leg-shaped fried dough filled with shredded chicken. Typically consumed as a snack.
Discussion and Conclusion

Most of my Japanese Brazilian participants reported identifying as Japanese before migrating to Japan. This identity largely benefitted them due to the stereotypically positive, modern image that Japan typically conjures in the mind of Brazilians, and because of the favorable character traits that are usually associated with Japanese descendants in Brazil. In addition, my participants’ involvement with activities, places, and individuals associated with the Japanese culture in Brazil was often cited as confirmation of their Japanese ethnic identity before migrating. Each of these findings is consistent with prior work (Tsuda 2003; Linger 2001).

My participants’ accounts of the Japanese other-identity and ascribed label in Brazil occasionally mentioned experiences of negative discrimination in which they were the subject of mean-spirited, unsolicited jokes, comments, and attention. Interestingly, these experiences diverge from previous (Tsuda 2003) findings that potentially discriminatory acts are generally interpreted in a relaxed or neutral manner, as some of my participants described feeling defensive and upset with this unwanted attention. Nevertheless, these negative experiences also seemingly served to reinforce the Japanese identity of some participants, as they were considered as confirmation of the differences between themselves and Western Brazilians. Furthermore, while negative discriminatory experiences called attention to the Nikkei’s discerning features in a largely Western society, these differences were also often associated with their positive minority status, from which most participants derived a sense of pride.
In Japan, most of my participants demonstrated the fluidity and flexibility of ethnic identity by coming to the realization that their actual identity was not Japanese, but Brazilian. This realization occurred in association with my participants’ perception of cultural and physical differences between the native Japanese and themselves, as well as a defiant reaction to the discrimination they experienced in Japan. Upon realizing that the native Japanese were physically unlike Japanese Brazilians in their style of dress, skin tone, body type, and even hair color choices, a dividing line between them began to be drawn. This line was cemented further by perceived differences in the Japanese cold behavior versus the warm Brazilian attitude. My participants’ redefinition of their ethnic identity from Japanese to Brazilian – motivated by perceptions of cultural and physical differences between themselves and the native Japanese – support and confirm existing research on the variability of one’s identity as a self-concept that is shaped and molded by social and contextual factors (Phinney et al. 2001; Erikson 1994; Goffman 1959; Root 2002; Rockquemore and Brunsma 2002; Rockquemore et al. 2009).

Burdened by their Japanese ancestry, blood, and physiognomy, many participants described being met by the Japanese expectation that they would be fluent in the Japanese language, knowledgeable about the country’s customs, and would conform to the culture’s behavioral expectations. However, failing to live up to the native Japanese’s expectations associated with the “myth of Japanese homogeneity” (Howell 1996:172) or the government-supported belief that Japanese cultural essence is intrinsically intertwined with “pure” Japanese blood, many participants described feeling pressured, mistreated, and discriminated by the native Japanese. An additional layer of discrimination was added to my participants’ negative experiences in the form of the subtle discrimination
associated with their Brazilian nationality. As described by my participants, adverse perceptions of Brazil as a backwards and uncivilized Third World country likely influenced their experience of variant forms of subtle discrimination from the Japanese. Once again, these findings generally support the notion of a Japanese “social veneer of politeness” (Tsuda 2003:136) and the subtlety of Japanese discrimination (Lebra 1976), as well as previous studies’ findings of nationality-based discrimination against Japanese Brazilians in Japan (De Carvalho 2003).

Consistent with Tsuda’s (2003) prior observations, the discrimination reported by my participants interestingly contributed toward the formation of a Brazilian counter-identity, one that allows Japanese Brazilians to distance themselves socially and psychologically from the Japanese identity they once held in high regard in Brazil. Despite the anti-Brazilian prejudice perceived by my participants in Japan, they nevertheless turned to their Brazilian self-aspect as a protective buffer against negative feelings associated with their failed expectations of an ethnic homecoming and their inability to conform to the myth of ethnic homogeneity. In doing so, they deemphasized the importance of their Japanese heritage as an identity or as a “source of self-evaluation” (Thoits 1999:360) and changed the way they viewed themselves as a coping mechanism (Linville 1987; Stryker and Burke 2000). My participants’ distancing from the Japanese identity is strongly expressed in and reinforced by their aforementioned perceptions of difference relative to the Japanese, as is clearly evident in their framing of such dissimilarities: While the Japanese are often discussed in an unfavorable light, Brazilian characteristics – particularly human warmth – are mostly exalted by Japanese Brazilians.
However, though most identified as Brazilian in Japan in manners consistent with the notion of a counter-identity, not all Japanese Brazilians reported doing so. Monica, possibly because of a particularly Japanese upbringing in Brazil – one in which she was taught from an early age to speak Japanese and was exposed to elements of the Japanese culture – expressed assimilationist tendencies and, therefore, a more favorable view of Japan and the Japanese in addition to a preference for adapting and adjusting to Japanese society while distancing herself behaviorally from Brazilians. While she did not identify completely as Japanese, she did not identify as entirely Brazilian either, therefore existing in a liminal state between the two ethnic identities. Monica, thus, seemingly lives in a state of ethnic confusion that strongly resembles Rockquemore and Brunsma’s (2002) notion of a transcendent identity; however, while transcendent individuals generally find themselves at ease with not having a defined identity, my assimilationist and identity-less participants expressed confusion and, to some extent, frustration at their perceived lack of a homeland.

My participants described the existence of an invisible barrier between the native Japanese and Japanese Brazilian migrants in Japan – a division that is unique in its derivation from the perceived validity of blood and phenotype in determining one’s ethnic and cultural knowledge and behavior. While most Japanese Brazilians arrive in Japan with the anticipation that their shared cultural past and roots will grant them a warm reception and easy adaptation to the country, they encounter, instead, a perceived barrier of prejudice and preconceived notions that obstructs their full integration into Japanese society. Likewise, the native Japanese’s expectations that the Nikkei are fluent in Japanese and familiar with the Japanese culture as it exists in modern Japan are
frequently not met, which often results in feelings of inferiority and insignificance among Japanese Brazilians (Asakura and Murata 2006). Thus, in keeping with previous research (Tsuda 2003; De Carvalho 2003), this study’s findings point to disappointment, a failure to fulfill expectations by both sides, and perceived experiences of discrimination as sources of marginalization that contribute to the Japanese Brazilians’ formation of a Brazilian counter-identity. More specifically, upon being pressured by the native Japanese to possess and demonstrate a high degree of cultural and linguistic knowledge but failing to comply, most Japanese Brazilians develop a sense of self-consciousness that points to their inferior social position as Brazilian foreigners in Japan and not, as they previously saw themselves, Japanese.

This chapter, therefore, makes important contributions to the existing literature by strengthening and supporting previous findings regarding the changes in ethnic identification that Japanese Brazilian migrants experience as they move from Brazil to Japan. In addition, it points to perceptions of negative discrimination as yet another (mostly unaddressed) factor that may influence their self-identification as Japanese in Brazil in the pre-migration period. However, while the findings of this dissertation research are broadly similar to those of its predecessors, they are not entirely alike: This study also makes an important contribution to the existent literature by noting that Japanese Brazilians’ identification as Japanese in Brazil is not entirely derived from processes and dynamics of self-identification associated with what are perceived to be positive Japanese attributes and neutral or positive experiences of racial awareness incited by others. Rather, these data suggest that Japanese Brazilians’ self-identity may also be a compliant response to what they perceive as an often unsolicited and
occasionally discriminatory Japanese label that is ascribed to them by Brazilians of non-Japanese descent in Brazil.

Furthermore, this chapter begins to suggest a parallel between Rockquemore et al.’s (2009) theory of multiracial identity development and the possible idea of multiethnic identity development. As Rockquemore et al. (2009), Herman (2010), and Saperstein and Penner (2012) discuss, it is important to recognize the difference between racial identity, racial identification, and racial category, as it is possible that, among some populations – particularly multicultural ones – an individual’s identification may differ from his/her identity due to physical appearance, social context, and other factors. A similar phenomenon seemingly occurs among Japanese Brazilians in Japan and in Brazil; however, this phenomenon does not necessarily pertain only to the individual’s race but rather, to his/her ethnicity as well – a personal feature that is arguably less visible than race and potentially more complicated to assess by others and, as is the case of Monica, even by oneself. The idea of multiethnic identity development becomes even more intricate when the superficial physical similarities (especially to unfamiliar eyes) between the native Japanese and Japanese Brazilians are considered.

In short, just as studies on multiracial identity development argue for the importance of differentiating between racial identity, identification, and category, this dissertation chapter suggests that the same may be said of ethnic identity. Additionally, it suggests that, as is the case with race, it is important to consider ethnicity as a variable and personal characteristic that may not be solely defined by place of birth or family ancestry. This idea is likely to become of greater importance in the near future, as “homecoming” migration movements become more prevalent and the meanings of
community, tradition, and home continue to develop and change (Giddens 1991; Malkki 1997). While the notion of multiethnic identities has been addressed in the field of psychology, a gap still exists in the sociological literature. The uniqueness of the Japanese Brazilian “return-return” migrant population only stands to contribute positively to this idea of mutable multiethnic identities.

This chapter additionally calls attention to the subjective and flexible nature of the terms “race” and “ethnicity” across cultures, but particularly as they are understood by a culturally ambiguous population, such as the Japanese Brazilians interviewed for this study. As the definition of and distinction between these two terms are somewhat unclear and vague for my participants, this dissertation approaches race and ethnicity as separate but not mutually exclusive concepts (Cornell and Hartmann 2007). In doing so, it accommodates my participants’ perspectives while allowing for the recognition of physical characteristics as important elements of one’s ethnic identity.

In addition to largely supporting existing research (Linger 2001; Tsuda 2000, 2003), the findings of this chapter begin to suggest a different interpretation and application of Rockquemore et al.’s (2009) theory of multiracial identity development. Now that it has been established and confirmed that most Japanese Brazilians chose to identify as Japanese in Brazil and Brazilian in Japan, this study will move forward to explore how the ethnic identities of Japanese Brazilians may or may not undergo further modifications upon their return to Brazil. By examining the second return movement of a return-return migrant population, this study makes an important and novel contribution to the literature. While studies extensively address migrant’s return to their cultural
homeland, a review of the literature was unable to locate any examinations of their return to the country of origin. This will be examined in Chapter Five.
Chapter Five

“I have a Japanese Soul but a Brazilian Heart”:

Examining the Ethnic Identities of Japanese Brazilians

Post-Return Migration in Brazil

Introduction

While Chapter Four explored how Japanese Brazilians self-identified ethnically in Brazil (pre-migration) and during their sojourn as laborers in Japan, this chapter proceeds to examine the ethnic self-identity of Japanese Brazilians in Brazil following their return from Japan. More specifically, this chapter addresses the ethnic self-identity of Japanese Brazilian “return-return” migrants by exploring how they come to view and describe themselves in Brazil after living and working in Japan, as well as the factors that are potentially associated with the self-identity they eventually develop. Additionally, this chapter examines how this identity is expressed in descriptions of my participants’ self-perceptions and behavior. Therefore, Chapter Five answers the following research questions:

1. How do Japanese Brazilians negotiate their ethnic identities in Brazil after returning from Japan?
2. How are these ethnic identities influenced by their perceptions of Japan, Brazil, and their cultures?

3. How do Japanese Brazilians’ self-perceptions reflect these ethnic identities?

By addressing these questions, this chapter stands to make an important general contribution to the current sociological understanding of ethnicity and identity, as it continues to enhance and strengthen the notion of flexible ethnic identities discussed previously, while also calling attention to the significance of understanding and acknowledging the differences between processes of self- and other-identification. Additionally, on a more specific level, the findings presented in this chapter begin to fill an important gap in the academic literature concerning Japanese Brazilian “return-return” migrants in Brazil. While research on Japanese Brazilians and their Brazilian counter-identity in Japan is plentiful, questions regarding their identities after their return to Brazil remain largely unexamined. More specifically, the possibility of another redefining of ethnic identity occurring upon their return to Brazil, as well as the migration- and identity-related factors potentially associated with this switch are generally unaddressed by existing research. Thus, the currently available literature tells only two-thirds of the story of Japanese Brazilians’ self-identities, and this chapter aims to begin to complete it. Furthermore, as the larger literature on “return-return” migrants similarly neglects to examine the experiences of this population upon their return to their country of birth, this chapter also aims to make a wider contribution to our general knowledge of migration and identity.
As discussed in Chapter Four, most Japanese Brazilians reported self-identifying as Japanese in Brazil prior to their first migration and Brazilian in Japan; however, significant emerging themes in my participants’ interviews suggest that, after their return to Brazil, most Japanese Brazilians seemingly experience the emergence of a new ethnic identity that merges the Japanese and Brazilian identities into one. My findings further suggest that a minority of participants, on the other hand, describe themselves as possessing an undefined identity upon their return to Brazil. Thus, the main themes pertaining to my participants’ ethnic identification in Brazil post-return migration identified in this study’s interviews were: 1) I feel Japanese and Brazilian; 2) I was born in Brazil and display Brazilian characteristics in my personality, but I do not feel entirely Brazilian; 3) I returned to Brazil feeling more Japanese, but I do not identify as exclusively Japanese; and 4) I returned to Brazil feeling as if I have no country.

From Japanese to Brazilian to “Right in the Middle”

I would say I have a Japanese soul but a Brazilian heart.

- Denise, 39, Sansei

Denise’s response to the question, “Nowadays, do you think you identify more closely with the Brazilian or the Japanese culture?” accurately reflects the sentiment expressed by most of my participants that, currently, they do not perceive themselves to
be defined by a single ethnic identity. Rather, as emerging themes in this study’s interviews indicate, most participants described experiencing a strengthening of their Japanese characteristics in Brazil as “return-return” migrants, in addition to a desire to maintain contact with the Japanese culture – all while nevertheless continuing to express awareness and acceptance of their own Brazilian characteristics and biographical attachment to Brazil. Thus, most of the elements that my participants drew upon to justify their Japanese identity prior to migrating – namely, stereotypical Japanese traits and activities – were, interestingly, once again cited as evidence of the Japanese portion of their identity in Brazil post-return migration; however, after my participants’ return to Brazil, these elements were presented in conjunction with Brazilian characteristics as well.

*Elements of a Japanese Identity: There Are Certain Japanese Habits We Don’t Forget*

Overall findings for this study indicate that, after their return to Brazil, Japanese Brazilians possibly experience a blurring of the once well-defined line that separated them from the native Japanese in Japan. Accordingly, my findings suggest that, unlike what they described experiencing in Japan, most no longer fully reject the Japanese identity when they return to Brazil. This was largely suggested by my participants when they were posed the question, “How do you feel about yourself now that you are back in Brazil?” In their responses, most described returning to Brazil feeling “more Japanese” than they did prior to migrating, which some participants explained as a consequence of
the characteristics and customs they gradually came to absorb in Japan. Furthermore, all participants discussed the traits and customs they acquired in Japan in a positive manner, as Katia demonstrated:

"I think I’m more Japanese nowadays [than I was before I went to Japan]. I wanted to bring good things back with me from Japan to Brazil, and I think it worked, you know? I think it did."

Upon reflecting on how his personality and mindset have changed after living and working in Japan, Paulo explained that, “as much as we take our own Brazilian culture to Japan, we end up absorbing some of their culture, too.” Among the positive elements of Japanese culture my participants mentioned embracing, timeliness, cleanliness, and respect were among the most cited. Cecilia, for instance, described becoming more aware of the importance of being on time after her experience in Japan:

“My way of looking at things became more Japanese. I don’t really like lateness, you know? I’m a bit, like… I got used to how time works [in Japan]. If you’re supposed to start work at 8, but you start at 8:01, they discount fifteen minutes from your salary, you know? So if, like, I’m on time, but the other person arrives late, that’s a lack of respect. My husband reminds me, “You’re not in Japan, you're in Brazil. You're in Brazil.” […] But when it comes to time, we have to respect others.

Similarly to Cecilia, Diego described becoming more aware of the importance of timeliness in addition to developing an appreciation for order and organization in Japan."
Consequently, the traits he learned during his sojourn in Japan, Diego explained, often lead to some frustration in daily interactions with his wife, who is also a second-generation Japanese descendant but has never visited Japan:

I see my wife for example: She leaves things anywhere. I don’t like that. Before, I didn’t care as much. Today I care. Things have to be in their right place, right? If you took it, you should put it back where you found it. And… time. I’m crazy about being on time. I have to be on time. I’ll say, “Oh, let's go out at ten.” Ten o'clock comes around... I’ll say, “Let’s go?” She’ll say, “Oh, wait a little longer, I have to do I-don’t-know-what.” So… I changed a lot.

Bianca, likewise, described another example of how she adopted the perceived Japanese habits of order and cleanliness, which she believes differentiate her from the general population in Brazil, and how she currently applies them in her daily life in Brazil:

I picked up a lot of Japanese traits. A lot, a lot [of traits]. I think that my way of speaking… There’s a lot about my way of behaving as well, [my way] of thinking. For example, a small example, but getting rid of a candy wrapper… In Japan, you don’t throw it on the ground, on the street; even if it’s the street, you just don’t do it. So, I keep [the wrapper] in my handbag. There are certain Japanese habits we don’t forget, so we absorb them; we think they’re good and stick to them. That’s about it. Why should I throw [the wrapper] on the floor? I see everyone doing it in Brazil. I could do it, too, but that’s when this awareness that it’s not correct to do so comes in.
Additionally, other participants described adopting and applying some elements of the Japanese tradition inside their homes as well. Forty-eight-year old Julia, a second-generation Japanese Brazilian, explained that, while she used to “eat normally” before migrating to Japan, her daughters and she decided to no longer use plates and forks for their meals after returning to Brazil. Rather, they substituted plates for chawan\(^{32}\) and forks for hashi\(^{33}\), which she described as, “something we got used to doing in Japan.”

Fernando, likewise, noted that living in Japan influenced his family’s behavior at home. Whereas previously he would enter his family home wearing shoes, Fernando noted that, like the Japanese, he now makes sure to remove them when he arrives:

I lived a long time in Nihon, a long time in Japan, so I ended up adopting their customs and bringing them here. Even inside the house, I take my shoes off. Everyone… Sometimes, there are visitors, so we’ll give them some slippers and explain, “It’s not that we want to make people uncomfortable, but it’s a custom that we have.” And, actually, our visitors usually feel more at ease without their shoes on.

In addition to perceiving an increase in or a strengthening of their Japanese characteristics, most participants also described making a conscious effort to participate in activities and associations related to the Japanese culture as it exists in Brazil. When asked if they still kept in touch with some aspect of the Japanese culture after returning to Brazil, many participants mentioned being part of one of many Japanese cultural associations (or kaikan) that exist in São Paulo, participating in weekly karaoke competitions, and/or attending Japanese cultural festivals, such as Festival do Japão,

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\(^{32}\) A bowl used for drinking tea but also used for eating rice.

\(^{33}\) Chopsticks.
which is held yearly in the city. Some participants also noted that, because they work in
the Liberdade neighborhood, they are also in constant contact with other Japanese
Brazilians. While some, like Sabrina, claimed they had so many options to keep in touch
with Japan that they, “don’t even feel the difference between Japan and Brazil,” others
believed the opposite. Gabriela explained that, while she feels connected to the Japanese
culture by interacting with her Nikkei friends, eating at Japanese restaurants, and going to
the weekly Sunday outdoor market in Liberdade, she nevertheless feels “there’s
something missing… there’s always something. It’s not the same.” Guilherme addressed
this issue further by demonstrating his awareness that, indeed, my participants’
perception that they continue to keep in touch with a genuine form of Japanese culture is
somewhat inaccurate. As he explained: “I sing at karaoke competitions… But I’m not in
touch with the Japanese culture as such – I’m more in touch with our Nikkei culture over
here.” In choosing to describe the culture as Nikkei and not Japanese, Guilherme
accurately notes the distinction that exists between Japanese culture and the Japanese
Brazilian culture experienced by most of my participants in Brazil.

Elements of a Brazilian Identity: Deep Inside, We Know We Are Brazilian

My participants’ belief that they returned to Brazil with a stronger sense of
identification with the Japanese culture begins to suggest a return to their pre-migratory
Japanese identity; however, returning “more Japanese” does not entail their full rejection
of the Brazilian identity. Rather, my participants continue to identify with some of the
elements that comprise the Brazilian self-concept after their return. Findings of a partial
affinity with the Brazilian identity are supported by a significant emerging theme identified in interviews with my participants: Despite acquiring Japanese traits in Japan, as discussed in the previous section, my participants nevertheless demonstrated and expressed retaining elements of their Brazilian counter-identity, including personality traits such as a proclivity for friendly communication.

Accordingly, some participants, as Fabio demonstrates below, described their biographical and geographical ties to Brazil as significant elements of the Brazilian aspect of their identity:

When I was [in Japan], I could think perfectly like the Japanese thought, like the Brazilians thought. It was natural for me. In Japan, for me... Everything worked out, I didn’t want for anything. But I was born and acquired culture here in Brazil. I always intended to live in Brazil. I always liked Brazil the most.

In addition to their Brazilian roots, my participants frequently referred to personal characteristics and personality traits as important markers of their partial Brazilian identity. One such characteristic often cited by my participants is communicativeness, as Renata described:

I now know that [being communicative] is a strong part of me. [As a Brazilian] I have much more contact with people than if I were Japanese. When it comes to talking, to coexisting and helping others… Brazilians love to help others, right? So, I try to do that a lot when I can: helping people.
On a similar note, Pedro noted how, unlike the native Japanese, he enjoys and is not ashamed to demonstrate affection by embracing his friends and kissing his wife in public in Brazil, as he perceives himself to be more outgoing and warmer than the native Japanese: “I think I'm more Brazilian when it comes to this thing, this natural ease in communicating. I’m more outgoing, warmer. It is different from what we experienced in Japan, right?”

Marcos, likewise, described himself as more personable and outwardly friendlier than the Japanese. In addition to acknowledging his Brazilian side by, like Denise, affirming that his heart is Brazilian, Marcos also expressed relief for possessing Brazilian characteristics:

But if you come up to me and call me Japanese, I understand, right? It’s normal, right? But deep inside, we know we are Brazilian, right? We have a Brazilian heart. And I thank God for being Brazilian. I didn’t want to be born Japanese. God forbid it.

Most participants, therefore, described retaining positive Brazilian characteristics despite the resurgence of their Japanese identity post-return migration.

Proud to Be Japanese Brazilian: I Have Two Cultures within Me

This study’s findings suggest, therefore, that a new, merged Japanese and Brazilian identity emerged for many of my participants upon their return to Brazil: an identity that is henceforth referred to as the “Descendente identity” in this dissertation. The
Descendente identity is comprised of primarily positive personality traits generally perceived to be associated with both the Japanese and Brazilian people and that is expressed in their understanding that, despite their involvement with the Japanese culture, they nevertheless have their roots in Brazil. Furthermore, interviews indicate that, just as my participants took pride in their previous Japanese identity in Brazil and Brazilian identity in Japan, they now similarly take pride in their merged identity as well. This pride is seemingly derived from the perception that they hold the best of both worlds within themselves, as Guilherme explained:

I think that we, Nikkei, I think that we are privileged. What we have... the Japanese culture, this notion of what is right, honor, and such… And we also have the Brazilian side, this part that is excited, warm, right? This is very nice […] So, I think that… This halfway point that we are at here, I guess it’s nice. It’s ideal.

Similarly, Pedro expressed pride in his bicultural identity by sharing in Guilherme’s view that Japanese Brazilians are culturally privileged:

I’m privileged. I always tell people I’m privileged, because I have two cultures within me. I preserve my culture and that of my parents and also acquired a new culture, which is the culture of Brazil. This applies to everything, right? Both in personality and in the food I eat, right? I eat yakisoba, I eat feijoada […] I eat sushi, misoshiru – misoshiru with churrasco (laughs). I am privileged. There’s no reason not to feel good, right? I value this. I’m privileged.
Thus, interviews with my participants largely suggest that, after returning from Japan, most came to perceive themselves as a people who acquired and proudly continue to preserve elements of traditional Japanese culture while nevertheless preserving a constant awareness of their Brazilian roots, traits, and culture. Consequently, following their return to Brazil, they seemingly came to recognize that they will never be fully Japanese or fully Brazilian – or accepted as such by either group. Rather, as 44-year-old Sansei Talita described, they came to embrace their Descendente identity and to regard it as a position of honor:

We always feel Brazilian but with our roots in Japan, keeping our Japanese manners. It’s different; our consciousness as Japanese descendants is different. We will never be [like western Brazilians] because we carry our Japanese roots with us, right? The upbringing we had was different in a good way.

In understanding the emergence of this merged, bi-ethnic identity adopted by Japanese Brazilians after their return to Brazil, findings indicate that a number of positive and negative factors associated with the Japanese and Brazilian identities may serve to shape my participants’ new self-conception: while some sociocultural elements encourage Japanese Brazilians’ identification with a particular ethnicity, others seemingly dissuade them from it. In other words, emerging themes identified in interviews suggest that the new Descendente ethnic identity expressed by my participants can be understood through an analysis of the “push” and “pull” factors which repel and attract them from
and to each culture, and which eventually result in the blended culture they currently display. While the underlying logic and terminology of this approach lies in “push-pull” theories of migration (Portes and Borocz 1989), this dissertation applies it toward an analysis of identity formation. This chapter will, therefore, follow in the footsteps of Rockquemore and Brunsma’s (2002) by understanding identity as an “ongoing interactional process” in which “individuals […] may feel pulled toward one racial identity option because of positive experiences with one group or may feel pushed away from another racial identity because of negative experiences” (58). By conceptualizing identity as the product (partly) of several push and pull factors, this dissertation explains my participants’ development of the Descendente identity, while paying special attention to the association between place and identity.

The Push and Pull of Being Brazilian

This study’s findings suggest that, after returning to Brazil, the Brazilian counter-identity my participants affirmed and displayed in Japan is noticeably weakened. Considering the findings suggested in Chapter Four, this seemingly occurs in association with a significant decline in the experiences of negative discrimination and perceptions of difference that initially encouraged their counter-identity in Japan, as these are nearly nonexistent after their return to Brazil. In other words, the need for a protective Brazilian counter-identity is significantly reduced among my participants in Brazil. However, most participants also described experiencing disappointment, frustration, and intense fear
upon their return to Brazil and later, as they adjusted and adapted once again to the country. This further weakened their Brazilian identity.

Place, or the environment to which one is emotionally attached, plays a significant role in one’s identity through its association with self-esteem: As Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) found, being linked to a “prestigious place” (219) with symbolic qualities is associated with positive self-esteem, which, in Tajfel and Turner’s (1979) view, is one of the objectives of the process of identity development. In order to develop a sense of belonging to a certain location, therefore, Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) argue that one must believe it reflects his/her “values and aspirations” (219). It is not surprising, thus, that my findings largely seem to suggest that the importance and prominence of the Brazilian identity also declined among my participants in Brazil in association with their exposure to the perceived negative factors that accompany it. However, it is also important to note that interviews with my participants also indicate that their Brazilian identity was not entirely discarded, as they nevertheless identified qualities in the country and discussed some feelings of attachment to Brazil. My findings suggest, therefore, that being Brazilian consists of both “push” and “pull” factors – none of which suffice to completely repel or lure my participants to adopt it as an exclusive identity.

Brazilian Push Factors: How Difficult It Is to Live Here

In describing their return to Brazil, most participants painted overwhelmingly negative pictures of their readjustment and readaptation to the country and its culture – often doing so by drawing comparisons between Brazil and Japan. Among the most
significant emerging themes identified in interviews were: the perception that nothing works as it should in Brazil, feelings of insecurity associated with a fear of violence and crime, and difficulties in accepting and adjusting to negatively perceived Brazilian behavior. This dissertation’s findings indicate that the negative elements associated with life in Brazil dissuaded my participants from fully associating themselves with the country as they did not reflect my Japanese Brazilians’ aspirations and, thus, “pushed” them away from the Brazilian identity (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell 1996).

When posed the question, “Did you encounter any challenges when you returned to Brazil?” nearly all participants reported dissatisfaction with Brazil and the difficulties involved in performing even the most seemingly ordinary tasks, such as shopping for fresh produce or managing one’s finances online. Furthermore, while very few participants expressed a desire to return to Japan as laborers, nearly all reported missing and valuing the ease with which they were able to conduct their lives in Japan. With the exception of the language barriers they encountered, as discussed in Chapter Four, my participants overwhelmingly described everyday life as easier, simpler, and more convenient in Japan. Thus, as 44-year-old Sansei Bruno noted, the participants’ negative impressions of Brazil were only exacerbated by their overall positive perceptions of Japan as an organized and efficient society, thereby leading to inevitable comparisons between the two countries:

Everything about coming back [to Brazil] was negative. The negatives kept adding up: bad employees, a city hall that doesn’t work. Many things don’t work […] In Japan, you start to live, you have your commitments, you get used to the pace of life there. Everything works; you go to the bank, and the queue is actually
orderly. You go to the city hall and it works; everything works as it should. You come to Brazil, you think it’s all the same, but no. So all that was positive [in Japan] only painted the negative here in a much larger scale. I can’t adapt [to Brazil], not really. I’m serious, I can’t get used to it.

In addition to general feelings of frustration associated with the slow Brazilian bureaucracy and its lack of organization, several participants also mentioned how unclean they perceived the country to be. When asked about their first impressions of Brazil upon their return, most of my participants expressed disbelief at the dirt and disorganization they encountered. As Aline, a 76-year-old Nisei woman, described:

What I noticed was that, because Japan is a rich and advanced country, everything was cleaner and more organized. When I came back [to Brazil], I thought there was a lot of dirt here. I’d go to the supermarket and think, “Wow, that’s dirty…” In Japan, everything is clean. “Wow, so dirty… So ugly, this is absurd,” That’s how I thought.

Despite noting that they eventually grew somewhat accustomed to Brazil once again, most participants’ negative impressions of Brazil as a country where, as Stella noted, “everything is a *muvuca*[^34] initially led to feelings of shock, fear, revulsion, and even the impulse of returning immediately to Japan. Thus, other common complaints voiced by my participants were: endless and slow queues, old vandalized buildings, outdated technology, and Brazilian traffic and its related noises – all of which, again, were discussed using Japan as a backdrop of ease and comfort. Describing her initial

[^34]: A Brazilian Portuguese slang term that generally denotes a mess or confusion.
astonishment at the amount of noise disturbance in São Paulo, Gabriela noted that, “there was so much silence [in Japan] and, when we came here, there was the noise of trucks, loud cars. My son would wake up at night.” Similarly, Daniela described her appalled reaction to São Paulo’s public transportation system and its perceived high fares: “Man, it’s terrible here, right? You think everything’s horrible. It’s all very difficult, very expensive. Everything’s of poor quality… The horrible buses!”

In addition to criticisms of the Brazilian infrastructure, my participants also expressed strong perceptions of insecurity in Brazil, which, again, were often presented in contrast with what they described as feeling peaceful and safe in Japan. Paloma, a 55-year-old second-generation Japanese Brazilian, described fear as her main difficulty in readjusting to Brazil:

I can’t get sleepy here, no matter how tired I am. I get in the car and I have to keep an eye out for motorcycles on both sides. And it’s a fear of danger, you know: being burglarized, being approached by some strange being who wants to do something to you. Wow, at first I couldn’t even leave the house. I was afraid to leave the house; we walked around feeling so afraid here. Then, with time, we got used to it, but we pray every day for nothing to happen […] In Brazil] everything is very complicated, because everything revolves around safety and security.

Paloma’s account of her nearly constant fearful state of hyper-vigilance was generally echoed by most participants in their perceptions of Brazil as an unsafe country. These perceptions were often justified by their initial shock at the visual contrast between Japan and Brazil for, as Julia describes, Brazil poses a “completely different image.” She elaborated further by explaining that, immediately upon her return to Brazil, as her
daughters and she drove from the airport to their house, her younger daughter told her she felt afraid, for when she looked outside the car window, “she saw a man without his shirt on, she saw graffiti… which is something you don’t see in Japan.”

Additionally, some participants described feeling unsafe because of their status as former laborers in Japan and the often-false belief held by some Brazilians that they return to Brazil with large amounts of money in savings. As Sandra remarked and many of my participants similarly believed, “people will pay attention to you because you came back from Japan.” Complaining that her mother-in-law “told everyone that we went to Japan,” she described feeling very fearful:

I was afraid, very afraid. I had a son, but it took me two to three years to leave the house alone. I always went out accompanied by my husband and by car. So, I was very slow to adapt.

It was not uncommon, therefore, for my participants to paint an image of Brazil as a daunting and dangerous country, where safety and tranquility are seemingly rare indulgences and where vigilance is a constant requirement. In addition to affecting my participants’ ethnic identification process, such environmental stressors and signs of neighborhood disorder are also negatively associated with mental health and wellbeing, as will be further discussed in Chapter Six.

Associated with my participants’ negative overall perceptions of Brazil, many also described being acutely aware of the country’s faults and, therefore, feeling unable
or unwilling to grow used to them and settle. Marcela, a nursing student who attends classes at night in order to accommodate her daytime work schedule, explained:

To this day, I can’t tell you that I have no fear. Of course I do. I study at night, I get home at night. Is it scary? It is. We can adapt to it, but it’s not like you want to say, “Hey, I’m used to it.” No, we don’t have to get used to the violence here. We can’t think that killing is normal. It’s not normal.”

Monica similarly described feeling reluctant to readjust and readapt. After noting how common it is for one to encounter a street littered with garbage in Brazil and to view it as nothing out of the ordinary, she expressed the fear that she will eventually come to accept this as her immutable reality:

Little by little, I’m afraid that I’ll get used to it here – to accommodate to this whole situation. Very… Wow, I’m afraid. What is the government doing? Do they not pay any attention to this? It’s good to get used to Brazil, but when I came back, I couldn’t even look at that. We look at it and think, “Wow, how difficult it is to live here.” You fear getting used to this.

However, while findings suggest that undesirable factors, such as negative perceptions of and fear of living in Brazil, seemingly serve to discourage my participants from assuming a Brazilian ethnic identity and negatively affect their mental health and wellbeing, other factors nevertheless appear to attract them to a Brazilian self-conception. Therefore, despite voicing their criticisms of the country, participants also demonstrated
awareness and acceptance of the positive attributes associated with living in Brazil and being Brazilian.

_Brazilian Pull Factors: Life Is More Alive_

Whereas a constant theme in this study’s findings is the participants’ frustration with living in a country where “nothing works,” particularly when contrasted with their experience in Japan, my participants nevertheless also expressed how living in Japan allowed them to return and appreciate a different, more positive side of Brazil. Guilherme recognized that:

In the beginning, [coming back to Brazil] was kind of complicated, because you see a lot of correct things in Japan and… But I think there is a balance also. In the same way that there are a lot of right things and a lot of wrong things [in both countries], there is also the social side, right? Over here, there is much more heart; it’s much cozier. There are relationships. Life is more alive, you know? In Japan, I think that life is less like life.

Reflecting upon their time in Japan, therefore, some participants explained how, after being away from Brazil for years, they returned with a new sense of appreciation for the country. Eliana, as one of these participants, described a strengthening in her unwillingness to accept the negatively perceived Brazilian status quo and coming to the realization that the country can improve:
People who lived abroad, they see other things outside of their own country. We have a different vision, so we don’t accept everything here. We know there are things we can’t accept, and we won’t accept them.

Denise, likewise, discussed how her years in Japan changed her mindset, explaining that, in addition to absorbing elements of Japanese knowledge and culture, she also developed “feelings for Brazil.” As she explained, “Sometimes, you might be [in Brazil], but you don’t value many things that exist here and, when you come back, you start to cherish them.”

Some participants similarly recognized that, once permanently back in Brazil, they experienced a sense of liberation that contrasted sharply with how they felt in Japan. Describing his experience working in Japan as “very painful,” Marcos explained: “[Returning to Brazil] for me was a relief. Like, arriving here in Brazil and kissing the ground (laughs).” Similarly, 75-year-old Sueli, a Nisei woman, despite explaining her perception that Brazil is a nation that is, “only good for the elite, [where] we work hard but are dominated by multinationals […]because] we are ants,” nevertheless described returning to Brazil and feeling that it is, “my land, my beloved land, my beloved Brazil.” Sueli concluded, “And I won’t leave it again.” Rodrigo elaborated further on his peers’ feelings toward Brazil by describing feeling more at ease in a country where he understands and speaks the language:

[In Brazil], for me, at least, it’s better. I can read things. I can communicate with people; I can say what I want to say. I don’t have to use an interpreter to make myself understood.
In addition to these pull factors associated with my participants’ personal opinions of and newfound appreciation for Brazil, another prominent pull factor that emerged was participants’ positive perception of Brazilians: a creative and warm people who, despite their own faults and faults within their country, remain persistent and hopeful of a brighter future. Similarly to their criticisms of Brazil, this positive perception of Brazilians was often presented in contrast with some of the negative characteristics they perceive the native Japanese to hold. Thus, whereas my participants often described Brazilians in general as lazy, ill mannered, and prone to committing criminal acts such as stealing (particularly in Japan), they also recognized the optimistic and cheerful characteristic of the Brazilian people – characteristics with which most of them reported identifying. As Flavia described:

I see Brazilians as a tired people, a people that suffer, a wronged people… But at the same time, a people with a lightness of spirit that is able to endure it all. People who, even in the heaviest moments, the hardest ones, still manage to make fun of the situation. It’s a Brazilian characteristic (laughs).

Similarly, in her description of Brazilians, Marcela referenced the slogan, “Eu sou brasileiro e não desisto nunca” (I am Brazilian, and I never give up), a catchphrase launched in 2004 by the federal government in conjunction with the Associação
Brasileira de Anunciantes\textsuperscript{35} as part of a campaign to improve Brazilian self-esteem (Almeida and Scaldaferrri 2005). She described Brazilians as follows:

I think Brazilians are like this: They’re a people who don’t give up on things. There’s that saying, that catchphrase they use in ads, you know? Anyway, I think I have some of that. I think you have to fight; you’ve got to chase after what you want, because things aren’t easy, right? So, I think we [Japanese Brazilians] all have that Brazilian perseverance.

Some participants also described Brazilians as innovative, creative, and always ready to use their \textit{jeitinho brasileiro}\textsuperscript{36}: a “Brazilian cultural characteristic” that involves achieving a desired outcome in spite of “[l]aws, orders, and rules […] that would make […] the aims of the person [impossible]” (Motta and Alcadipani 1999). In other words, in most occasions my participants viewed the \textit{jeitinho brasileiro} as an asset that differentiates them from the native Japanese. Daniela explained:

Brazilians want to innovate; they want to do things differently. The Japanese, if you suggest innovating, they’re like… They don’t change. They’re very… You must live according to the system no matter what. But not the Brazilians right? They will always use their jeitinho [brasileiro].

Other participants proudly described using the \textit{jeitinho brasileiro} for their own advantage, particularly in Japan where such behavior is perceived to be uncommon.

\textsuperscript{35} Brazilian Association of Advertisers  
\textsuperscript{36} Literally translates to, “the Brazilian way.”
Fabio, who explained he learned the *jeitinho brasileiro* by working with Brazilian entrepreneurs for two years, reported applying it to his work in Japan with positive results. He noted:

[I started] being a smartass in contrast with the certinho\(^{37}\) way of Japan. I started applying it while I was working at a company [in Japan], and it began to yield results.

Finally, among my participants, Brazilians were generally perceived to be considerably friendlier, more sociable, and more outgoing relative to the native Japanese. Marcela provided an overview of this cultural difference:

I found [the Japanese] to be extremely polite, extremely disciplined, but they’re a cold people. They don’t have this… How do you say it? They aren’t like good Brazilian people. [In Brazil], when you arrive somewhere, you hug people and everything. You go somewhere, and there are people talking to each other; it’s easy. In Nihon\(^{38}\), there’s nothing like this. Even if you go to a festival, you don’t see this kind of exchange happening, right?

Further strengthening my participants’ desirable image of Brazilians as warm and sociable, most participants chose to answer, “human warmth” when asked to name a Brazilian characteristic they believed they possessed. Similarly, Paloma discussed the

\(^{37}\) Brazilian Portuguese slang that denotes a person who is obedient and disciplined.  
\(^{38}\) “Japan,” in Japanese.
excitement of the Brazilian people as the one Brazilian element she missed most while in Japan. In her words: “I missed the warmth of the people.”

While most of my participants expressed strong, negative reactions to a number of difficulties and challenges they observed in Brazil (particularly when these were discussed in comparison to their overall positive impressions of Japan’s infrastructure and organization), they nevertheless did not disavow their Brazilian identity completely. As most of my participants described, they continued to perceive in Brazil the same personality and cultural differences they observed between the native Japanese and themselves in Japan. Furthermore, despite various negative comparisons between the two countries, some participants also expressed coming to place greater value on Brazil and the Brazilian people after returning from Japan. Thus, though findings suggest that my participants do not feel the Brazilian identity as strongly and proudly as they did in Japan, they continue to acknowledge it partially in Brazil. For most participants, therefore, Brazil and Brazilians continue to hold, to some degree, desirable values. Their symbolic qualities, thus, allow them to be regarded as a somewhat esteemed place and identity. Hence, despite its faults, Brazil continues to play an active role in my participants’ construction of their identity (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell 1996).

The Push and Pull of Being Japanese
Interestingly, the weakening of the Brazilian identity upon return to Brazil, seen among study participants, is also accompanied by a revival of the Japanese identity my participants had previously discarded in Japan. Next, this chapter will examine the factors that may have positively and negatively affected this Japanese identity revival by, once again, applying the underlying logic of “push-pull” theories toward understanding my participants’ ethnic identification process.

**Japanese Push Factors: They Didn’t Give Up Their Seats, but We Did**

Many of the push factors that discourage Japanese Brazilians from assuming a Japanese identity in Japan have already been documented in Chapter Four, which discussed the significance of experiences of perceived discrimination and perceptions of difference in the formation of a Brazilian counter-identity. Interestingly, these push factors seemingly remain valid after my participants’ return to Brazil as, in their interviews, they were still able to recall experiences of perceived discrimination vividly and continued to affirm the physical and cultural differences they perceive to exist between themselves and the native Japanese. However, these data also suggest that, following my participants’ return to Brazil, some of the elements that previously contributed toward the development of a Brazilian counter-identity in Japan – particularly those pertaining to language differences and unmet cultural expectations – also came to be understood as the unfortunate consequence of a country that developed and
modernized rapidly, thereby leaving much of what some participants referred to as the
Japanese “essence” behind. The native Japanese’s loss of this essence, therefore, served
as a factor that reinforced the symbolic distance between themselves and the Japanese
Brazilians. As Guilherme explained,

The Japanese culture evolved and changed. So… They practically lost, you know, that essence. That’s what I think, and I said, “Wow, this is strange. I feel more Japanese than the Japanese themselves. You know? Especially when it comes to what we seek to preserve here: friendship and respect […] Japan developed too much and I saw that much of the culture was left behind. And what I’m proudest to have today is this essence of the Japanese culture, you know? That samurai and honor stuff: To stand by your word, to be honest, to help. And I didn’t see any of this in Japan.

Through this reasoning, therefore, my participants shifted the responsibility for
their perceived lack of cultural knowledge in Japan from themselves to a rapidly
Westernized Japanese society. As one of several examples of his experiences with the
essence-less Japanese culture, Guilherme recounted feeling disappointed when riding the
train in Japan, as the Japanese are known for their respect for the elderly:

When there was an elderly person, nobody paid attention to them. You’re on a
train, so you should give up your seat for the elderly… But we’d notice that people, the Japanese, they didn’t give up their seats, but we did.
Before relocating to Japan, Diego recalled being told by his mother that he would “starve to death” because he was lazy, whereas the Japanese were diligent, dedicated workers. Diego, therefore, expected he would have to work particularly hard in order to keep up with the efficient Japanese workers his mother described. While working at a factory manufacturing tires for trucks in Japan, however, he described experiencing a very different situation:

We had to make 1200, 1300 parts, but we made 2000, 3000. The japonesada\(^ {39} \) couldn’t even make the full 1200. So, I asked myself, “How is it that the japonesada are hard workers?”

Adding to his perception of Japanese laziness, Diego also mentioned his job in Japan was often “turned down by the japonesada,” as it was a “dirty job” they did not like to do and that, at the mention of working overtime hours, the Japanese “[ran] away saying they were tired.”

Sueli expressed a similar disillusioned view of the native Japanese as she lowered the volume of her voice to a near whisper:

Can I tell you the truth? (Laughs) The Japanese don’t work, no. The ones who work are we, the imported people […] They are efficient, they have the technology, but they don’t work. Nothing. The people who work are we, the imported ones.

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\(^ {39} \) Derogatory term used to refer to a group of Japanese people
Thus, while the self-protective psychological need for a Brazilian counter-identity diminished in Brazil, interviews with my participants suggest that they nevertheless do not fully return to the Japanese identities they held pre-migration. Rather, they express disappointment when reflecting upon the differences between their cultural expectations of Japan and the cultural reality they actually encountered, as well as the differences between their expectations of Japanese attitude and the behavior they observed in Japan. Thus, they continue to avoid identifying with the native Japanese in Brazil. My data suggest that this avoidance of a Japanese identity is due to participants’ perceptions of the Japanese’s disappointing lack of traditional “essence,” or their failure to fulfill traditional, albeit stereotypical, expectations of Japanese behavior and culture. My participants’ observations and impressions of modern Japanese society serve as a factor that distances them from embracing a modern Japanese identity.

Interestingly, however, the disappointment my participants expressed in modern Japanese culture and its “essence-less” population seemingly pushes them away from a modern Japanese identity but toward another kind of Japanese identity – one that, in Guilherme’s words, is “frozen in time” and, as my research shows, merges with Brazilian culture. My findings suggest that elements of this idealized and traditional version of the Japanese people serve as the main pull factors for a Japanese identity among most of my participants, as identified in their interviews.

Japanese Pull Factors: They Give Us a Lot of Credibility
As discussed in Chapter Four, many of my participants expressed disappointment at encountering a Westernized, modern Japan and having their expectations of encountering a traditional, hardworking, and idealized people unmet. Yet many of the factors that nudged Japanese Brazilians toward a Japanese identity are, perhaps not remarkably, associated with the very stereotypical characteristics they expected but failed to find in Japan. This was suggested by emerging themes in my participants’ accounts of their return to Brazil, including the perception that they had returned to Brazil feeling more Japanese, as previously discussed, and the perception that Japanese descendants receive preferential treatment in Brazil.

Among most Brazilians, Tsuda (2003) found that a generalized set of “Japanese” qualities is often associated with the native Japanese and, consequently, with Japanese Brazilians. These qualities paint an image of the Japanese as a, “hardworking, honest, intelligent, trustworthy, and responsible” (Tsuda 2003:72) people. Despite coming to the realization in Japan that this stereotypical image of the Japanese is not always accurate, most of my participants nevertheless reported identifying with and embodying these characteristics after their return to Brazil – possibly as an unconscious way to benefit from this idealized version of the Japanese.

Furthermore, a majority of my participants described believing that, because of their Japanese ancestry and the aforementioned positive attributes associated with the Japanese, Japanese descendants in Brazil experience preferential treatment from the general population – particularly in professional and academic settings. Fabio provided an example of this advantage by describing how he believes that his Japanese family name confers more credibility to his company:
Westerners, I think they see that we have a lot of drive. They see we have a Japanese face, so they think we’re an honest Japanese person. They give us a lot of credibility. You can see that in the name of my brand. You feel that they have greater respect for it and feel more at ease and think it’s synonymous with quality. That’s how they look at it.

Similarly noting how Brazilians are positively receptive of Japanese Brazilians, Fernando compared the treatment he presently receives in Brazil to how he was treated in Japan. He described feeling so well regarded in Brazil to the point of becoming suspicious:

Over here, it’s the other way around [compared to Japan], right? Here in Brazil, people treat you differently, whether you want to or not. You don’t even have to tell others your profession. Today, for example, when I go to business get-togethers hosted by Brazilians, the way they treat me is different. It’s very flattering. It’s totally different; it’s nice. But at the same time, I actually get a little suspicious: Do they want something from me?

While he failed to mention this explicitly, Fernando’s experience may be associated not merely with the positive personality traits ascribed to the Japanese but, additionally, with the previously mentioned Brazilian-held general perception that Japanese Brazilians, particularly former labor migrants, are wealthy. Providing an example of this, Monica described noticing a change in the demeanor of bank employees after informing them she had just returned from Japan. As she explained, “There are some employees who are kind of rude, but when I mention that I just came back from
Japan, everything changes. Funny, right?” Monica further noted that she believed this
differential treatment could be attributed to Japan’s status as a “First World” country and
the incorrect presumption that returning from Japan is synonymous with being, “full of
money.” She further recognized that, “if it were someone else, they wouldn’t care; they
wouldn’t have the kind of manners that you should have with customers, that common
sense of respect.”

In addition to benefitting from the characteristics generally associated with the
Japanese, my participants also noted that their connection to the Japanese tradition – one
that is often regarded as respectful, wise, and admirable by Brazilians – often serves as
another reason for experiencing differential treatment in Brazil. Sueli explained that
Japanese Brazilians in Brazil “are mostly treated with great respect because we have a
tradition behind us.” However, upon remembering her disappointment with modern
Japan, she quickly corrected herself by adding, “I mean, we had one… Nowadays, not so
much.”

Thus, despite their disillusionment in experiencing and witnessing a Japanese
culture that is less traditional and less consistent with the stereotypes described to them
by their families (e.g., portrayals of the Japanese as diligent, disciplined, and efficient)
my participants nevertheless expressed a strengthening in their Japanese identity
following their return to Brazil. My findings suggest that this strengthening is partially
driven by the positive minority status enjoyed by Japanese Brazilians in Brazil, including
the somewhat idealized image of the Japanese and Japanese traditional culture that is
generally held by most Brazilians.
I Don’t Have a Country

While findings suggest that most of my participants are aware of and satisfied with the merged ethnic identity they developed in Brazil, it is also important to take note of a minority of participants (N=4) who described returning to Brazil with the uncomfortable awareness that they have no country or identity, as multiple migrations, perceptions of difference, and negative experiences contribute toward the perception that they are not sufficiently connected to either Brazil or Japan. Paloma described this feeling as follows:

In Japan, we are Brazilians. But when we come back here, we go to Liberdade, and we try to keep the Japanese culture alive in us. So, we’re on the fence: We are neither Brazilian nor Japanese. It’s a strange situation. We’re left more or less without a country.

Maria similarly described feeling torn between two countries – an experience she explained was “a little confusing.” Like most of my participants, Maria recalled previously identifying as Japanese in Brazil and coming to the realization that she was Brazilian in Japan. Now that she has returned to Brazil once again, however, she explained she saw herself as, “Brazilian: a Japanese descendant who comes from a Japanese family.” Nevertheless, she also noted that her Japanese side was merely inherited from her family and, though she recognized being born in Brazil made her
Brazilian, Maria explained that, “I can’t say I identify with all of this here [in Brazil].” She therefore concluded: “Nowadays, I’m kind of left without an identity, you know? […] I think I still need to find myself.”

Felipe, a 23-year-old Sansei man of mixed ancestry, expressed feeling less doubtful but nevertheless similarly unclear regarding his current ethnic self-identity, as he explained:

I do not consider myself either [Japanese or Brazilian]. I actually... Even being in Brazil I don’t feel Brazilian; when I'm in Japan, I don’t feel Japanese. When I went to Australia [to work for a few months], it messed with my head even more.

Elaborating further on his undefined self-identity, Felipe explained he “didn’t want to become Brazilian,” and expressed feeling critical of general Brazilian behavior. He recalled initiating an argument with public transit employees who he described as walking slowly on the left side of a passageway in a subway station in São Paulo, thereby slowing down rushing commuters. Felipe recalled: “I was angry because they didn’t think about other people. They don’t have to think about other people, but they should at least be polite, right?” Likewise, Felipe also recounted several instances in which he felt discriminated by a native Japanese person in Japan and chose to confront him/her. He specifically recalled an occasion involving a supermarket employee, who Felipe believed was following him as he shopped for groceries. Offended by the man’s perceived actions, Felipe recounted turning around to face him and saying, “Look, don’t worry. I work and have money to pay for my shopping; you don’t need to follow me, ok?” Felipe explained,
therefore, that his lack of identity-related ties to neither Japan nor Brazil as well as a deep sense of dissatisfaction with both countries and cultures encouraged him to develop a desire to spend his life traveling “in any country” rather than establishing himself in a single country.

Thus, while for most participants the “pull” factors associated with each identity suffice to encourage the development of a bi-ethnic, merged Descendente identity, for others like Paloma, Maria, and Felipe, elements of the Japanese and Brazilian identities are seemingly not enough to justify their identification with either or both identities.

Discussion and Conclusion

After returning to Brazil, virtually all Japanese Brazilians interviewed for this study continued to stand by the realization that they are not Japanese and, therefore, cannot identify as such. However, interestingly, most participants nevertheless affirmed that they returned to Brazil feeling more Japanese than they did prior to migrating. This assertion, which strongly resembles my participants’ validations for a pre-migration Japanese identity (as discussed in Chapter Four), was often justified by citing characteristics and customs stereotypically associated with the traditional Japanese culture, such as timeliness and organization, that they described acquiring in Japan and applying in their daily lives in Brazil.
Nevertheless, despite “becoming more Japanese,” most participants remained critical of the native Japanese as not only did the social isolation they experienced in Japan still vividly persist in their memories, many also claimed to be disappointed by the lack of tradition and lack of Japanese “essence” they encountered in Japan. This lack of essence, or the notions of honor, tradition, and respect that are stereotypically associated with the Japanese and generally taught to Japanese descendants from an early age, served as a source of disillusionment for some participants, which may have encouraged their distancing from the Japanese culture as it exists today. My participants’ sense of disenchantment and disappointment with the modern and Westernized Japanese culture bears a striking resemblance to the reaction of Japanese Peruvians labor migrants who, similarly, found themselves disillusioned by the lack of “Japaneseness” practiced by the native Japanese (Takenaka 1999). Like my Japanese Brazilians, their Peruvian counterparts were partially lured to Japan by older relatives’ embellished stories of tradition and culture as well as the pursuit of an ancestral homeland. When met with disappointment, Japanese Peruvians redefined their self-conception by shedding their “Japanese” self-identity in favor of a hybrid Nikkei identity in Japan (Takenaka 1999). My participants, contrastingly, only came to develop their own hybrid identity after their return to Brazil.

My data suggest that the Brazilian counter-identity that previously emerged in Japan weakened among most participants after their return to Brazil, as they found it difficult to adjust and adapt to what they perceived to be a disorganized, dirty, and unsafe country relative to clean and convenient Japan. My participants described Brazil’s negative environmental characteristics as a sharp contrast to Japan and as an inaccurate reflection
of their own orderly personalities, which complicated their readjustment process while weakening the desirability of the Brazilian identity. Indeed, as Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) discuss, the environment is significantly associated with one’s identity through self-esteem: Places that are viewed as more desirable and prestigious are more likely to encourage feelings of identification and belonging. Nevertheless, interviews show that most of my participants do not completely shed their Brazilian identity despite criticisms of the country, as they also describe returning to Brazil with a newfound value for the country and its people’s defining features, such as resilience, persistence, “heart,” and warmth. Thus, while the strength of the Brazilian identity seems to weaken among my participants upon their return to Brazil as a result of negative environmental factors, it does not entirely fade away, as the positive social characteristics of the Brazilian people continue to encourage its existence. It is also important to note that my participants did not mention their negative perceptions of Brazil as a “push” factor that influenced their initial decision to migrate, therefore suggesting the possibility of internalized prejudice, as will be discussed in Chapter Six.

These findings suggest, therefore, a small resurgence in my participants’ Japanese identity along with a weakening – but not disappearance – of their Brazilian identity after their return to Brazil. The resulting effect of the varying degrees of importance placed on factors associated with each identity appears to be the emergence of a new, merged Japanese Brazilian identity among my participants. The Descendente identity is described and expressed as one in which they continue to hold traditional Japanese values and try to maintain contact with the Japanese culture – albeit a modified version of it – in Brazil, while nevertheless acknowledging and asserting their Brazilian roots, nationality, and
characteristics. Therefore, by drawing elements from both cultures, thereby conveniently allowing them to recognize their place of birth while respecting their ancestral roots, Japanese Brazilian return migrants in Brazil have formed and embraced an alternative ethnic identity that is distinct from one that is strictly Brazilian or Japanese.

During the process of constructing a new ethnic identity after returning to Brazil, my participants continued to demonstrate the same flexibility and fluidity of identity that was observed during their time in Japan. In doing so, they provided further confirmation of the association between social and contextual factors and identity that has been suggested by existing research (Phinney et al. 2001; Erikson 1994; Goffman 1959; Root 2002; Rockquemore and Brunsma 2002; Rockquemore et al. 2009). Due to its flexibility and association with social elements, the formation of the Descendente identity can be understood in a manner similar to Rockquemore and Brunsma’s (2002) approach to biracial identities by conceptualizing the process as one that is influenced by push-pull factors. While positive factors, such as Japan’s organization and the flattery enjoyed by Japanese descendants in Brazil, “pulled” my participants toward the Japanese identity, negative factors such as the Japanese “essence-lessness” pushed them away. Likewise, the positive social aspects of Brazil, such as the Brazilian people’s determination and warmth, “pulled” my participants closer to a Brazilian identity, whereas negative factors, such as disorderly environment characteristics, discouraged them from assuming the identity in its entirety.

The Descendente identity came to be through my participants’ changing self-conceptions and their interactions with the social environment, thereby providing a satisfactory (but likely temporary) solution to the pursuit of a positive social identity and
self-esteem in which Tajfel and Turner (1979) believe we are constantly engaged. As a positive social identity that allows one to benefit from the positive minority status enjoyed by Japanese Brazilians in Brazil while maintaining a beneficial psychological distance from the cold and essence-less Japanese, the Descendente identity also supports the circumstantialist view that a utilitarian logic exists in the process of ethnic identification, as suggested by Cornell and Hartmann (2007). By separating themselves from structural and emotional factors that negatively affect their self-esteem and self-conception, my participants have developed an identity that merges the best of both worlds while enhancing the pride and satisfaction they feel in their Descendente identity. Furthermore, by forming their own ethnic identity, my participants demonstrate that identities are multifaceted and unconstrained by existent social categories – rather, as a reflexive process of situational adjustment that is currently taking place in a rapidly globalizing world, ethnicity can be created and recreated to reflect one’s self-conception and interaction with one’s social surroundings and environment (Cornell and Hartman 2002; Giddens 1991; Malkki 1997).

The findings described in this chapter stand to make an important and unique contribution to the current literature by beginning to fill the gap concerning the ethnic identities of Japanese Brazilian “return-return” migrants after their return to Brazil. In its description of the bi-ethnic cultural identity developed by my participants, this chapter begins to suggest a process of ethnogenesis (Roosens 1989) in which an identity that defies the Japanese/Brazilian dichotomy emerges: the Descendente identity. Furthermore, in examining the factors potentially involved in the genesis of this new Descendente identity, this chapter suggests a novel application of “push-pull” theories toward an
understanding of the formation of an individual’s ethnic self-conception, thereby suggesting a dynamic, social, and purpose-driven understanding of identity construction (Rockquemore and Brunsma 2002; Cornell and Hartman 2007).

By addressing the process of ethnic redefinition undergone by my participants after their return to Brazil, this chapter not only begins to analyze a previously unexplored segment of Japanese Brazilian “return-return” migration but also continues to strengthen the notion of multiethnic identity development already suggested in Chapter Four. By doing so, it begins to pave the way for future studies on similar “homecoming” migrant populations, such as Japanese-Peruvians, Greek-Americans, second-generation Turks in Europe, and the Italian-Swiss (Christou 2006; Fokkema 2011; Takenaka 1999; Wessendorf 2007), as well as mixed-race and multicultural populations that might not particularly identify with ascribed labels and that may, therefore, come to develop their own merged ethnic identities. Thus, by understanding one’s ethnic identity as fluid and dependent on variable factors such as social context and personal preference, the findings suggested in this chapter call forth the need to further examine the complexity that lies behind one’s ethnic self-identity.

Finally, by examining the “push-pull” elements potentially associated with the formation of a Japanese Brazilian ethnic identity, this chapter begins to suggest the underlying self-protective factors involved in my participants’ new self-conception. Findings suggest that the Japanese Brazilian merged identity occurs as an expression of the strengthening of my participants’ sense of distinction from the native Japanese who socially excluded them, as well as an acknowledgement of the difference they perceive to exist between themselves and poorly regarded Western Brazilians. A Japanese Brazilian
merged identity, accordingly, allows its adopters to distance themselves from both cultures sufficiently enough to reap their benefits without claiming exclusive membership in either group. At the same time, my findings’ indication of potentially self-protective factors of one’s identity calls attention to the unique position of vulnerability that is occupied by those who claim to have no country and are, therefore, confused about their identities. As individuals who are likely to encounter challenges in acculturating and developing a sense of belonging, they are particularly vulnerable to negative health outcomes (Giddens 1991).

Multiple migrations and ethnic identity are known to be important factors to consider in understanding one’s mental wellbeing. As Chapters Four and Five demonstrate, my participants encounter many of the stressors that are common to migrant populations, such as linguistic challenges, feelings of isolation, and difficulties associated with resettlement. Japanese Brazilians are unique, however, in the identity-specific factors they encounter along their migratory journey, which, in addition to spurring changes in their ethnic identification, also have negative and positive effects on their mental health and wellbeing. This dissertation will, therefore, proceed to examine the associations between my participants’ ethnic identities, multiple migrations, and their mental wellbeing in Chapter Six.
Chapter Six

From "Illiterate Traitors" in Japan to a Privileged Minority in Brazil:

Understanding the Mental Wellbeing of Japanese Brazilian Return-Return Migrants

Introduction

While Chapters Four and Five addressed my Japanese Brazilian participants’ processes of ethnic identification, the social and contextual factors that helped to shape their identities, and the ways in which these identities are expressed in their daily lives, Chapter Six proceeds to examine how identity- and migration-related elements may (separately and in conjunction with each other) serve as potential psychological stressors or as factors that promote resilience in their mental wellbeing. More specifically, this chapter identifies and examines factors that were commonly mentioned by my participants as sources of emotional discomfort and dissatisfaction as well as sources of contentment and pleasure during their sojourn in Japan and after their return to Brazil. Additionally, it addresses the coping strategies adopted by my participants in Japan. While some of the migratory and identity-related factors that may affect the mental wellbeing of Japanese Brazilian migrants in Japan have been addressed by previous
studies (Tsuda 2003), factors encountered following their return to Brazil remain largely unexplored. Chapter Six aims to begin to fill this gap.

Chapter Six identifies the significant stressors, sources of strain, and factors that positively impact mental wellbeing at different stages of my participants’ migration process by addressing the following research questions:

1. In what ways do migratory factors and factors associated with social identity present challenges to the mental wellbeing of Japanese Brazilians in Japan? How do these factors work separately and together to impact the mental health of Japanese Brazilians?

2. In what ways does the process of return-return migration, including readjustment stressors, negative environment appraisals, and negative perceptions of social comparison, impact the mental wellbeing of Japanese Brazilian in Brazil? How do these migration stressors interact with factors associated with social identity in their impact on the mental wellbeing Japanese Brazilians?

As established by the existing general literature on mental health and identity, one’s self-conception – including factors that threaten or support an individual’s identity – holds the potential to affect one’s mental wellbeing both negatively and positively (Mossakowski 2003; Stryker and Burke 2000; Thoits 1999). Among Japanese Brazilian migrants specifically, the different understandings and meanings of race and ethnicity in Brazil and Japan, along with expectations of a cultural homecoming in Japan, necessitate
adjustments to the ethnic self-conceptions of Japanese Brazilian migrants beyond those of general migrant populations. These vital adjustments, as this Chapter will discuss and as my data demonstrate, have a unique impact on the mental wellbeing of my participants in the form of stress and strain, as well as protective buffers against negative emotions.

In Japan, my participants encountered a unique set of stressors related to their social identities, including discrimination and stigma associated with their Japanese ancestry. The effects of their negative experiences in Japan continued to be felt in Brazil in conjunction with issues pertaining to their social identities as Japanese descendants and a positive minority group. Whereas aspects of the Descendente identity were described as a psychological benefit and asset in Brazil, they also gave rise to a new reference group in Brazil against which my participants compared themselves unfavorably. Similarly, their experiences in Japan, along with potentially internalized prejudice, led to my participants’ newfound and negative appraisals of environmental and ecological factors in Brazil. Thus, common resettlement stressors and identity factors interacted to affect my participants’ mental wellbeing both positively and negatively – first in Japan and again upon their return to Brazil.

In addition to identity-related factors that affect the mental wellbeing of migrants, changes and challenges pertaining to migration movements (e.g., feelings of isolation and linguistic and cultural barriers) are known to serve as significant sources of strain in the lives of migrants (Pumariega et al. 2005; Viruell-Fuentes 2007). Indeed, emerging themes identified in my findings indicate that participants experienced a set of common migration stressors during their time in Japan and following their return to Brazil – many of which have already been addressed in Chapter Four and Chapter Five. As Brazilian
nationals – most of whom were educated primarily in Portuguese and have had scarce direct contact with modern native Japanese culture – all of my participants discussed encountering at least one migratory stressor in Japan. Similarly, after their return to Brazil, many reported experiencing resettlement and readjustment challenges in an environment that they perceived negatively.

Thus, as a population that undertakes multiple migrations, experiences multiple changes in their self-conception, and undergoes an arguably more complicated process of adjustment in their host and native countries relative to other migrant groups, Japanese Brazilian return-return migrants are a unique migrant population whose mental wellbeing faces unique vulnerabilities and advantages. As such, their experiences present a valuable contribution to the literature on mental health, immigration, and identity. The experiences of Japanese Brazilian return-return migrants with potential stressors and psychologically protective factors in Japan may, therefore, be described as occurring in three different, but occasionally overlapping, realms of their migratory journey: stressors common to migrants, stressors associated with their return status, and stressors associated with ethnic identity confusion and conflict. My participants’ experiences with factors that affect their mental wellbeing in Brazil post-return migration are considerably less clearly divided, however. My data indicate that common resettlement challenges in Brazil often interact with issues of identity to affect their mental wellbeing.

My participants consistently suggested that the stressors present in their lives have an existing association with their mental health and wellbeing. They commonly expressed negative emotions and varying levels of psychological distress in their interviews, which they attributed to feeling lonely, isolated, and socially and culturally inadequate in Japan.
After returning to Brazil, participants attributed their emotional distress to different sources, such as perceptions of violence, lack of safety, and social disorder in their immediate environment, as well as social comparisons with their non-migrant peers. Among several participants, these negative feelings culminated in addiction, depression, and near-depression in Japan and in Brazil. Of the 38 Japanese Brazilians interviewed for this study, 55 percent (N = 21) knew of other Nikkei in Japan who struggled with depressive symptoms, and 26 percent (N = 10) described themselves as having suffered from depression or having experienced depressive symptoms. While my participants’ discussion of emotional distress may not representatively reflect the negative emotions experienced by the broader Japanese Brazilian migrant population, and it may not fully reflect their levels of distress due to the stigma associated with reporting these experiences, their interviews indicate that distress is nevertheless clearly present in their lives. Additionally, my data indicate that my participants were able to identify distress not only within themselves but in peers, friends, and acquaintances as well.

**The Decision to Migrate: So, I Went…**

A common potential stressor identified in immigrant populations surrounds the decision to leave a cultural setting with which one is familiarized, which may understandably lead to feelings of “fear, loss, and apprehension” (Vega et al. 1987:514). My findings suggest that my participants’ experiences were no different, as the decision to migrate to Japan was a stressor in itself as well as an emotional strain. When asked about their decision to migrate, my participants recalled experiencing negative emotions
and varying levels of emotional distress: from feeling unwilling to relocate to Japan, feeling emotionally torn about their decision, to feeling guilty for deciding to travel against their family’s wishes. Paulo, who migrated to Japan at the age of 18 despite his father’s hopes that he would pursue a college education in Brazil, described feeling that he was “hit by a deep depression” and overwhelmed by guilt upon his arrival in Japan:

I cried a lot, I wanted to go back, to call Brazil and apologize to my dad, and… But unfortunately, I was already there. I had financed my plane ticket, and I had to pay for all of it [before I could go back].

Osvaldo described a very different but nonetheless challenging experience with his father, who he described as, “a hardened Japanese man, ex-military, [who didn’t care] if we had prior plans when he wanted something.” Prior to migrating to Japan, Osvaldo explained that his life was in order, and he had concrete plans for a future in Brazil: He had recently concluded a post-graduate degree in human resources, was engaged to marry, and had saved enough money to purchase an apartment for himself and his soon-to-be wife. However, his plans were upset when his father asked Osvaldo to go to Japan as a way to earn enough money to settle his uncle’s debts. Given his father’s personality and the Japanese cultural expectations of responsibility associated with being the family’s first-born son, he described feeling unable to decline the request:
When he asked me to go to Japan, he didn’t ask; it was an order […] I have a younger brother [who could have gone], but for my dad, I was just like an extension of his possessions. So, whatever he wanted had to be done.

While his fiancée offered to accompany him to Japan, Osvaldo decided it would be more prudent to end their engagement and travel alone:

I was going to Japan, and I didn’t know when I’d come back. My plan was to stay between five and ten years. I thought I was going to marry her, to have children with her. But I wanted to have children to raise and care for, not to abandon. She wanted to come with me, but she had just graduated from college and had started a teaching job. I thought just one person should have to ruin their life; I didn’t need both of us to do it, right?

Though it has been more than fifteen years since Osvaldo returned to Brazil, he still expressed regret over leaving Brazil and ending the engagement – an emotional sacrifice made for the sake of his father’s orders. Osvaldo explained: “Today, I regret having done it. I should have stayed longer, should have thought it through. I should have stayed and had a child with her.” He further noted that he still feels resentful toward his father: “I harbor a lot of anger toward my father. To this day, I can’t speak to him.”

Like Paulo and Osvaldo, Pedro also recounted his decision to relocate to Japan as fraught with emotional challenges, as he traveled just two days after one of his older brothers passed away in a car accident. He described feeling guilty and hesitant to leave his family in Brazil during an emotionally difficult time. However, Pedro recalled his brothers nevertheless encouraged him to travel: “There’s nothing you can do; life has to
go on. You planned your trip, so go on with your life. You can’t stop living [...] What will you accomplish by staying here?” Heeding his brothers’ advice, Pedro traveled to Japan; however, he recalled feeling painfully distant from his family when he arrived:

So, I went… What really hit me was the fact that [my brother’s death] happened, and I was far away. I didn’t know how the relationships between the people in my family were, how my family was doing, if everything was all right.

Furthermore, Pedro noted that communicating with Brazil and financial matters presented an added challenge to his already distressing situation:

There was [no way to communicate], only letters and the phone. And because I already had a debt in Japan because I still had to pay for my plane ticket, I had no money left. So, I could only call home once a month, and it had to be quick. I bought a calling card that allowed me to call for a certain amount of minutes, and that was it.

Pedro coped with his sadness by developing a new sense of determination to save as much money as he could in the shortest time possible: “The more I saved, the faster I could return home. So, I set a goal to go back. The longing I felt was great, but it was bearable. The more determined I was, the earlier I could go back.”

The contextual factors surrounding my participants’ decision to migrate to Japan only added to the distress experienced by most migrants upon leaving their origin. From complicating perceptions of family obligations to feelings of regret, it was not uncommon
for my participants to discuss the anguish and general distress they experienced pre-
migration and immediately after arriving in Japan.

Migration: Unfulfilled Hopes of an Ethnic Homecoming

During their time in Japan, my participants reported encountering unique and
significant stressors that are intrinsically associated with their identities as Japanese
descendants returning to their ethnic homeland as temporary labor migrants (as discussed
in Chapter Four). Among the stressors discussed most frequently were their experiences
with perceived prejudice and discrimination associated with their Japanese ancestry and,
relatedly, the expectation to acculturate and assimilate to Japan. The unexpectedly
negative reception my participants encountered in Japan, along with cultural pressure and
expectations, posed a strong and disappointing contrast to their expectations of an ethnic
homecoming, which have been mirrored by the similarly discouraging experiences of
their Japanese-Peruvian counterparts (Takenaka 1999). As these have already been
discussed extensively in Chapter Four as significant factors that help to define their
Brazilian counter-identity in Japan, this Chapter will only address them briefly before
proceeding to discuss other general stressors, specifically as they pertain to our
understanding of Japanese Brazilians migrants’ mental health and wellbeing.

During their time in Japan, many monoracial participants described finding
themselves in uncomfortable situations due to their “pure” (i.e., racially unmixed)
Japanese blood, which often led to incorrect assumptions of a Japanese identity. Sandra
described being introduced to this popularly held belief in an inherent association
between lineage and culture in a conversation with native Japanese colleagues, during which she shared that her parents had been born in Japan. Upon learning she was Nisei, her colleagues began to “consider me Japanese because of the direct bloodline.” This association was often accompanied by a set of cultural expectations that my participants, as Japanese descendants who were educated primarily in Brazilian Portuguese and are largely acculturated to Brazilian society, were mostly unable to fulfill.

A common theme in my participants’ descriptions of their interactions with the native Japanese, therefore, was the latter’s expectation of Japanese fluency among Japanese descendants that, when unmet, often resulted in verbal reprimands for my participants’ cultural and linguistic ignorance. Diego, who self-described as possessing limited knowledge of Japanese, recalled being reproached by his boss for his lacking linguistic skills: “You’re Japanese, you should speak more correctly. You are Japanese, but you don’t know how to speak Japanese!” In response to such admonishments and the native Japanese’s expectations of cultural proficiency, my participants described experiencing levels of emotional distress, such as feelings of inadequacy, incompetence, frustration, low self-esteem, and unfulfilled hopes of belonging.

Further adding to their unfulfilled expectations of an ethnic homecoming, a consistent theme in my participants’ responses to the question, “How do you think the native Japanese see Japanese descendants?” was the perception that they are regarded as “cowards” and “losers” whose families once fled Japan, only to have their children and grandchildren return as lowly manual laborers. Osvaldo explained that Japanese Brazilians are, consequently, largely regarded by the Japanese as “traitors to the country
[of Japan]” – a sharp contrast to their previous expectations of being welcomed as in-group members and long-lost relatives and friends.

My data suggest, however, that not all Japanese Brazilian migrants were equally expected to acculturate or demonstrate knowledge of the Japanese language and culture. Rather, interviews with my participants suggest that closer physical resemblance to the Japanese ethnicity (i.e., possessing Japanese physical traits) and higher proficiency in Japanese are associated with higher cultural expectations from the native Japanese. Diego described noticing that he was treated more harshly than his non-Japanese-speaking peers: “I was scolded, but I got even more upset because there were people who couldn’t speak a word of Japanese, but they were treated better. It was hard to understand [why this happened].” Conversely, participants whose spouses are not Japanese descendants and lack any physical resemblance to the native Japanese noted that their partners were often treated more kindly. Maria, whose husband is “dark-skinned with curly hair,” and Sandra, whose husband has blond hair and light-colored eyes, explained their partners were often treated well by the native Japanese – a discrepancy that both similarly attributed to the Japanese’s incorrect assumption that their husbands were American.

My participants reported that those of half-Japanese descent were also often afforded the same gentler treatment by the Japanese. Sandra noted that her son, who is half-Japanese, experienced kinder behavior compared to other Japanese descendants, as she believed he was “considered more like an American, because there are many half-Japanese in the United States.” Felipe, who is of mixed descent and whose facial features bear only vague traces of his Japanese heritage, described a similar positive experience in his interactions with the native Japanese: “When I deal with the Japanese, they find it
interesting that I have a Brazilian face but speak Japanese. So, since I don’t look like them, but I’m trying hard to speak their language, I experience greater acceptance by them.”

Therefore, contrary to my participants’ expectations, “pure” Japanese blood and physical resemblance to the native Japanese served as aggravating factors – as opposed to factors that promote social bonding – in their unpleasant experiences in Japan. Unfulfilled hopes of an ethnic homecoming and Japanese expectations of acculturation and assimilation generally contributed toward my participants’ emotional distress, as expressed in their feelings of inadequacy, frustration, and low self-esteem.

Conversely, lack of proficiency in Japanese (for some Japanese Brazilians) functioned as a protective factor that shielded some participants from understanding disparaging comments made about them, whereas higher Japanese proficiency often resulted in greater distress. While some participants and their spouses enjoyed gentler treatment from the native Japanese because of their ethnically mixed or Western physical appearance, most were burdened by their Japanese traits and the expectations they carried, thereby reporting higher levels of distress.

Migration Stressors and Strains

As a migrant population, Japanese Brazilians also experience a number of common migratory stressors in Japan in addition to those associated with their identity and position as “return-return” migrants. Some of these stressors, particularly the perceived prejudice and discrimination associated with my participants’ Brazilian
nationality and with the negative image of Brazil held by some native Japanese, have already been discussed at length in Chapters Four and Five. This Chapter will, therefore, proceed to focus on common migration stressors identified in interviews with my participants and their effects on mental wellbeing. More specifically, the main stressors identified in this study are: linguistic barriers, the loss of protective networks of social support, and work-related stressors in Japan.

*Linguistic Barriers: I’m Illiterate in Japan*

Language barriers among immigrants are generally associated with higher stress levels and greater vulnerability to poor mental health, as those who are unable to communicate comfortably in the native language often find themselves at a higher risk of isolation, experiencing psychological distress, and encountering challenges in service utilization (Pumariega et al. 2005; Ding and Hargraves 2009). The same association can be observed among Japanese Brazilians in Japan, as linguistic barriers are identified as one of the main obstacles faced by this population, thereby placing them at greater risk of developing mental health issues and experiencing negative effects on their mental wellbeing (Asakura and Murata 2006; Miyasaka et al. 2007). This was clearly described by my participants, as challenges related to communication in Japan served as an important source of stress in their lives, which for some contributed to their depression. As Marcela explained, her insufficient knowledge of Japanese often led to feelings of powerlessness and incompetence:
Time and again, I thought, “Hey, I’m in a country where I’m illiterate. I don’t know how to speak the language, I can’t read, I can’t write, I need to have someone with me for everything: To go to the doctor, to go to the bank…” And then I started asking myself, “What am I doing here?” That’s kind of how I felt.

Echoing similar feelings of powerlessness, Bruno noted: “I felt the need to communicate, but I wasn’t able to communicate. I had to depend on other people and kept wondering, ‘Did he really understand what I meant?’”

Furthermore, in addition to serving as a significant complication for my participants in their daily lives, linguistic challenges were often also described as a point of origin for other sources of strain, including isolation and loneliness. A consistent theme in interviews with my participants, therefore, was the perception that the difficulties some Japanese Brazilians experienced in communicating in Japanese were intrinsically connected to isolation and, for some, feelings of depression. Thus, some participants, such as Diego, expressed the view that linguistic barriers may lead one to seek distance from others: “Look… People who have depression in Japan are often like that because they’re the ones who can’t communicate. They become closed off, even from their Brazilian friends.”

For some, as Cecilia and Renata noted, this isolation may also occur as the result of what they described as a psychologically detrimental “guessing game” that develops from trouble understanding the language. Because most Japanese Brazilians do not understand Japanese fully, Cecilia and Renata explained they often resort to making negative assumptions regarding what is being said. When asked if she knew anyone who took part in this game in Japan, Cecilia promptly recalled Carlos, a nineteen-year-old
man she met at the factory where they both worked. Cecilia described Carlos as suffering from depression and “going a little crazy” after living and working for a year in Japan. As he had very little knowledge of Japanese, she noticed that his interpretations of what the native Japanese said to him were often based on negative conjectures:

[Carlos] would say, “Oh, I know they’re talking about my hair.” And I’d say to him, “But you don’t even speak Japanese!” His uncle worked at the same factory, and we talked about it, and he said, “Yeah, I think Carlos has to go back [to Brazil].”

Similarly, as previously noted (see Chapter Four), Renata’s limited knowledge of Japanese led her to play this “guessing game” herself, as she often speculated about what others were saying. As she explained, this regularly resulted in imaginary stories surrounding a specific, often negative scenario that often fed into her depressive feelings. Renata described linguistic obstacles as contributing toward the perception that she lived in a world that existed separately from that of the native Japanese:

We isolate ourselves; we live in another world, a parallel world. We're there, but living in another world. We're there, but we are not part of them [...] right? And, I don’t know, we live in our little world there [...] I lived there for fifteen years feeling like this.

Some participants also noted that difficulties in speaking and understanding Japanese often hindered their access to medical services. Daniela described her
insufficient knowledge of Japanese as a significant challenge in obtaining access to healthcare and in communicating effectively with medical professionals. While she noted that translators were available, she explained they were often difficult to find or located in undesirable hospitals:

I didn’t know how to speak Japanese; so it was very difficult to go to the doctor. Especially after I had my son, I needed a translator; it was so much trouble, you know? If you needed something, you didn’t know how to say it. I needed someone [to translate], and it was terrible because people weren’t always willing to help you. It was a huge challenge in my life to have to manage in every possible way, to learn however I could […] Usually, [the hospitals] that have translators are the bad hospitals where you don’t want to go. People would also go to private practices, but it’s very difficult to find translators there. Sometimes, they have some forms in Portuguese that don’t help, because if you want to explain what you’re feeling in detail, you can’t.

Whereas some participants described their lacking Japanese language skills as a stressor that often resulted in everyday challenges and in admonishment from the native Japanese, some described it as a buffer against the pressure to acculturate that most participants experienced, as well as a protective factor against individual-level, personally mediated discrimination. In line with Asakura and Murata’s (2006) findings that as one’s understanding of Japanese improves so does one’s awareness of discriminatory comments, Marcela noted that:
Once you know the language and people start to talk about you, you know they’re speaking ill of you. But if you don’t understand it, you don’t know. The person's sitting there going, “Man, he’s so ignorant, he can’t understand…” They might be saying things, but you don’t understand. So it's like a camouflage, you know? You’re there, you're living, but you don’t know what the person is saying. It could be good and bad. It’s good because you don’t suffer, but it's bad because you do not know how to defend yourself.

Challenges associated with my participants’ linguistic abilities therefore suggest that both ends of the Japanese proficiency spectrum may result in significant distress. Whereas not understanding Japanese led some participants to play a dangerous “guessing game” that often involved pessimistic, psychologically detrimental assumptions about what was being said, having a fluent grasp on the language meant that participants were, at times, too aware of discriminatory and disparaging comments made about them. Thus, in addition to the well-documented isolation and complicated access to medical services that migrants commonly experience, linguistic challenges among my participants were also associated with varying levels of emotional distress resulting from both understanding and not understanding Japanese.

*Loss of Networks of Social Support: Nobody Can Live Alone*

A common theme present in my data involves the perceived loss of networks of social support, which my participants often identified as a contributing factor for their feelings of loneliness and isolation in Japan, as well as their depression and depressive symptoms. These comments were often inductive and, therefore, unprompted by any specific questions. Loneliness, or a perceived lack of companionship, has been
consistently linked in the literature to depression and anxiety through the absence of feelings of belonging and camaraderie (Thoits 2011).

Fernando’s description of how he often felt alone in Japan presented a point of view that was largely confirmed by his peers in this study: “I secretly cried every night [during my first year in Japan]. How I cried. Why? It was a good place, but I didn’t have any friends. I was completely isolated.” Feelings of loneliness were expressed particularly by those who migrated alone or who eventually found themselves alone in Japan, such as Carlos. As he described:

When you go [to Japan] alone, you’re very isolated […] There was a time when I lived in a place where I was the only Brazilian person living there. I didn’t have the money to make calls to Brazil all the time, and any little thing – sometimes a problem happened, I wanted to talk to someone and, like, I didn’t have anyone to go to. So, it hits you: It’s something that holds onto you; I’d feel really down, cry…

Marcela described experiencing similar feelings of isolation and depression in Japan. Despite migrating with her then fiancé, their engagement ended when he decided to return to Brazil and she chose to remain in Japan. Upon finding herself unexpectedly alone, Marcela described feeling isolated and displaced in Japan:

I was in Japan alone, without any relatives. I hardly knew anyone. I didn’t master the language; I didn’t know how to walk around by myself […] I wasn’t familiar with places, so it exhausted me a little. So, this isolation… It’s obvious that I was going to get depressed. I was sad; I started to isolate myself. I didn’t interact [with
others], and humans need to live with other groups of people, to interact, to have a social life. Nobody can live alone.

Feelings of loneliness and a sense of isolation were a common emerging theme in interviews even among those who were not objectively alone in Japan. Evandro, who relocated to Japan with his older sister, described feeling lonesome and depressed, as their different work schedules often meant they had minimal interaction with each other:

I cried because I didn’t have anyone to talk to. When we got [there], my work schedule was different from my sister’s. When she got home, I had already left for work. And when I got home, she was already sleeping, so we weren’t able to talk. I had no contact with the people who worked at the factory, so I felt very alone. I watched TV and listened to music. I think I had a bit of depression then…

Life changes associated with migration, therefore, often resulted in a perceived sense of social isolation among my participants. Motivated primarily by a sudden loss of important networks of social support, such as friends and family, these changes generally led to feelings of loneliness and, among some participants, depression.

Animosity among Brazilians in Japan: They Only Care about What Is Theirs

While some participants, such as Carlos, described feeling less alone when in the company of other Brazilians, a noteworthy theme to emerge in interviews was a perceived lack of camaraderie and solidarity among Brazilians in Japan. Most of my
participants described the Brazilian in-group dynamics and culture as problematic and filled with animosity in Japan – particularly in workplace settings. Thus, rather than serving as a coping resource and source of social support for Japanese Brazilians who were struggling with social isolation and loneliness, being in close proximity to other Brazilians intriguingly posed an additional source of strain for most.

As Evandro explained, my participants’ perceptions of animosity among Brazilians in workplace settings were often described as motivated by jealousy and competitiveness:

I know I shouldn’t generalize, but you see a lot of Brazilians who want to harm other Brazilians. It’s very strange […] Usually, these people are the ones who want to harm those who know how to speak Japanese and who have more contact with production line leaders. And, sometimes, they know that they’re talking about things that aren’t work-related. I don’t know if they get jealous because another person’s getting the leader’s attention… I think it’s a jealousy thing.

Monica described personally experiencing this antagonism from other Brazilians, as she recalled feeling victimized by her factory co-workers because of her advanced knowledge of Japanese. Having taken Japanese lessons from a young age, Monica self-described as fluent in Japanese and mentioned she did not “feel any difficulty there in talking, reading or writing,” as she could “read, write, speak, and communicate like a Japanese person.” Indeed, as previously mentioned in Chapter Four, Monica spoke Portuguese with a heavy Japanese accent during her interview.
Before relocating to Japan, Monica recalled a contractor advising her, “You should pretend you don’t know how to speak Japanese very well.” At the time, she recalled wondering: “I don’t understand. Why’s he saying this? If I go to Nihon[^40], and I know how to speak Japanese, why can’t I speak it?” Monica described coming to understand the reason for the contractor’s advice later on as a factory employee:

When I started working at the factory I understood why [he said that], right? There was another woman there who knew some Nihongo[^41] and thought there was no one better than her. But as I could read and write, I could also communicate more easily with my superiors, so she was very jealous of me. Wow, I really suffered in her hands. She was the type of person who could do evil without saying a word.

Stella described experiencing a similar situation while working in the assembly line of a car parts manufacturer, where a competitive Brazilian co-worker often reminded her: “You’ve been here less time than me, and I’m the boss’s assistant. I’ve been here for ten years; I’ve been in Japan since I was young.” Despite having lived in Japan for years, however, Stella explained that the woman had very limited knowledge of Japanese and likely felt threatened by her conversational skills. Suggesting that antagonism among Brazilians may serve to breed further antipathy between them, she described a particular occasion when their Japanese superior approached the woman to talk and Stella intentionally chose not to assist her:

[^40]: Japan in Japanese.
[^41]: Japanese.
She had this face, like, “What’s he talking about?” I was standing behind her, and I could understand a good amount of what he was saying, while she didn’t understand anything. But just because she was rude to me, I didn’t say anything. I kept to myself.

The explicit connections between tensions in the Brazilian community and my participants’ mental wellbeing are underexplored in this study’s data and in previous research. A review of the general existing literature, however, suggests that interpersonal animosity and work conflicts are positively associated with poorer mental health and mental distress among migrants, as they add to already existent challenges while depriving them of the psychological benefits of social support from a familiar community (Santos et al. 1998; Wong et al. 2008). Furthermore, existing literature on the association between poor job conditions and poor mental wellbeing identify social support, in the form of positive interactions with coworkers and supervisors, as a significant predictor of psychological health, as it alleviates work-related strain and stress (Netterstrøm et al. 2008; Tausig 2013).

It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that tension and animosity among Brazilian workers in Japan likely affect their mental health in at least two ways: 1.) By depriving them of a comforting and familiar source of social support; and 2.) By depriving them of a psychological buffer against work-related stressors. This study’s data are in line with the associations suggested by the literature, as they indicate that my participants were, indeed, deprived of the psychological benefits that social support – particularly at work – would bring. The absence of social support from a familiar community, in turn, contributed toward further isolation and loneliness.
As Luis noted, lack of unity and “a lot of competition between us” led many Brazilians to isolate themselves. Bianca also noted that Brazilians’ behavior toward other Brazilians in Japan was in direct contrast to the expressions of fellowship she believes one generally finds among Japanese Brazilians in Brazil and was contrary to the sense of solidarity that exists in other migrant populations. As she was unable to find social support in the Brazilian community, and her family was in Brazil, Bianca occasionally became depressed:

I often had depression in Japan. We really do get depressed […] We spend a long time away from our family, and Brazilians are much less united than other races, other ethnic groups. There’s a community of Japanese Peruvians – you can see they’re more united than us […] The Brazilians are kind of individualistic. They only take care of what’s theirs and want to stab others in the back […] I wish they were more united. When you come [to Brazil], everyone kisses and hugs you, asks how you’re doing. Why can’t we keep doing that in Japan?

Some participants indicated that the prevalence of a mental health stigma in the community also potentially contributed toward the further isolation of Brazilians in Japan. When asked, “Are there ways for people to seek help [for their mental health] in Japan?” Daniela responded:

No, they mostly just stay quiet and keep to themselves. Usually, they’re discriminated if they have some kind of [mental] issue, right? Brazilians themselves end up distancing themselves from [a person with a mental health issue]. Every now and then I saw that happen. [Brazilians] don’t want any contact
with people like that […] If the family doesn’t try to help, they don’t try to look for help either. And then it’s too late, and they’re already in too deep.

My data do not allow for an in-depth explanation of the heightened levels of animosity experienced by my participants; however, intragroup conflict among Japanese Brazilians, predominantly in work settings, appears to be motivated by an elevated sense of competition among co-workers, which replaced social camaraderie with rivalry. This is supported by many participants’ description of Brazilians’ intense, almost obsessive, focus on making and saving money in Japan in order to return to Brazil as quickly as possible. It is likely that such feelings of competition contributed toward a shift in Japanese Brazilians’ group dynamics: from in-group peers who share a cultural and national background to rivals in an in-group/out-group competition for work, money, and overtime hours.

Work Strain: All We Do is Work and Sleep

In addition to issues associated with interpersonal conflict and animosity among Brazilians, general work strain and dissatisfaction comprise a significant theme in my data. My findings suggest that work-related stressors are associated with my participants’ negative change in social status as part of their labor-oriented migration, as none reported holding jobs in manual labor prior to relocating to Japan. Rather, most participants left Brazil as recent high school graduates, young professionals, or as middle-aged women in search of a novel life experience, and arrived in Japan as assembly line workers in factories. As suggested by the literature (Santos et al. 1998; Del Amo et al. 2011), job
strain is a significant predictor of poor mental health among migrant workers. Consistent with existing research, therefore, my data indicate that demanding and intense work schedules, perceptions of their “frozen” and unused intellects, and unsafe work environments served as significant sources of strain during my participants’ sojourn in Japan, thereby placing them in a position of psychological vulnerability.

A consistent theme in my participants’ discussion of their daily routines in Japan was the description of a regular day (including weekends) consisting primarily of working and sleeping. When asked, “What did you do for fun in Japan?” most responded that leisure and free time were luxuries that they often renounced in favor of working overtime hours and/or holding multiple jobs. A common complaint was the perception that they worked “like robots” and often felt pressured to work as much as they could in order to earn money, which some recognized had a negative effect on their mental wellbeing. Cecilia described Japanese Brazilians’ work lives in Japan as follows:

It’s a lot of pressure. We work very hard, we earn very little. Many who go to Japan to work have a focus on money, on saving money. So, they work twelve hours, go home, and sleep. […] They might take a day off once a week but, sometimes, on this day off, they’ll work elsewhere, so they don’t have any time for themselves. And the Japanese put pressure on you all the time… You’ve got to obey them because you’re working for them.

Adding to Cecilia’s description of Japanese Brazilians’ lives in Japan, her husband, Marcos, described his work routine as a stressor that was only aggravated by the lack of social support and Brazilian animosity previously discussed in this Chapter. As he
explained, perceived lack of social support and work strain led some Japanese Brazilians to become depressed:

Depression was very common because of work: this kind of life where all you do is work and sleep. Also, you’re away from family, away from your friends. There’s this [competitive] pressure that exists there; Brazilians in Japan are very difficult people […] Imagine someone who arrives in Japan with no family, nobody, and they end up in a factory working with a bunch of callous people. There’s no other way this could go. Twelve hours spent working like a robot. You can’t do it. If your mind is prone to depression or going crazy, you will.

Cecilia noted that Marcos’ mental wellbeing was one of the reasons that prompted the couple’s return to Brazil, as she feared “he’d go crazy, [because he] wouldn’t be able to endure living and working in Japan for a long time.”

Furthermore, as most participants found themselves performing repetitive manual tasks, which they believed did not require critical thinking skills or intellectual engagement, many described feeling as if they were regressing or atrophying intellectually by working in factories. As Marcos described:

Imagine being in a factory for twelve straight hours. Take this iPad here; you’ll be sitting there putting screws in it for twelve hours. You’ll do that for twelve hours, then you’ll go back home and sleep. The next day, it’s the same thing: another twelve hours of putting screws in iPads. If you spend two years doing that, there’s an intellectual regression that’s bound to happen, right?
Luis shared in Marcos’ perspective, adding that, “the physical part of the job was easy, the mental part was the hardest.” Similarly, Julia explained that, “people stay inside these factories and don’t use a lot of their thinking skills.” Consequently, she believed that labor migrants in Japan become “frozen in time” only to return to Japan with health issues such as depression. When asked if she had any advice for Japanese Brazilians who might be considering migrating to Japan temporarily, Julia answered: “If you’re going there as a dekasegi to stay frozen in time, I don’t think you should go.”

Occasionally, some participants described the consequences of the stressful nature of their work and lives in Japan as manifesting themselves in their physical health as well. As one of these participants, Felipe described experiencing psychosomatic symptoms associated with stress and a demanding workload. As he was still underage in Japan, Felipe was not legally allowed to work overtime hours; however, he had managed to obtain two different identification cards, which allowed him to work an initial five-hour shift followed by three hours of overtime. In addition to working at the factory, Felipe was also attending high school as a full-time student. Eventually, his body began to show signs of stress, though he did not immediately recognize them as such:

I felt some chest pain. My jaw hurt, and when I opened my mouth, it would make these cracking sounds. When I went to the hospital, the doctor told me, “It’s a sign of stress. If you keep it up, you’ll end up depressed.”

His symptoms only disappeared fully after returning permanently to Brazil:
It was only after two years, only after I came back to Brazil and had spent a year here that the pain stopped. Today, I don’t feel anything anymore. I started worrying less about things; I have less pressure on me, and I’m not at the factory anymore.” Before […] I screamed to make myself feel better.

Also of note, a small number of participants described feeling trapped and controlled by their employers, as they discussed having to ask permission to spend time away from employee housing and even having their passports withheld illegally as a guarantee that their debts with labor contractors would be paid. Sandra described feeling that her life lacked freedom: “When you went out, you had to let them know; when you traveled, you had to let them know. […] I felt like we were always being watched, like slave labor. I felt trapped.” The perception of a loss of autonomy negatively affected the mental wellbeing of participants like Sandra, who described feeling frustrated and distressed with the low level of control she had over her own life.

My participants’ sudden immersion into repetitive, “robot-like” manual labor, accompanied by perceived pressure, fear of an atrophying intellect, and a loss of autonomy served as significant sources of strain in their daily lives. This is evident in their discussions of work strain as well as in descriptions of their mental and physical wellbeing: Many participants associated stressful job conditions in Japan with depression and other manifestations of psychological distress, as well as with psychosomatic symptoms such as physical pain.
By adopting the Brazilian counter-identity in Japan, my participants were able to distance themselves psychologically from the Japanese, who many came to perceive as cold, rigid, and prejudiced. In contrast to this negative perception of the native Japanese, those who adopted a Brazilian counter-identity saw themselves as generally friendlier, livelier, and warmer (see Chapter Four). Thus, in addition to providing psychological distance, my data suggest that the Brazilian counter-identity also elevated my participants’ self-esteem in face of discrimination due to their nationality and descendant and migrant statuses. With self-esteem as a mediator, the Brazilian counter-identity acted as a protective buffer against prejudice and discrimination in Japan.

In addition to relying on their Brazilian counteridentity as a protective buffer, however, many participants also described turning to different coping strategies as a way of alleviating sadness and other negative feelings. When asked, “How did you make yourself feel better when you were sad or frustrated?” some described avoidance-oriented, self-damaging behaviors, such as excessive drinking and gambling, as a way to escape from what afflicted them, while others explained they relied heavily on support from family members as well as outdoor activities to ease their minds. Whereas my participants’ reliance on alcohol was never described as developing into an addiction that was out of their control, gambling activities, which initially served as a form of distraction and avoidance, seemingly became an addiction disorder for at least one self-diagnosed participant.
Taylor and Stanton (2007) suggest that avoidance-oriented methods may be beneficial in coping with short-term situations that are not under one’s control; however attempting to escape or avoid negative feelings associated with more persistent stressors, such as my participants’ sadness and loneliness in Japan, is also a significant predictor of elevated levels of distress. Whereas he described himself as “drinking a little from time to time” in Brazil, Evandro explained he started drinking increasingly more in Japan until it became a habit. Drinking, he explained, served as a source of leisure and a distraction from loneliness, as he was often alone at home while his sister was at work, and he had few friends in Japan – most of whom he felt he could not trust. Furthermore, he lived in a small town where the entertainment options were scarce: “It wasn’t like Tokyo; I didn’t have many leisure options. If I wanted to go to the movies, I had to go to another town.” In addition to drinking, Evandro also became a “wanderer… like a gypsy” for more than a year after his sister returned to Brazil, leaving him by himself in Japan. Feeling “alone, kind of discouraged [and] a little tired from factory life,” he decided to “migrate to other cities and states” without a specific objective in mind.

Similarly, Osvaldo described developing a drinking habit motivated by loneliness, social pressure, lack of social support, and the stigma associated with mental health:

People gossip. They talk about other people’s lives; everyone finds out about things. So, you can’t talk about your family problems or work problems, because they’ll tell other people about it. So, what happens? You’re only able to vent at night to your best friend: alcohol. The amount of social pressure they place on the individual in Japan is very large. If you stumble, or if you speak in a different way, you’re seen as crazy. There are those who don’t care about things like that and are strong, but what about
the other people who are sensitive and can’t overcome these things? They turn to alcohol, drugs, and violence.

Paulo described turning to negative, avoidance-oriented coping strategies upon coming to the realization that he had spent seven years in Japan and “had not saved anything […] had not done anything,” and had “never sent a money transfer to my mom and dad.” He described:

It kind of made me freak out. What did I do with my life? I saw pictures of my mom… My mom had aged, my dad had aged. My nieces, who were small when I left, were already big. That began to affect me mentally, right? Like, what am I doing here? Why did I come here? Then I began to question myself, I started feeling like I failed… I started looking for a way out.

Paulo’s “way out” eventually developed into a more serious mental health disorder in the form of an almost yearlong addiction to gambling, which only exacerbated the negative feelings and distress that already existed. As he explained: “I’d spend a month’s salary in three days. One time, I spent it in two days, so I didn’t have enough to eat. I ate bread every day.” Thus, instead of making himself feel better, gambling only worsened his feelings: “Every time, I came home feeling even more dejected. I felt like even more of a failure. I wanted to recover that money [I lost], but I returned the next day and lost even more money.” Paulo also explained that his gambling addiction aggravated his depression, as his financial losses led him to consider suicide:
I didn’t want to work. I didn’t want to leave the house. I started thinking about doing bullshit: taking the car and driving myself off a mountain or a cliff. That’s right; that went through my head several times. And everyone would stop by my place; they’d call me, but I didn’t answer the phone.

When asked about how he overcame his addiction to gambling and how he dealt with depression, Paulo explained that thinking of his mother helped him to recover:

I often thought of my mom, and I asked myself, “God made you perfect: you have two legs, two arms, you have… You’re in good health, so why are you like this?” That weighed heavily on me to help me get out of my depression. I’d think a lot of my mom, and I told myself, “I’ll stop this addiction. I’ll start working again.” […] People who never had depression say this is bullshit, you know? But the people who lived in Japan and went through it all, they know it’s hard.

Other participants described resorting to positive coping strategies, or strategies that “foster more positive appraisals of potentially stressful situations and more approach-related coping” (Taylor and Stanton 2007: 381) in order to alleviate negative emotions. Thus, common emerging themes in my participants’ coping methods included leisurely activities such as walking and fishing, as well as relying on trusted loved ones for support. As Thoits (1999; 2011) suggests, resources such as social support are associated with lower levels of psychological distress and the promotion of psychological adjustment to stressful circumstances, as they encourage coping efforts by increasing a person’s sense of self-worth and importance to others.
Diego noted that, whenever he felt himself getting depressed, he would go fishing: “An *ojisan*[^42] who worked with me, he’d say, ‘You’re very agitated. Let’s go fishing.’ He’d stop by my place, and we’d go together.” Similarly, Luis and Bianca mentioned going out for walks with no specific destination in order to make themselves feel better. As Bianca described:

I’d walk the streets for hours; it was wonderful. I lived near the port of Nagoya, and I was near the beachfront, so it was very nice. I walked, biked… There was no one on the streets; the streets were so quiet. There’s a convenience store in every corner [in Nagoya], so I’d stop, eat something, walk… Walk to distract myself. I walked a lot.

Fernando, who migrated to Japan along with his parents and most of his siblings, explained that he believed the company and support of his family was pivotal for his mental wellbeing in Japan:

I had my parents’ support and that of my family, that’s why I was able to hold on all of this time. If I didn’t have that, I think I would have become depressed. I would get sad sometimes but, through conversations and always talking about my problems and having someone to give me support – that helped me a lot.

My participants, therefore, turned to their Brazilian counter-identity and a variety of coping strategies in response to the distress caused by various stressors in Japan. While some strategies fostered positive attitudes (e.g., social support, healthy leisurely

[^42]: A middle-aged man.
activities) that helped to alleviate emotional distress, others focused on avoidance, which for participants like Paulo led to larger issues of addiction.

**Post-Return Migration: Return to Brazil**

Many of my participants made the involuntary decision to return to Brazil because of an ill family member, elderly parents, or the economic crisis of 2008-2009. However, their choice to return was comparatively less distressing than their original decision to migrate to Japan, as all participants but one described their intent was always to return to their home country eventually. Among those who left Japan voluntarily, the reasons cited for returning to Brazil included having reached their financial goal, wanting to raise their young children “the Brazilian way,” and deciding to invest in higher education in order to improve their socioeconomic prospects.

After their return to Brazil, my participants described experiencing identity-related factors that were both beneficial and detrimental to their mental wellbeing, such as their return to positive minority status and a newfound negative perspective of the Brazilian infrastructure and environment. My participants also described encountering several resettlement stressors that are common to most migrants returning to their country of origin. These include social, environmental, and professional readjustment challenges in Brazil. Yet as a unique population that underwent processes of identity negotiation, a negative change in social status, and perceived unexpected levels of prejudice and discrimination while in Japan, my participants’ experiences of “common” stressors in Brazil are anything but common. Rather, my data indicate that the resettlement
challenges they encountered are inextricably linked to issues pertaining to identity negotiation in Japan and, now, in Brazil.

Indeed, it is impossible to understand their experiences post-return migration without considering how my participants have been changed and affected by processes of both ascribed and self-identification in Japan. Thus, whereas a model that distinguishes between migratory and identity stressors was effective in discussing factors that affected my participants’ mental wellbeing in Japan, this distinction is not as useful in understanding their experiences post-return migration. This chapter will, therefore, proceed to explore post-return migration stressors by conceptualizing them as the synergistic results of interactions between factors pertaining to issues of both return migration and identity in Brazil.

“Japanese Privilege” in Brazil: We Do Things Right

During the process of readjustment to Brazil, my participants described their return to positive minority status (see Chapter Four) as a beneficial change after experiencing the negative effects of low social status in Japan. However, my data suggest that this positive minority status – a significant and valued aspect of my participants’ Descendente identity (described in Chapter Five) – may have a dual effect on their mental wellbeing. Whereas it often serves as a source of privilege, it also provides them with a non-migrant Japanese Brazilian reference group, which may lead to negative social appraisals and, consequently, a negative impact on their mental wellbeing.
My participants primarily discussed the Descendente ethnic identity as a source of elevated self-esteem and an asset to their mental wellbeing, as it allowed them to benefit from the positive traits associated with the Japanese and Brazilian ethnicities and, additionally, signified a return to their ascribed positive minority status. As extensively discussed in Chapter Five, most of my participants returned to Brazil feeling “more Japanese,” and noted that they often receive preferential treatment and are more highly respected by Brazilians due to their Japanese ancestry and cultural ties to Japan. As an example of “Japanese privilege,” Renata described the positive image that is often associated with the Japanese as an advantage that facilitated her professional adaptation in Brazil. Renata, whose job consists of setting up and managing food stalls at festivals and other events, demonstrated an important sense of optimism regarding Japanese Brazilians’ professional future, post-return migration, in Brazil:

We get a lot of credit in Brazil for being Japanese descendants, because when we do things, we do them well. We have good hygiene, we are careful… We do things right [...] And I see that, when I work at an event that isn’t Japanese, and I’m the only one with a Japanese stall, it’s always fuller than the others.

When asked how she would react if she were called japa (a shortened, colloquial version of japonês that is occasionally used in a derogatory manner), Daniela expressed a similar sense of pride in her identity: “It’s not a problem. With great pride, I’ll tell them, ‘Honey, I’m japa and you’re not!’ (Laughs).” Interestingly, Daniela noted that before living in Japan she “hated being called japa. I didn’t even like my [Japanese]

43 Japanese person.
name; I didn’t like it when they said it. I was ashamed to be Japanese […] I was very rebellious. If they called me Japanese, I had a fit. I hated it.” This notable shift in attitude toward the Japanese aspect of her Descendente identity calls attention to the positive effect of Daniela’s return to positive minority status in Brazil. Furthermore, it accentuates the emergence of the Descendente identity post-return migration.

Most participants, thus, described experiencing elevated levels of self-esteem and a positive sense of self related to their Descendente identity after their return to Brazil. Additionally, some, like Renata, optimistically believed Japanese Brazilians’ positive minority status facilitated their professional readaptation in Brazil. Like self-esteem and sense of control, the dispositional optimism demonstrated by Renata is associated with important health benefits. As the literature documents, positive self-esteem and sense of self are consistently associated with higher levels of mental wellbeing (Thoits 1999; Taylor and Stanton 2007).

The Emergence of New Reference Groups

Despite the positive effects that the Japanese aspect of the Descendente identity and strengthened feelings of “Japoneseness” may have for my participants’ self-esteem and mental wellbeing, data suggest that they may also negatively affect their perceptions of self and the environment by altering their selection of reference groups post-return migration. Whereas prior to migration my participants enjoyed the social and psychological benefits of positive minority status relative to the general Brazilian population of Western descent, the migration process and their experiences in Japan led
to the awareness of a new reference group post-return migration: that of Japanese Brazilians who, unlike my participants, did not migrate. Similarly, my participants’ experiences in a country they largely praised as clean, modern, and organized led to new comparisons between Japan and Brazil after their return. Whereas perceptions of Brazil as dirty, loud, and unsafe were not cited as significant push factors for migration, these characteristics were among the main environmental complaints made by my participants post-return migration. While negative environmental appraisals were to be expected from my participants given the stark contrast they perceive between the two countries, it is also possible that they have internalized some of the prejudiced beliefs expressed by the native Japanese (see Chapter Five). Therefore, they may have accepted, to some degree, negative evaluations of Brazil and expressed them in their devaluation of the Brazilian environment (Jones 2000).

Identity and environmental factors, thus, combined to affect my participants’ perceptions and experiences after their return to Brazil. More specifically, just as non-migrant Japanese Brazilians emerged as a new reference group post-return migration, so did Japan as a reference country. As this Chapter will proceed to discuss, the effects of identity negotiation processes in Japan and, consequently, the emergence of new reference points, are consistently visible in the environmental and social post-return migration stressors they encountered.
Negative Appraisals of the Brazilian Environment: I Was Terrified

Most of the stressors involved in my participants’ return to Brazil, particularly as they pertain to their initial negative impressions of Brazil and Brazilians, have been discussed extensively in Chapter Five. These include environmental and ecological factors, such as general feelings of fear associated with lack of safety in Brazil and the perceived lack of overall organization and cleanliness in Brazil. While these appear to be common migration stressors at first glance, my data in fact show them to be inextricably linked to issues pertaining to their identity in Japan and in Brazil.

The positive minority status that accompanies the Descendente identity was often cited as an indirect source of fear. Indeed, the Brazilian-held general perception that Japanese descendants (and particularly migrant returnees) are wealthy, along with perceptions of unsafe neighborhoods, were cited as some of the reasons for my participants’ fear of crime, as documented in Chapter Five. As established by the literature, crime and fear of crime are significant environmental determinants of mental health, as they are associated with elevated levels of anxiety and avoidance behaviors such as spending more time indoors and avoiding social interaction – outcomes some of my participants described experiencing after their return to Brazil (Lorenc et al. 2012).

Monica described feeling extremely fearful of crime after arriving in Brazil:

[In Japan], there’s more peace of mind to walk alone at night safely. But here, it’s scary. Brazil has to improve a lot. When I got here, I was terrified. Even during the day I was scared to leave the house. Everyone warned me to be careful, so I walked around clutching my bag to my side.
In addition to fear of crime and perceptions of lack of safety, my participants consistently criticized signs of neighborhood disorder and environmental stressors in Brazil (e.g., graffiti on walls, litter on sidewalks, air pollution, among others). While they did not draw explicit connections between ecological factors and their mental wellbeing, they nevertheless reported varying levels of emotional distress elicited by what they perceived to be Brazil’s negative environmental characteristics. Existing models of the negative effects of neighborhood disorder and environmental stressors on mental wellbeing support my participants’ descriptions of distress. As the literature suggests, negative neighborhood and environmental characteristics are associated with elevated fear of crime, social isolation, and negative mental health outcomes, such as anxiety and depression (Wandersman and Nation 1998; Ross and Mirowsky 2012).

It is important to note that perceptions of Japan as a clean, safe, and organized country were mentioned mainly as points of contrast during discussion of my participants’ impression of Brazil upon their return. These perceptions did not emerge as protective factors in Japan – rather, descriptions of their experiences in Japan were overwhelmingly negative. Whereas this discrepancy in perception may be due to migratory experiences simply highlighting the environmental and social differences between two countries, my participants’ extreme awareness of negative conditions in Brazil may also be partly due to internalized prejudice. After experiencing discrimination and prejudiced attitudes from the native Japanese because of their association with Brazil, a country that was often described as “Third World,” uncivilized, and dangerous, it is notable that these perspectives became some of my participants’ own after their return.
Therefore, while my data do not allow for an in-depth analysis of this possibility, it is nevertheless plausible to hypothesize that my participants may have internalized some negative messages about Brazil during their time in Japan. My participants’ Brazilian nationality may, thus, have indirectly contributed toward a negative assessment of their country of birth.

*The Positive Minority Reference Group: What Was I? I Wasn’t Anything!*

Negative social appraisals and negative processes of social comparison were another consistent and significant theme in my participants’ discussion of their readjustment to Brazil. These were visible in my participants’ lives in the form of challenges and obstacles to their reintegration to Brazilian society. More specifically, my participants’ common complaints included: the perception that they placed their lives on hold in Japan, challenges in reestablishing their professional lives, and difficulties in rejoining social networks in Brazil. Stressors pertaining to social readjustment are common to many migrants returning to their country of origin (Barrett and Mosca 2013); however, this study’s overall findings suggest that both the Brazilian counter-identity and the Descendente identity also affect how these stressors manifest themselves and how they are felt by my participants. Once again, therefore, the resettlement challenges encountered by my participants highlight the significance of identity and how it continues to matter in their lives post-return migration, albeit differently than in Japan.

As seen with perceptions of wealth and safety, Japanese Brazilians’ positive minority status (and, consequently, the Descendente identity) is two-edged after my
participants’ return to Brazil: While it may afford advantages that facilitate some migrants’ professional readjustment and increases self-esteem and optimism, it also generates a reference group against which many compare themselves unfavorably. It was not uncommon, therefore, for my participants to compare themselves to a reference group of non-migrant Japanese Brazilians who, from my participants’ perspective, seemingly embody the positive minority image of university-educated, middle-class, and skilled professionals.

Therefore, by engaging in a social evaluation process that assesses their own achievements relative to those of non-migrant Japanese Brazilians in Brazil, some of my participants came to the conclusion of a perceived social disadvantage and low subjective social status, class, and socioeconomic position in comparison to their peers. As McLeod (2013) notes, negative appraisals of one’s social standing are associated with feelings of less power over one’s own life, a diminished sense of control, and low efficacy, along with decreased self-esteem – all of which are linked to psychological distress and symptoms of depression. Consistent with the literature, my participants’ own negative self-appraisals contributed to addiction issues, feelings of frustration, and depressive symptoms.

**What Did I Do with My Life?**

A common theme in this study’s data was the perception that my participants had put their lives on hold and had generally stopped living and progressing during their time in Japan. As Paulo noted, this feeling started to become salient in Japan, particularly in
comparisons with peers who had stayed in Brazil, but fully blossomed after he returned to Brazil and came into direct contact with non-migrant Japanese Brazilians. As one of the catalysts for the distress that contributed to his previously discussed gambling addiction, Paulo explained that “getting in touch with your friends in Brazil and learning that they’ve gotten through college [and] are building their own careers,” often prompted feelings of worthlessness and powerlessness as he measured his own achievements against theirs. Therefore, upon returning to Brazil after ten years and becoming fully acquainted with the overall developments in his friends’ and peers’ lives, Paulo described feeling a “big shock”:

I’m out of the loop in all ways! The Brazil I knew ten and a half years ago was very different from what I found when I returned here. It was a big shock. I saw friends who, when I left, were eighteen and starting college but, today, they’re already lawyers, they have their own careers. One’s a pharmacist, another a doctor. And when I came back, what was I? I wasn’t anything. That made me freak out. What did I do with my life? I was there for ten years!

Felipe described a similar reaction to watching a segment on Brazilian high school students on Fantástico, a Brazilian variety show that is available on cable television in Japan. As he watched Brazilians of a similar age group preparing to begin their university education, Felipe compared himself to them:

I spent most of my teenage years working at the factory, so I didn’t really live my life. When I was in Japan, I’d watch Fantástico, and they’d show these high school students graduating and taking the college entrance exams. I saw these
young people in Brazil, and they looked happy. I thought, “Wow, that’s wonderful.” Meanwhile, I was stuck inside the factory. And the worst thing is that I was there because I wanted to be there. In my mind, I thought I had no other choice, you see?

Now that he has returned to Brazil, Felipe explained that he has been devoting himself to his studies as a hospitality student in college and endeavoring to make up for lost time by studying; however, he admitted that he still lags behind his peers when it comes to his writing and reading skills.

My participants’ assessment of their own personal and professional achievements against those of a non-migrant reference group thus contributed toward a distressing perception of social disadvantage and even feelings of inferiority. Furthermore, given respondent bias and Thoits’ (2011) important observation that the potentially detrimental influence of social comparison on health can occur even in the absence of explicit discussion, it is possible that social appraisals occurred even among many participants who declined to discuss it in their interviews.

**You Lose the Ability to Think**

Despite negative social comparisons and feelings of inferiority relative to non-migrant Japanese Brazilians, many participants also demonstrated an eagerness to progress professionally in Brazil; however, they also described struggling with the perceived negative consequences of their past as manual laborers in Japan. These consequences can be traced back to their identity as low status foreigners: As several
studies discuss (Ross and Mirowsky 2012; Nieuwenhuijsen et al. 2010; Stansfeld and Candy 2006; Netterstrøm et al. 2008), larger structures of inequality and stratification function to determine one’s position in the labor market and, consequently, one’s exposure to factors that affect mental wellbeing. Most of my participants, as foreigners living in Japan temporarily with limited linguistic skills, were placed in low status jobs where demand was high yet control was low. My data suggest that their consequently negative professional experiences in Japan, which were largely determined by their social identity, continued to affect their lives as they attempted to reenter the labor market in Brazil. These effects, in turn, were only exacerbated by processes of social comparison between my participants and their reference group of non-migrant Japanese Brazilians.

As they sought skilled employment in Brazil, my participants expressed feeling particularly affected by the consequences of the low intellectual demands at their previous jobs in Japan – a highly demotivating factor and significant source of strain (Stansfeld and Candy 2006). Confirming his peers’ previously discussed perception that Japanese Brazilian migrants in Japan experience an intellectual “freeze,” Osvaldo recounted the challenge of trying to find a job in human resources after working as a truck driver and loader in Japan for years. Despite holding a post-graduate degree, Osvaldo perceived his social status to be low as a partial consequence of the intellectual freeze he experienced in Japan:

Thank God, I’m managing to survive, but it’s not good. When you work a physical job, you lose the ability to think because you only work with your body. When you come back to Brazil, you can’t get intellectual jobs. The brain is a
Osvaldo’s difficulty in finding employment after returning to Brazil was echoed by many of his peers, some of whom sacrificed higher education in favor of working in Japan and later came to regret their decision. Therefore, once again, the perception of low social status and class relative to a non-migrant reference group was evident in my participants’ responses.

My data further indicate that, in addition to suffering the negative psychological consequences associated with their perception of low social status, several of my participants also relatedly suffered from a perceived sense of lack of control over their own lives in Brazil – possibly as a consequence of their relatively low educational attainment. Whereas higher levels of education are consistently associated with perceived control due to greater freedom to make one’s own schedule and high pay (McLeod 2013), participants who did not have a college degree were acutely aware of their relative social disadvantage and expressed feeling powerless.

Cecilia, who does not hold a college degree, described returning to Brazil as a “joy,” yet she nevertheless felt “lost” after her return: “I said to myself, ‘Oh my God, what will I do? I’ve got no college education, no job, and to start something…’ And that’s where I messed up, right? If I had today’s mindset, I think I wouldn’t have lost so much time [in Japan].” Bianca similarly noted that, when she returned to Brazil, she had no savings, no job, and had to return to her parents’ house. Finding employment was a financial and emotional challenge, and she admitted to settling for less in her current job.
as a sales associate in a small shop, which she described as low paying and oftentimes demeaning:

Getting a job was difficult. First, because of my age and also because I was completely out of the job market and needed to get back in there. I had to learn all over again. I had to come back and do it all over again, and I’m trying […] I’m so tired… Kind of discouraged. I’m working at a store now. I think I settled. I have my customers… I guess it’s good enough. I’m starting to feel a bit old.

As Thoits (2011) notes, a sense of perceived control over life obstacles is beneficial for one’s mental and physical wellbeing; however, some participants who find themselves ill-equipped to overcome professional challenges in Brazil are unfortunately deprived of the psychological benefits of self-mastery and control. Difficulties in finding satisfying employment opportunities due to some participants’ self-described intellectual “freeze” and lack of education and professional experience (foregone in favor of working in Japan) are associated with feelings of discouragement and loss of control and mastery over their own lives. Furthermore, when my participants’ distressful challenges in reentering the labor market are considered alongside negative processes of social comparison to the image of a positive minority, it is likely that the mental wellbeing effects of these obstacles are intensified. My data suggest, therefore, that my participants’ decision to migrate to Japan entailed not only the sacrifice of education and skilled professional experience, but the sacrifice of subjective positive minority status and its mental wellbeing advantages as well.
I Felt Alone

Upon returning to their home country, return migrants often experience difficulties in re-establishing social relationships with family members and friends who stayed behind – particularly when attempting to return to a level of intimacy that existed pre-migration (Barrett and Mosca 2013). Thus, another common emerging theme in interviews with my participants was the perception that readapting socially to Brazil was – and for some still is – a difficult and often lonely process. As with social appraisals and professional challenges, the effects of their time in Japan may once again be seen in my participants’ social relationships in Brazil, as most of the stressors described can be traced back to issues of identity and prejudice.

When asked, “How was your experience adapting again to Brazil?” Cecilia, who previously noted that she regrets “losing” time in Japan, explicitly mentioned the discrepancy she senses between her working friends and herself – a negative social appraisal that significantly affected her social networks:

I felt a little lonely. I felt my friends were more distant; they had changed, right? […] I felt alone. I didn’t have many friends anymore, and everybody worked while I stayed at home.

Likewise, Monica described returning to Brazil only to discover her family had drifted apart and that she could no longer count on them as a source of social support and companionship during her difficult readaptation to the country. Monica explained she,
therefore, looked for support in her friends and in social organizations (i.e., NIATRE) that serve others who share in her identity as a recently returned migrant:

After I returned to Brazil, it seemed that my family no longer spoke the same language; it seemed like we all had a falling-out. I don’t know; this part’s very difficult to talk about. It was very lonely for me, to be fighting alone. Despite that, when I came back, I didn’t feel completely alone. I was alone within my family, but I have my friends and many good people around me, such as [the people I met at] NIATRE.

Renata, who previously described living in a separate “parallel world” in Japan, similarly noted that she found it difficult to readapt socially to Brazil. As explained earlier, Renata lived in near isolation for fifteen years in Japan, playing a “guessing game” and trying to avoid contact with the native Japanese. As a low status Japanese Brazilian migrant who identified as Brazilian, she faced communication issues and generally felt uncomfortable interacting with non-Brazilians. Living with minimal social contact in Japan, therefore, affected her social interactions in Brazil, contributing toward a state of near-depression:

When I arrived in Brazil, I could finally talk to other people […] but, at first, I had a hard time talking. So, for a while, I continued living in my own little world, where I was still guessing everything. If someone didn’t look at me the right way, I came up with a reason for it in my head. I didn’t go up to the person to talk about it. I didn’t have a social life. And in Brazil, if you don’t fit in with people, you suffer […] And when you arrive in Brazil after, like, fifteen years in Japan, you come back feeling totally averse to people. You think everyone’s bad. You
can’t separate [Japan and Brazil] anymore; you can’t live with people. That was the kind of shock that I felt here in Brazil. I almost fell into depression.

Difficulties in reconnecting with friends, family, and other Brazilians was, thus, a significant barrier for some participants, who described feeling lonesome and sad after finding their loved ones had grown distant during their time in Japan. However, my findings suggest that the participants themselves also underwent changes during their time in Japan that significantly affected their resettlement in Brazil. While some found themselves ill equipped to re-enter the labor market, thereby creating an invisible barrier between themselves and non-migrant friends, others felt the effects of having little contact with outsiders for an extended period of time.

Despite my participants’ discussion of the environmental, professional, and social stressors involved in their readjustment to Brazil during the post-return migration stage, most seemed to be on the path to feelings of post-return belonging, autonomy, and self-mastery at the time of their interviews. Many, therefore, ultimately shared a positive outlook on their lives in Brazil – particularly in comparison to the alternative option of continuing to work and live in Japan. For most of my participants, living in Brazil signified being “home” and “not alone,” despite the many resettlement challenges they encountered. As Bianca explained, despite the several obstacles she faced, she “wanted to come back here, because this is my place.” When asked if she would consider re-migrating, she noted that she would hesitate to return to Japan, as she knew it meant she would be alone again. Guilherme recognized that some of his recently returned peers are
finding it difficult to adjust to Brazil, as they have not yet managed to establish a dependable social circle of friends; however, he also noted that, unlike Japan, living in Brazil meant he would not be alone:

It’s easier to adapt here in Brazil because it’s a nice country. It’s easier than leaving Brazil and adapting to Japan. You’re alone over there. When you come back here, you’re coming home.

Therefore, the challenges they encountered in Brazil were, for most participants, preferable to those they faced in Japan. Despite resettlement stressors and obstacles, most described Brazil as a country where they felt less alone and which, ultimately, represented a greater sense of hope for the future.

**The Ethnically Confused**

While 34 of my 38 participants returned to Brazil and adopted the Descendente identity, the remaining four described themselves as living in a state of ethnic confusion that is exacerbated by the uncomfortable feeling that they have no country or homeland (as discussed in Chapter Five). Consequently, these participants described never feeling entirely at ease in Japan or Brazil – a sensation that is sadly illustrated by Felipe’s descriptions of perceived discrimination in Japan and critical dissatisfaction in Brazil – both of which have led him to engage in verbal altercations in the two countries. When
asked to describe themselves, Maria defined herself as a “mutt,” while Paulo believed he was “thrown around” and “discarded” in Japan and in Brazil due to his lack of a country.

The connections between my participants’ lack of an ethnic identity or country and their mental wellbeing are underprobed in my data; however, research suggests that those who lack a formed identity find themselves in a position of greater mental health vulnerability relative to their peers with better defined identities. As Mossakowski (2003) and Liang et al. (2006) demonstrate, pride in one’s ethnic identity potentially serves as a protective buffer against stressors such as perceived discrimination. My identity-less participants are, therefore, deprived of this valuable protective mechanism. Similarly, whereas biethnic participants are able to confine stressors and negative emotions to one aspect of their self-identity while relying on another aspect as a coping resource, it is also likely that identity-less participants are unable to turn to this strategy as a coping resource (Linville 1987).

Discussion and Conclusion

In spite of expectations of familiarity with the native Japanese culture and the native Japanese population, most of my participants described experiencing several unexpected strains and stressors upon immersing themselves in what they discovered to be an unexpectedly unfamiliar Japan. My findings suggest that, while some of these stressors are factors generally associated with most international relocations, others are associated uniquely with identity issues pertaining to a population returning to its perceived ethnic homeland. Indeed, many of my participants’ negative experiences in
Japan mirror those of their Japanese-Peruvian counterparts who similarly migrated to Japan with largely unfulfilled hopes of an ethnic homecoming (Takenaka 1999), as well as those of Greek-American and Greek-Germans who looked forward to a “dream return” (King and Christou 2010:112) to Greece but encountered corruption and xenophobia instead.

Among the common migration-related obstacles encountered by my participants in Japan, emerging themes identified in interviews suggest the following potential stressors that present significant risk factors for mental health (Pumariega et al. 2005): linguistic and cultural barriers, a loss of protective networks of social support, a negative change in social status, and perceived prejudice and discrimination associated with their nationality and non-citizen status. As “return-return” migrants, my participants also experienced a unique set of stressors related to their ethnic identities in Japan: Most reported experiencing perceived prejudice and discrimination associated with their identities as Japanese descendants as well as a strong pressure and expectation to acculturate due to their Japanese ancestry. Perceptions of discrimination are significantly associated with mental health and its effects are comparable in magnitude to those of significant life stress events, such as divorce (Kessler, Mickelson, and Williams 1999).

As Williams, Neighbors, and Jackson (2003) note, victims of discrimination may manifest their psychological distress in feelings of anger, depression, and unhappiness. My participants’ reactions to perceived Japanese prejudice are consistent with the literature, as they generally described experiencing depressive symptoms, addiction issues, and varying levels of emotional distress, as well as turning to a wide range of
avoidance- (e.g., substance abuse and gambling) and approach-oriented (e.g., social support) coping methods.

This dissertation categorizes stressors primarily according to their association with common migratory challenges or with challenges pertaining uniquely to Japanese Brazilians’ social identity; however, it is also important to understand how these relate to each other, particularly in their mental health and wellbeing consequences for my participants in Japan. As the subsequent discussion of stressors and their mental wellbeing consequences demonstrates, an overlap of migratory and identity-related stressors often occurred during my participants’ migratory experiences.

Among the sources of frustration and dissatisfaction in Japan mentioned by my participants, difficulties communicating in and comprehending Japanese was one of the most frequently cited. Thus, as predicted by Pumariega et al. (2005) in a discussion of general immigrant populations, and as observed by Asakura and Murata (2006) and Miyasaka et al. (2007) among Japanese Brazilians, linguistic obstacles and challenges often resulted in psychological distress among my participants. In addition to contributing toward negative experiences of perceived discrimination (for, as Japanese descendants and as dictated by the myth of Japanese homogeneity, my participants were widely expected to speak the language fluently) and loneliness, lack of Japanese proficiency also hindered and obstructed my participants’ interactions with the national healthcare system (Howell 1996).

Interestingly, however, competence in Japanese did not serve as a protective factor: Among the few participants who spoke Japanese fluently, proficiency did not
facilitate their adaptation to Japanese society, as they reported feeling increased pressure to assimilate (usually from their superiors) and were more acutely aware of discriminatory comments directed toward Japanese Brazilians. This data confirm Asakura and Murata’s (2006) findings of an association between Japanese proficiency and elevated levels of distress. Additionally, they mirror Finch et al.’s (2000) conclusion that, as Mexican immigrants’ levels of English proficiency increase, the more likely they are to perceive discrimination and to become more vulnerable to depression. My findings also suggest an association between Japanese proficiency and increased animosity among Brazilian co-workers, as knowledge of Japanese was described as a threatening professional advantage to which work colleagues reacted with jealousy and competition.

While those with advanced knowledge of Japanese reported feeling especially victimized, general animosity among Brazilians, particularly in factory and work settings, was a common theme in my participants’ descriptions of their everyday life. My data do not sufficiently speak to the precise origin of this intragroup conflict; however, my participants described a widespread sense of competition for better work, better pay, and overtime hours in the workplace, which might contribute toward an explanation of the minimal sense of camaraderie they perceived. My participants describe the lack of social support in the workplace as having a negative effect on their mental wellbeing, as predicted by previous studies. While social support from colleagues and supervisors has been found to have a positive effect on the mental health of workers by serving as a buffer against the negative effects of demanding occupations, thereby decreasing the risk for future depression, my participants were unfortunately deprived of this opportunity for
improved mental wellbeing (Netterstrøm et al. 2008; Stansfeld and Candy 2006; Tausig 2013).

Lack of social support in the workplace thus exacerbates the already detrimental association that exists between work, stress, and mental wellbeing among my participants in Japan – an association that can be ultimately traced back to larger structures of inequality and stratification. As several studies (Ross and Mirowsky 2012; Nieuwenhuijsen et al. 2010; Stansfeld and Candy 2006; Netterstrøm et al. 2008) have identified, social and economic structures, along with a larger system of social stratification, work together to define a worker’s position in the labor market and, in turn, to determine his or her levels of exposure to work-related stressors and their mental wellbeing consequences. Therefore, from a structural perspective, my participants’ wellbeing was at least partially defined by social status differences and macroeconomic and segmented labor market structures: As non-citizens who generally began their migratory journey to Japan by signing a contract in which they agreed to accept a position as manual laborers, they also agreed to be exposed to stressful job conditions and, consequently, negative mental health outcomes.

My participants overwhelmingly described their jobs in Japan as unsatisfactory and uninteresting: As manual laborers in factory assembly lines, most described feeling pressured to meet a daily quota of assembled parts while attempting to suppress their frustration at being unable and unauthorized to exercise their Brazilian creativity at work. Based on subjective descriptions of their jobs, those participants who worked in factory settings likely found themselves in “strained” occupations, or positions where demands are high and decision latitude is low, according to the Job Strain Model developed by
Karasek (1979). According to this model, high demands and low degrees of independence and flexibility combine to have negative impacts on the mental wellbeing of workers. Individuals employed in “strained” jobs, such as my participants, have been found to “bear the highest risk for developing stress-related disorders” (Netterstrøm et al. 2008:119), as weakened feelings of control, autonomy, and authority are associated with depressive and anxiety disorders (Stansfeld and Candy 2006; McLeod 2013). As discussed in this Chapter, my participants’ accounts of their mental wellbeing in relation to their jobs in Japan confirm the detrimental emotional and psychological effects of jobs that fall in the “strained” category.

Whereas my participants’ physical job demands are high, they largely described the intellectual demands as low, which may likewise contribute toward psychological strain through the “atrophying of skills and abilities” (Stansfeld and Candy 2006:444). Again consistent with previous research findings, my participants generally reported experiencing psychological distress associated with their tedious and repetitive work responsibilities, as well as feeling that one’s brain was “frozen” due to lack of intellectual exercise. Additionally, my participants reported continuing to feel the consequences of this intellectual atrophy even in Brazil, as they faced difficulties reentering the labor market in skilled labor occupations.

This dissertation differentiates between migratory and identity stressors in its examination of factors that affected my participants’ mental wellbeing during their time in Japan; however, the same approach is not as helpful toward an understanding of their experiences post-return migration. Rather, my participants’ experiences as migrants in Japan interact with identity factors to shape and affect their experiences as return-return
migrants in Brazil. Thus, whereas they do encounter resettlement stressors that may be common to most migrant populations (Vega et al. 1987), it is important to remember that they are nevertheless intrinsically connected to issues pertaining to their identity as Brazilians, Japanese descendants, temporary migrants, and foreigners. It is not, therefore, possible to understand the mental wellbeing of and stressors faced by return-return migrants in Brazil without recognizing their uniqueness and taking into account how identity negotiation processes continue to shape their life experiences. Just as it did in Japan, my participants’ identity continues to matter in Brazil, albeit in different ways.

Following their return to Brazil, some participants described encountering several post-return migration and resettlement stressors associated with their social readjustment to the country. These include the perception that their lives were squandered in Japan, the absence of social support in Brazil, difficulties in finding employment opportunities, and negative perceptions of Brazil, all of which my participants explained as leading to emotional distress, a deep sense of dissatisfaction, and fear. As this Chapter has noted, these stressors may be traced back to issues pertaining to my participants’ identity. Whereas they enjoy ascribed positive minority status in Brazil, many described themselves as holding subjectively low social status, as they sacrificed their education and skilled careers in favor of working in Japan. Despite identifying as Descendentes, many of my participants did not objectively fit the middle-class, positive image that is ascribed to them. Thus, my data suggest that the Japanese Brazilian positive minority serves as a reference group for my participants after their return, which consequently leads to negative social appraisals and processes of social comparison. Furthermore, the
negative mental wellbeing effects of negative social appraisals are only exacerbated by a disruption of social networks and difficulties in re-entering the labor market.

Similarly, images of a clean, safe, and organized Japan become an environmental reference for my participants post-return migration. Whereas Brazilian disorganization, pollution, and crime were not cited as significant push factors pre-migration, these characteristics became a significant theme in my participants’ discussion of their experiences post-return migration. It is expected that my participants would notice and acknowledge contrasts between the two countries after their return to Brazil; however, it is also possible that, as Brazilian nationals who experienced discrimination in Japan, they have come to internalize some of the prejudiced beliefs expressed by the Japanese (Jones 2000). If this is the case, their Brazilian counter-identity may have served as a mediator.

My participants’ negative reactions to what they perceive to be a disorderly and threatening environment in Brazil are consistent with existing models of the effects of neighborhood disorder (Wandersman and Nation 1998; Ross and Mirowsky 2012). As Ross and Mirowsky (2012) note, signs of visible disorder such as those mentioned by my participants (i.e., garbage, graffiti, and vandalism, among others) signify a breakdown of social control and a potential for harm, even if victimization has not occurred, among neighborhood residents. Additionally, such visible disorder encourages and strengthens feelings of perceived powerlessness and loss of personal control, thus making the residents’ neighborhood experience (a subjective indicator of neighborhood context) negative. As Hill and Maimon (2013) explain, this negative experience of neighborhood conditions also serves as the “primary link between neighborhood-level processes and mental health status” (486). Thus, by experiencing conditions they perceive to be
stressful, residents of disordered neighborhoods, such as some of my participants, perceive themselves at a higher risk of depression. Furthermore, as the self-concept can be closely tied to the environment in which one lives, negative neighborhood experiences may adversely affect one’s self-esteem and sense of self-worth (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell 1996; Hill and Maimon 2013).

After returning to Brazil, some participants expressed profound frustration with their own life accomplishments as well as difficulties in reentering their old social circles. The sense of having squandered one’s life was particularly present in my participants’ social evaluation processes, in which they compared their life accomplishments and social status to the new reference group of non-migrant Japanese Brazilians, who seemingly personified the positive minority image held by Japanese descendants in Brazil. A consistent theme in these evaluations was their lack of a university degree and professional career, compared to what they perceived to be their highly educated peers’ successful professional lives. Such comparisons often led to feelings of discrepancy in social class and status, which were inevitably accompanied by feelings of powerlessness, lack of authority, and low levels of personal control among some of my participants – all of which are known to contribute toward explanations of mental health disparities by social class (McLeod 2013).

By engaging in an evaluative social comparison process upon their return, my participants thus determined themselves to be at a social disadvantage relative to the reference group of non-migrant Japanese Brazilians. This conclusion of a low subjective social status and social disadvantage was only aggravated by the positive minority status generally enjoyed by Japanese Brazilians in Brazil, which is partly reflected in their
advantaged socioeconomic position and status as well-educated members of the middle-class who are primarily employed in the skilled labor sector (Tsuda 2003). My participants’ expressions of personal distress due to their low subjective social status are largely supported by the literature, which explores associations between social comparisons and mental health by examining self-esteem as the outcome (Thoits 2011; McLeod 2013). As McLeod (2013) discusses, social class is strongly related to self-esteem among adults, and subjective social status is associated with psychological distress, depressive symptoms, and “stress-related indicators of physiological functioning” (241). Low self-esteem and self-worth, in turn, are associated with anxiety, distress, life satisfaction, depression, and happiness (Thoits 2011).

Further exacerbating their low self-esteem and feelings of powerlessness is the negative change in subjective social class that can be observed in comparisons of my participants’ pre- and post-migratory statuses: Whereas most left Brazil as recent high school graduates and in search of a different opportunity in Japan, they returned to Brazil as relatively uneducated former labor migrants with few marketable and professional skills. However, they still retained their ascribed positive minority status.

Whereas my participants noted levels of emotional distress and experiences with depression in association with the stressors they encountered during their migratory journey, explicit connections may be occasionally underexplored in my data. As the available literature on urban health, mental health, and immigrant mental health demonstrate, however, the individual-level and structural stressors described by my participants nevertheless impact their mental wellbeing. Further work may wish to address these connections in greater detail and specificity.
By addressing the common stressors present in my participants’ lives as they migrate to Japan and readapt to Brazil, this study begins to pave the way toward an understanding of the unique risks to mental wellbeing experienced by Japanese Brazilians, particularly in their association with my participants’ self-identities. Furthermore, the results presented in this dissertation begin to point to my participants’ ethnic identity and processes of ethnic redefinition as important coping strategies for specific migration stressors and also as protective buffers against prejudice and discrimination and negative emotions. In doing so, it adds further support to previous studies (Tsuda 2003) in their identification of the Brazilian counteridentity as a shielding self-conception and in the protective effect of insufficient linguistic knowledge (Asakura and Murata 2006). Similarly, this dissertation contributes to the literature on mental wellbeing and identity by identifying my participants’ merged Japanese Brazilian identity post-return migration as a self-concept that, like its Brazilian counteridentity predecessor, serves as an important psychological buffer among my participants.

This study also makes an important and unique contribution to our current knowledge of return-return migrants by understanding their experiences after they return to their country of origin, as called for by King and Christou (2014). Whereas most studies of populations who undertake ancestral migration (Christou 2003, 2006; King and Christou 2010; Takenaka 1999; Potter and Phillips 2006; Wessendorf 2007; Fokkema 2011) focus extensively on return migrants’ experiences in their ancestral homeland, a review of the literature was unable to locate an investigation of the second return journey of roots migrants.
The theoretical contributions and implications of the results presented in this dissertation will be discussed in Chapter Seven.
Chapter Seven

Discussion

Introduction

The objective of this dissertation was to explore and understand the ethnic self-identity of Japanese Brazilian labor migrants at three different stages of the migration process: 1) pre-migration in Brazil; 2) during their sojourn in Japan; and 3) in Brazil once again, post-return migration. Additionally, I aimed to examine the possible ways in which migratory and ethnic identification processes may have affected their mental wellbeing by identifying the potential stressors and psychologically beneficial factors the participants encountered throughout the two migratory processes.

The following guiding questions framed the direction of this research:

1. How do Japanese Brazilians in Brazil self-identify ethnically (before migrating)?
3. How do Japanese Brazilians negotiate potentially conflicting ethnic identities after returning to Brazil?
4. How are Japanese Brazilians’ mental wellbeing affected by migratory and identity-related processes?

The data presented in this dissertation were obtained through in-depth, face-to-face interviews with 38 Brazilian nationals of Japanese ancestry. My participants were recruited primarily through electronic communication with the assistance of NIATRE and, subsequently, by employing the snowball sampling method. All participants were recruited and interviewed in the greater São Paulo region, where the concentration of Japanese Brazilians is highest in Brazil. With the participants’ permission, all interviews were audiotaped, translated from Brazilian Portuguese to English, and transcribed.

An analysis of the data revealed several emerging themes that address this dissertation’s guiding research questions. This chapter proceeds to discuss the most relevant of these themes, which were presented in Chapters Four, Five, and Six.

**Most Japanese Brazilians Identify as Japanese before Migrating to Japan**

Before relocating to Japan as temporary labor migrants, most participants described self-identifying as Japanese in Brazil. For most, this identification was willing and voluntary (as opposed to ascribed or resulting from processes of other-identification), as they generally expressed feeling proud of their association with Japan and the native Japanese. The results presented in Chapter Four are largely consistent with previous
research. As Tsuda (2003) and Linger (2001) discuss, the Japanese ethnic identity of Japanese Brazilians in Brazil is partially derived from and encouraged by the positive collective image they enjoy in the country. Albeit generalized cultural stereotypes, the hardworking, honest, and intelligent qualities that Brazilians often associate with the Japanese greatly benefit Japanese descendants in Brazil and enhance their positive minority status. Furthermore, Japanese Brazilians tend to view their cultural ancestry as a valuable social asset because of Japan’s “First World” status, as mentioned by Luis in Chapter Four. Also consistent with Tsuda’s (2003) findings, such stereotypical characteristics were also seemingly absorbed and internalized by most participants, as they described themselves as more honest and certinho than Brazilians and, in some cases, than the native Japanese.

When asked to explain why they identified as Japanese, my participants typically responded by citing examples of their involvement and participation in the Japanese Brazilian community, such as: friendships with other Japanese Brazilians, a “Japanese” upbringing, visits to the Liberdade neighborhood, and attendance at Japanese cultural events. Once again, my participants’ responses closely resemble previous research findings. As Tsuda (2003) found, most Japanese Brazilians, as second- and third-generation immigrants, are comprehensively acculturated into Brazilian society; however, those who self-identify as Japanese also often turn to involvement in ethnic community events as well as practices and elements associated with the Japanese culture (such as a preference for Japanese food) as a manner of strengthening, maintaining, and affirming their ethnic identity. Additionally, as some of my participants noted, familial socialization
processes – particularly being taught to adopt Japanese cultural values from a young age – serve as one of the sources of their “Japaneseness” and Japanese cultural essence.

A minority of participants, however, described feeling less proud and less eager to self-identify as Japanese. In contrast to their peers, these participants placed smaller emphasis on the pride and pleasure derived from the Japanese identity in Brazil and, instead, focused most of their responses on instances of perceived negative discrimination as examples of occasions in which they were involuntarily ascribed the Japanese label. Such instances included being the focus of offensive ethnic jokes and being referred to as, “Japanese guy,” rather than one’s own name. These findings diverge from Tsuda’s (2003) suggestion that potentially discriminatory acts are generally understood as an expected expression of Brazilians’ recognition of difference in lighthearted or neutral circumstances. While Tsuda (2003) found that virtually all of his younger participants claimed having never experienced discrimination in Brazil, this study contrastingly found that some were quick to recall occasions in which they felt excluded and different because of physical and cultural elements of their Japanese identity. Though it is expected that western Brazilians will notice (and possibly acknowledge) the physical differences between Japanese Brazilians and themselves – particularly when their acute sensitivity to minor variations in racial appearance is considered (Travassos and Williams 2004) – such observations were generally discussed as negative, unwanted occurrences in my participants’ daily lives.

As Tsuda (2003)’s fieldwork is separated from my interviews by a span of nearly 20 years, it is possible that different historical climates and more recent conversations of issues surrounding race, racism, and general discrimination in Brazil encouraged my
participants to disclose their negative reactions to racial and ethnic labels and gestures. Likewise, my participants’ accounts of negative social difference may be attributed to my social identity as a Japanese Brazilian who, like them, grew up in Brazil as the occasional object of unwanted and unsolicited attention that is elicited solely by my physical appearance and superficial elements of my cultural background. It is important to note, however, that even those participants who described themselves as unwillingly Japanese nevertheless self-identified as such before migrating to Japan, for they found their names and faces served as obvious and inescapable markers of their identity.

**Most Japanese Brazilians Identify as Brazilian in Japan**

After migrating to Japan, all participants described coming to the realization that, contrary to their prior beliefs, they were not Japanese. In response to this novel awareness, most participants developed and assumed a nationalized Brazilian counter-identity through which the Japanese identity they previously held was minimized or negated and subsequently replaced. My participants’ ethnic identity switch from Japanese in Brazil to Brazilian in Japan is consistent with previous studies of Japanese Brazilian return migrants and other migrant populations that, like Japanese Brazilians, returned to their ethnic homelands only to redefine their ethnic identities due to unexpected factors, such as Japanese Peruvians, Greek Americans, and Bajan Brits (Christou 2006, King and Christou 2010; Potter and Phillips 2006; Takenaka 1999).
My participants’ (and other similar populations’) ethnic identity redefinition is not surprising, as research has long considered one’s identity to be flexible and formed and shaped by social and contextual factors (Phinney et al. 2001; Erikson 1994; Goffman 1959; Root 2002; Rockquemore and Brunsma 2002; Rockquemore et al. 2009). The Brazilian identity assumed by most of my participants is a prime example of the fluidity and variation of ethnic identity in its interaction with social context: As Tsuda (2000) explains, it emerges as a response to Japanese Brazilians’ experiences of exclusion and marginalization in Japan, which poses a stark contrast to their expectations of a friendly ethnic homecoming. It is, therefore, a counter-identity: an identity that is “formed when minority groups refuse to identify with a negatively perceived dominant culture by asserting and maintaining a sense of ethnic difference in opposition to majority society” (Tsuda 2003:192). This study’s findings suggest that my participants’ ethnic redefinition was propelled by two main factors associated with social exclusion and the perceived pressure to assimilate in Japan: perceptions of cultural and physical difference and experiences of perceived discrimination and/or prejudice.

Despite previous expectations of encountering a familiar ancestral homeland, most participants described noticing significant cultural and physical differences between themselves and the native Japanese. In addition to distinctions between the modern Japanese that is currently spoken in Japan and Japanese Brazilians’ generally outdated knowledge of the language, my participants also perceived differences in body type, skin tone, and clothing preferences between themselves and the native Japanese – all of which created and accentuated boundaries that most participants initially did not expect to find (Takenaka 1999; De Carvalho 2003). Thus, despite their status as ethnic return migrants
who should hypothetically resemble the native Japanese physically and culturally, my participants’ experiences mirror those of non-return migrants, who often find visible physical traits and other differences to be a significant barrier between themselves and the native population (Park 1928).

Perceptions of prejudice and discrimination associated with their biographical ties to Brazil similarly comprised a dominant theme in interviews with my participants – particularly beliefs pertaining to Brazil’s negative image as a Third World country where safety and modern infrastructures are rarities. These findings are similar to those obtained by similar studies (Tsuda 2003; De Carvalho 2003) and, while conditional on subjective interpretation, also generally support discussions of the subtlety of Japanese discrimination (Lebra 1976), as none of my participants described experiencing explicit or aggressive manifestations of prejudice. Rather, my participants’ accounts describe the native Japanese as expressing their prejudice primarily at the first and second levels of Allport’s (1979) “degrees of negative action” (14): antilocution and avoidance. When asked about discrimination in Japan, most recalled being posed questions by the native Japanese that implied a negative view of Brazil as uncivilized and crime-ridden, such as being asked if Brazilians wear clothes and if monkeys swing from the branches of the trees in São Paulo. Some participants also recounted experiencing social exclusion through the native Japanese’s avoidance of Brazilians at work and during leisurely activities. Such actions are consistent with what Tsuda (2003) deems a “social veneer of politeness” (136) that disguises the Japanese’s true prejudiced feelings and reflects the distinction that exists between their private and social selves. This dissertation’s findings, therefore, support previous research in their suggestion that the Japanese’s negative
attitudes toward Brazil and Brazilians were expressed primarily in a limited spectrum of superficially politically correct actions: from seemingly innocuous questions to social exclusion or isolation.

As second- and third-generation Japanese descendants, some participants described experiencing discrimination associated with their Japanese ancestral roots and their cultural inability to meet Japanese expectations of easy assimilation. The negative experiences resulting from the cultural pressure placed on my participants and, most importantly, from the significant barrier they encountered in the Japanese language, confirm and exemplify the “myth of Japanese homogeneity” (Howell 1996:172), which intrinsically associates the Japanese identity with Japanese cultural essence (Goodman et al. 2003). As Howell (1996) notes, “there is no melting pot in this discourse of [Japanese] national identity” (172), hence Japanese descendants, such as my participants, are generally expected to conform to Japanese society and its cultural expectations despite being generationally distant, Brazilian offspring of Japanese immigrants.

Indeed, this expectation is so prominent that it provides the reasoning behind the Japanese government’s decision to encourage Japanese Brazilians and other Latin American populations of Japanese ancestry to migrate to Japan as temporary workers: By allowing the entry of foreigners of Japanese heritage into the country, it aimed to attenuate the country’s need for manual labor, while also preserving the population’s ethnic homogeneity. Adding further impetus to this decision was the Japanese belief that its people’s homogeneity and purity were largely responsible for the country’s impressive economic growth following World War II and, therefore, immigrants of Japanese descent would aid Japan by doing the same (Goodman et al. 2003). Thus, by allowing Japanese
Brazilians to migrate with relative ease to Japan, the government hoped to satisfy the labor needs of its manufacturing sector while also ensuring the survival of the Japanese cultural essence, as Japanese ancestry was perceived to make migrants more easily prone to assimilation (Howell 1996; Goodman et al. 2003). When preconceived expectations of a Japanese identity and cultural essence in my participants were unfulfilled, the native Japanese were likely left perplexed for, as Omi and Winant (1994) note, “We expect people to act out their apparent racial identities; indeed we become disoriented when they do not” (59).

Consistent with Omi and Winant’s (1994) discussion of racial identity and with Tsuda’s (2003) findings, this anticipation of easy assimilation was felt more strongly by participants of full Japanese ancestry, as they described perceiving higher cultural expectations and experiencing harsher treatment than their ethnically mixed counterparts and non-Japanese spouses. Given the prevailing myth of Japanese homogeneity and the Japanese government’s stance on the preservation of ethnic consistency, it is not surprising that the participants who appeared to be physically and culturally more proximate to a Japanese identity were burdened with higher expectations of assimilation and integration. Japanese Brazilians in Japan, therefore, find themselves in a constricting situation: Despite their status as Brazilian foreigners in Japan, they are not able to disengage fully from their familial association with Japan, as their Japanese family names and faces burden them with cultural expectations and pressures from a society that believes they are all the same.

It is also important to note that the Japanese’s prejudice and discontent with my participants’ failure to show signs of the expected Japanese cultural essence were
expressed in an arguably less subtle manner relative to the discrimination they experienced for being Brazilian foreigners. This discrepancy, which occurs in violation of Tsuda’s (2003) notion of the Japanese social veneer of politeness and Lebra’s (1976) discussion of the careful distinction between the Japanese’s private and social selves, potentially suggests that, unlike feelings of prejudice associated with a dislike of Brazilians, the Japanese’s disapproving stance toward those who do not conform to expectations of cultural homogeneity need not be kept as a secretive inner attitude. Rather, the Japanese’s often explicit expressions of disapproval, as described by my participants, indicate that expectations of conformity to Japanese homogeneity are not bound by the rules of the social veneer of politeness and any associated disappointments may be freely expressed as a socially accepted attitude in Japanese society.

**Japanese Brazilians Identify as Japanese and Brazilian after Returning from Japan**

This study’s findings generally suggest that most participants came to self-identify as both Japanese *and* Brazilian after their permanent return to Brazil. This ethnic redefinition occurs in an interesting process of transnational identity development, which interviews indicate is potentially driven by the pursuit of a positive social identity (Tajfel and Turner 1979). While my participants did not fully return to the Japanese ethnic identity they held before migrating to Japan, they did not fully retain the Brazilian counter-identity they developed in Japan either. Rather, significant themes identified in my participants’ interviews reveal the emergence of a hybrid ethnic identity that consists
of elements commonly attributed to both the Brazilian and Japanese cultures: the Descendente identity.

In the American context, it is generally assumed that one’s ethnicity is fixed and constant as opposed to flexible and subject to variation according to social and contextual factors (Waters 1990). As my participants and other migrant groups demonstrate, however, it is possible for one’s ethnic identity to undergo changes associated with both individual and structural factors, such as personal preference, degree of acceptance in a given society, and the advantages and disadvantages associated with a particular identity, among others. For my participants, an accumulation of negative experiences in Japan, negative perceptions of Brazil upon their return, and an admiration for positive stereotypical characteristics associated with each group combined to form a liminal, hybrid ethnic identity that consists of elements associated with both groups.

Japanese Brazilians are not alone in their hybrid identification, as the Descendente identity displays strong similarities with the Nikkei identity held by Japanese Peruvians in Peru and Japan (Takenaka 1999). One of the few significant differences between these hybrid identities concerns only the migration process stage in which they emerged, as Japanese Peruvians assumed a Japanese Peruvian identity during their stay in Japan. Like the Japanese Brazilians interviewed for this study, Takenaka’s (1999) Japanese Peruvian migrants were met with cultural disillusionment and perceptions of difference in Japan, which encouraged a redefinition of their Japanese identity and perception of “Japaneseness.” While they did not develop a Peruvian counter-identity, their ethnic redefinition resulted in the construction of the Nikkei identity – a hybrid of Peruvian and Japanese cultures.
During the informal process of constructing a new identity after returning to Brazil, my participants described feeling torn between their pre-migratory Japanese identity and the Brazilian counter-identity they adopted in Japan, as they found the experiences they acquired throughout the migration process made an exclusive identification with either side nearly impossible. Thus, like Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) proposed in their discussion of biracial identities, this dissertation conceptualizes the hybrid identity formation as a dynamic process that is influenced by push-pull factors. In discussions of their perceptions of Japan and Brazil, my participants described the luring qualities and repelling flaws associated with each identity: While factors such as Japan’s First World status and Brazilians’ flattering admiration of the Japanese “pulled” my participants to reclaim their Japanese identity, negative factors such as memories of discrimination and disappointment with contemporary Japanese culture “pushed” them away from doing so. Similarly, while the feeling of being home in a familiar country and the perception of greater human warmth among Brazilians encouraged my participants to maintain their Brazilian identity, their distress and frustration with Brazilian bureaucracy, disorganization, and fear of crime discouraged them from continuing to affirm their “Brazilianness” fully. My participants, therefore, seemingly found themselves in a liminal state in which they were pushed and pulled from two distinct directions and which eventually solidified into a hybrid ethnic identity.

Interestingly, despite adopting a Brazilian counter-identity and recalling primarily negative experiences in Japan, such as those involving discrimination and overall disillusionment with an “essence-less” Japanese society, my participants nevertheless described returning to Brazil feeling “more Japanese.” Though this may appear
incongruous at first, my participants’ description of their own traditional Japanese characteristics (e.g., respect for elders, honesty, and a strong work ethic), in contrast with the “essence-less” behavior they observed in Japan, suggest that they have actually come to view themselves as a population that descends from the Japanese yet exists apart from them by continuing to maintain their own notion of a “Japanese essence.” My participants’ overall disappointment with lacking elements of the native Japanese culture and subsequent strengthening of stereotypical portions of their Japanese identity are broadly similar to the experiences of their Peruvian counterparts. Like my participants, Japanese Peruvians found that the contemporary native Japanese largely lack the positive values that are stereotypically associated with the Japanese culture but which they believe that they, as Japanese descendants, continue to hold (Takenaka 1999). Therefore, for both groups, this disillusionment accentuated their perceptions of difference relative to the native Japanese while at the same time strengthening their aforementioned “Japanese essence” and values. Among my participants, this resulted in the perception that they returned to Brazil “more Japanese” than when they left. As Guilherme remarked, “I feel more Japanese than the Japanese themselves.”

This study’s findings suggest that, at the same time as elements of my participants’ Japanese identity resurged after their return to Brazil, the Brazilian counter-identity they had developed in Japan weakened considerably in comparison, particularly as they reclaimed their status as a positive minority in Brazil. This weakening was seemingly also affected by the challenges my participants encountered in adapting to a country they perceived to be dirty, disorganized, and unsafe relative to Japan – a potential evidence of internalized prejudice experienced in Japan (Jones 2000). My participants’
weakened Brazilian identity due to the environmental and ecological challenges encountered upon their return lends support to Twigger-Ross and Uzzell’s (1996) notion of the importance of the association between place and identity, with self-esteem as a mediator. As Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) found, one’s sense of belonging or emotional attachment to a specific place or environment is largely mediated by its symbolic qualities, which in turn, have an effect on one’s self-esteem. Thus, “prestigious” and desirable environments are more likely to encourage a sense of belonging and identification among its residents, as opposed to dirty and disorganized places. In spite of resettlement obstacles, however, my participants’ “Brazilianeness” did not disappear completely: most participants described returning to Brazil with a newfound appreciation for the country, its culture, and its people, who they described as creative, innovative, and hopeful (in stark contrast to their negative perceptions of the Japanese). As they did with stereotypical, positive Japanese characteristics, my participants largely described identifying with “Brazilian” qualities such as warmth and sociability as well.

As Takenaka (1999) notes, the process of migration and membership in a transnational community often serve to emphasize the dissimilarities that exist between one’s own group and others. Despite my participants’ shared ancestral roots with the native Japanese, they never came to be completely assimilated and, hence, never established themselves as Japanese in Japan, as occurs with most migrant populations in a host society. This perception of dissimilarity with the Japanese remained after their return to Brazil where, as “return-return” migrants, they similarly realized that they do not identify entirely as Brazilians either. Thus, my participants came to live with a separated identity in Japan and in Brazil (post-return migration), in which they possessed a strong
In their construction of the Descendente identity, my participants draw from popularly held, admirable, and desirable stereotypes generally associated with the Japanese and Brazilian populations, thereby lending support to Tajfel and Turner’s (1979) popular assumption that individuals constantly “strive to maintain or enhance their self-esteem” (40). By turning to their cultural and transnational resources to claim positive characteristics such as Japanese honesty and Brazilian creative problem solving skills, my participants have constructed a self-conception that conveniently merges the best of both worlds in a single identity and, consequently, benefits them socially and economically in Brazil by raising the value of their social identity – as Tajfel and Turner (1979) argue, the value of one’s social identity is associated with the social evaluations of the group to which he/she belongs. This dissertation’s findings, thus, also provide support for the circumstantialist view (Cornell and Hartmann 2007) that a utilitarian logic exists in the process of ethnic identification: By distancing themselves from structural and emotional factors that contribute negatively to their self-conception, my participants are able to benefit from an identity that provides them with a beneficial sense of satisfaction and pride.

Thus, in the development of their hybrid identity, my participants once again demonstrate a strong similarity with Japanese Peruvians’ development of the Nikkei identity, which Takenaka (1999) describes as resulting from a “selective and strategic process in which the Japanese Peruvian community, in its growing distance from the Japanese, tries to increase its socioeconomic benefits” (1465). While this study found no
evidence that the Descendente identity is deliberate and premeditated, it nevertheless supports Takenaka’s (1999) suggestion that, like the Nikkei identity, the Descendente identity is propelled by perceptions of advantages and serves as a way to “maximize [Japanese Brazilians’] collective benefits” (1460). A similar situation can also be observed in Bajan-Brit return migrants, who knowingly draw on their symbolic whiteness and its markers, such as English accents, as a way to derive “unique social and economic privilege” (Potter and Phillips 2006: 914) in Barbados.

Some Japanese Brazilians Claim to be Identity-less or Country-less

Whereas a majority of my participants indicated that they were not and could never be fully Japanese, thereby identifying as Brazilian in Japan, a minority (N=3) nevertheless exhibited assimilationist tendencies in Japan. Unlike their peers, these assimilation-oriented participants continued to cling to their positive pre-migratory perceptions of Japan and the Japanese, while simultaneously expressing the belief that Brazilians should modify their presentation of self in order to conform to a more conservative and subdued Japanese society.

For the reasons discussed previously in this Chapter, the presentation of self of assimilation-oriented participants was generally not met with positive responses by the native Japanese and, consequently, was not validated. As Giddens (1991) and Goffman (1959) note, when one’s self-projection is discredited, a state of anomie is likely to ensue, as the maintenance of one’s identity and expressions of it become disrupted. For my
assimilation-oriented participants who, like their peers, were unable to acculturate and experienced instances of disappointment and perplexity due to linguistic deviations and perceived discrimination by the Japanese, it is likely that such disruptions contributed to a more complicated state of ethnic identity confusion. Unlike their peers, assimilation-oriented participants did not enjoy the protective effects of a Brazilian counter-identity. As discussed in Chapter Four, despite identifying as Japanese pre-migration, Monica demonstrated feeling unable to define her ethnic identity post-return migration in Japan and in Brazil. Indeed, Monica’s ethnic allegiance repeatedly switched from Japanese to Brazilian to Japanese once again during her interview. These findings are, therefore, broadly similar to Tsuda’s (2003) observation that the more “Japanized” Brazilian migrants in Japan encounter greater challenges developing their ethnic identities, as they are socially excluded by the Japanese yet nevertheless unable to become fully integrated with the Brazilian community in Japan.

As Giddens (1991) notes, “The individual only feels psychologically secure in his [sic] self-identity in so far as others recognize his behavior as appropriate or reasonable” (191). Thus, it is possible that assimilation-oriented Japanese Brazilians are more likely to feel less psychologically secure in Japan than those who have adopted a Brazilian counter-identity. While no conclusive empirical evidence concerning the Japanese Brazilian population yet exists, Tsuda’s (2003) observation of the challenges faced by assimilation-oriented individuals, along with this dissertation research’s findings, suggest that those in a state of ethnic identity confusion are likely to be more vulnerable to mental illness due to loneliness and the stress resulting from the pressure and expectation to acculturate. A review of the broader literature reveals that challenges pertaining to
acculturation and acculturative stressors have been found to be associated with poor mental health among migrant and refugee populations (Lincoln et al. 2015; Pumariega et al. 2005).

After returning to Brazil, most of my participants expressed identifying as biethnic Japanese and Brazilian individuals; however, a minority (N=4) described feeling devoid of a home country and, consequently, identity-less. These participants were not assimilation-oriented in Japan, as they claimed to identify as Brazilian (to varying degrees) there. While this perceived lack of identity is conceptually similar to Root and Brunsma’s (2002) notion of a biracial transcendent identity, a sharp distinction separates the two: Whereas individuals with a transcendent identity claim comfort in existing without a defined identity and are able to view identity as a mere social category, my identity-less participants expressed confusion and dissatisfaction associated with the lack of an identity or country with which they feel at ease. Thus, just as Giddens (1991) claims identity to be “reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography” (53), my participants’ lack of identity reflects their inability to readjust to Brazilian society while remaining highly aware of their previous realization that they cannot claim a Japanese identity. Identity-less or country-less participants were noticeably more critical of both Japanese and Brazilians societies and vocal in their perceptions that they do not “fit in” in either country. Thus, for these participants, it is likely that the “pull” factors associated with Brazil, Japan, and its respective populations were weaker than their “push” factors. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of my data to identify the reasons for the discrepancy in my participants’ choice of identity, as their number is small and interviews do not reveal any significant similarities between them.
While no definite research exists regarding the mental wellbeing of persons who claim to have no country or ethnic identity, it is likely that, like their assimilation-oriented counterparts, my identity-less participants are more vulnerable to mental illness than those with relatively better-defined ethnic identities. Whereas a strong sense of and pride in one’s ethnic identity has the potential to serve as a protective buffer against stressors such as discrimination (Mossakowski 2003; Liang et al. 2006), these participants cannot reliably count on pride in their identity as a coping resource, for they are not entirely certain of who they are. Similarly, while biethnic participants may use their hybrid identities as a protective resource through which they are able to confine the negative aspects of living in Brazil to a portion of their identity (as opposed to their entire self-conception), it is likely that my identity-less participants are not able to rely on this coping strategy (Linville 1987).

The Mental Wellbeing of Japanese Brazilians in Japan

My data suggest that my participants experienced stressors in three different realms, or layers, of their lives in Japan: common migration stressors, stressors pertaining to their return-return migrant status, and stressors that are unique to their Japanese Brazilian social identity. While my data occasionally do not speak sufficiently to the precise effects of these migration stressors on my participants’ wellbeing, emotional distress is unmistakably present, as made evident by their discussions of dissatisfaction, sadness, and frustration in Japan (as presented in Chapter Six). My participants’ levels of
distress are similarly visible in open discussions of their own experiences with depression, addiction, and substance abuse.

Deciding to leave one’s country of birth and resettling in a land that is virtually foreign (despite, or perhaps because of, one’s optimistic expectations of the contrary) is oftentimes a challenging sociocultural and psychological process for those involved – even when it is undertaken voluntarily. Having migrated to Japan as temporary labor migrants, my participants were no different, as they described encountering a number of stressors in Japan and Brazil that are commonly associated with the experience of migration, and which have been extensively researched and documented by previous studies of the mental health of immigrants (Bhugra 2004; Pumariega et al. 2005; Davies et al. 2010; Lincoln 2015; Castañeda et al. 2015; George et al. 2015). Additionally, the decision to migrate to Japan was seemingly a stressor in itself, as some participants described the beginning of their journey to be fraught with emotional challenges that resulted in much distress, such as guilt and regret.

Among some of the stressors most frequently cited by my participants during their stay in Japan were: linguistic obstacles, a loss of networks of social support, work-related challenges, and perceived prejudice and discrimination – all of which are known to increase migrants’ vulnerability to poor mental health (Pumariega et al. 2005). My participants emphasized, in particular, the sense of social isolation that resulted from these challenges, as they often felt excluded from or unable to engage in regular social activities due to language barriers and their work schedules, while also feeling unable to connect with Brazilian co-workers and even, occasionally, family members and partners.
Whereas my participants expressed the desire to turn to the Brazilian community in Japan as a source of social support during difficult times, they noted that relationships with other Brazilians were often fraught with animosity, jealousy, and feelings of competition. Thus, they reported feeling deprived of the significant benefits that could potentially come from the support and familiarity of other Brazilians (Santos et al. 1998; Wong et al. 2008), particularly in the workplace setting. The workplace is, in many cases, a social setting where one is able to fill a general need for socializing and receive support in the form of advice or encouragement from colleagues, which may have a positive effect on mental and physical wellbeing (Tausig 2013). Furthermore, cross-sectional and longitudinal studies of the effects of social support at work have determined it to be protective of workers’ mental health by decreasing the risk for future depression and facilitating one’s handling of psychosocial strain, especially in occupations where decision latitude is low and job demands are high, such as my participants’ jobs in Japan (Stansfeld and Candy 2006; Netterstrøm et al. 2008). It is reasonable then to conclude that lack of support from fellow Brazilian co-workers and supervisors likely divested my participants of a potentially significant buffer against the stressors pertaining to their work in Japan and their often-mentioned consequences, such as loneliness and depressive feelings.

As persons of Japanese ancestry “returning” to their ethnic homeland, my participants also encountered a unique set of stressors associated with their self- and other-identities in Japan, in addition to the migration stressors already discussed. The most prominently discussed identity-related stressors included prejudice and discrimination associated with their Japanese ancestry, and the perceived pressure to
assimilate to the native culture – both of which contributed to feelings of unfulfilled expectations of an ancestral homecoming.

As previously discussed, most of my participants recounted experiences of perceived discrimination based on their inability, as second- and third-generation Japanese descendants, to satisfy the Japanese myth of ethnic homogeneity and Japanese expectations of cultural essence. In response to what they perceived to be social exclusion and prejudice, my participants described suffering from depression and often experiencing emotional distress, which manifested itself in feelings of frustration, sadness, and loneliness. This dissertation’s findings concerning my participants’ experiences of identity-based discrimination are largely consistent with previous studies of Japanese Brazilian labor migrants in Japan (Tsuda 2003; De Carvalho 2003) and the native Japanese’s unmet expectations of cultural homogeneity (Howell 1996).

The Mental Wellbeing of Japanese Brazilians Post-Return Migration

Whereas this dissertation presented the factors that affect Japanese Brazilians’ mental health in Japan by categorizing them as migratory or identity-related stressors, this distinction is less useful in understanding my participants’ experiences in Brazil post-return migration. In Brazil, factors pertaining to both migration and identity interact with each other more intricately to affect the mental wellbeing of Japanese Brazilians as they resettle in their country of origin. Stressors common to most migrant populations are present; however, they are experienced differently by Japanese Brazilians as a result of
past and present identity negotiation processes. This study, therefore, conceptualizes my participants’ experiences post-return migration as affected by factors that have been shaped by issues of both identity and migration encountered in Japan. My data suggest that these factors may be responsible for variations in levels of self-esteem and emotional distress among my participants.

My participants’ social identity as a negative minority group in Japan, experiences with anti-Brazilian discrimination, and prejudice associated with their perceived cultural incompetency affected their post-return migration experiences through the creation of a new reference environment and reference group. Whereas negative environmental characteristics and signs of neighborhood disorder went virtually unmentioned as push factors that propelled their migration from Brazil to Japan, my participants consistently cited these factors as significant sources of distress in their daily lives post-return migration. Thus, after my participants’ return, Japan emerged as a country of reference against which Brazil compared very unfavorably. While it is possible that this new perspective emerged due to acquiring experience in two countries at contrasting stages of development, it is also possible that my participants developed negative views of Brazil as a result of internalized prejudice. As previously noted, my participants discussed being exposed to prejudiced beliefs regarding Brazil and its developing, “Third World” status while in Japan as Brazilian nationals. This study, therefore, expands Jones’ (2000) concept of internalized racism to one of internalized general prejudice and suggests that participants have accepted and absorbed negative messages of Brazil. Consequently, they engaged in a process of devaluation of the country, with Japan as a point of reference.
Negative perceptions of the environment, in turn, resulted in varying levels of emotional distress among my participants.

After their return to Brazil, most participants discussed encountering resettlement challenges pertaining primarily to issues associated with their environmental readjustment to Brazil and negative appraisals of the environment, including perceptions of signs of neighborhood disorder. In response to stressors pertaining to their readjustment to Brazil, my participants generally expressed feeling frustrated with and discouraged by the lack of organization, cleanliness, and safety they encountered in the country – particularly when these were considered in contrast to their impressions of a clean and modern Japan. As the urban health literature suggests, negative environmental characteristics, such as those noted by my participants, serve as a primary mediator between the neighborhood and one’s mental health status (Hill and Maimon 2013). Consequently, negatively perceived neighborhood-level characteristics are significantly associated with poor mental health outcomes (e.g., anxiety and depression) as well as with many of the adverse sentiments expressed by my participants in their interviews, such as heightened fear of crime and a sense of social isolation (Wandersman and Nation 1998). More specifically, signs of visible disorder, including garbage, graffiti, and vandalism (all of which were mentioned by my participants as common elements in their neighborhood environment), encourage and strengthen feelings of perceived powerlessness and a loss of personal control among residents, which increases the risk of depression and negatively affect self-esteem and sense of self-worth (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell 1996; Ross and Mirowsky 2012; Hill and Maimon 2013).
In addition to negative perceptions of environmental characteristics, perceptions of lack of safety in Brazil comprised another significant theme in my participants’ discussion of their resettlement in Brazil. As highly visible and easily distinguishable members of a positive minority group, my participants mentioned feeling fearful of being victims of violence and crime associated with the generally incorrect perception that all Japanese (particularly former migrants) in Brazil are somewhat wealthy. This belief likely stems from Japanese Brazilians’ generalized high educational status, professional occupations, and higher than average salaries (Tsuda 2003) in Brazil, as well as the Japanese Yen’s comparative strength and value relative to the Brazilian Real. Thus, the fear of being victimized, as participants such as Sandra and Carlos discussed, added another layer to the challenge of readjusting to Brazil, for it interfered negatively with their daily routine (albeit temporarily) and social readjustment: Sandra claimed she spent the first two to three years indoors and only left the house in a car with her husband, and Carlos described asking his then girlfriend to walk him to and from the bus stop as part of his daily journey to work.

My participants’ fear of crime and their belief that they may be singularly targeted because of their ascribed Japanese identities is of noteworthy significance, as not only does fear of victimization contribute to unhealthy avoidance behaviors, as Carlos and Sandra noted, but, as a sign of social disorder, it is also an important significant environmental determinant of mental health (Lorenc et al. 2012; Wandersman and Nation 1998) that is associated with elevated levels of anxiety and depression. Furthermore, exposure to negative, uncontrollable events in the neighborhood, such as crime and danger, fosters feelings of powerlessness among residents. Feelings of powerlessness, in
turn, interact with other signs of neighborhood disorder to create feelings of mistrust among residents, as is clearly demonstrated by Sandra and Carlos’ experiences, thereby weakening opportunities for social support and bonding (Ross and Mirowski 2012). This dissertation’s findings regarding my participants’ emotional distress, deep sense of dissatisfaction, and heightened fear of violence and crime are, therefore, consistent with the existent literature.

My participants’ social position in Japan as a negative minority group largely determined many of their personal and professional experiences in the country. As manual laborers in factories, most perceived themselves as deprived of professional and educational opportunities that would have elevated their social status in Brazil. As temporary migrants who lacked fluency in Japanese, they felt isolated and unable to interact normally with those outside the Brazilian community. After returning to Brazil, my participants saw their ascribed positive minority status restored; however, many believed their objective social status to be far from positive due to the professional and personal consequences of their experiences in Japan. Thus, just as Japan emerged as a new country of reference for my participants, so did the population of non-migrant Japanese Brazilians who, in my participants’ eyes, more accurately embody the image of a positive minority. Despite some participants’ acknowledgement that an ascribed positive minority image affords them some professional advantages and an elevated self-esteem, it also contributed to processes of negative social comparison against non-migrant Japanese Brazilians, perceptions of low social status, and emotional distress.

After returning to Brazil, many participants described feeling alone, as their friends and family had grown emotionally distant during their time in Japan. My
participants’ experiences, though disheartening, are consistent with the experiences of other return migrant populations. As noted in Barrett and Mosca’s (2012) exploration of the return of Irish migrants to Ireland, feelings of social isolation and difficulties in re-establishing pre-migration levels of intimacy with friends and relatives are a common challenge encountered by return migrant populations. However, among my participants, difficult experiences in readjusting to old social circles were exacerbated by perceptions of low social status and achievements relative to the non-migrant reference group, as some discussed coming to the realization that by migrating to Japan they put their lives on hold and became “frozen in time.” This realization was often accompanied by feelings of worthlessness and insignificance in comparison to their peers, who had continued to advance their education and careers in Brazil, whereas most participants sacrificed a university degree and professional experience in favor of working in Japan.

Many participants, therefore, engaged in social evaluation processes in which their own life accomplishments were negatively compared to those of their non-migrant peers. Such processes of social comparison largely led to a perceived discrepancy in social class and status, accompanied by feelings of powerlessness, lack of authority, low levels of personal control, and the conclusion of social disadvantage relative to non-migrant Japanese Brazilians. The emotional distress and dissatisfaction expressed by my participants in association with their negative social status post-return migration is supported by the literature: As noted by McLeod (2013), social class is a significant predictor of self-esteem among adults, and low subjective social status is consistently associated with psychological distress and depressive symptoms.
Relatively little is known so far about the mental health of international return migrants following return to their country of origin; however, the resettlement stressors identified in my participants’ interviews are broadly consistent with those identified by studies of Irish return migrants (Barrett and Mosca 2013), as noted above, and of returned internally displaced persons (Davies et al. 2011; Siriwardhana and Stewart 2013). As Siriwardhana and Stewart (2013) describe, return migration to an internally displaced person’s area of origin is a potentially “complicated and traumatizing event” (3) due to damaged sociocultural links to the community and overly optimistic expectations of returning home. However, elements of my participants’ identity as Brazilians in Japan, Descendentes in Brazil, and an ascribed positive minority group differentiate their resettlement experiences from those of other return migrant groups.

Ethnic Identities Serve as a Potential Protective Resource

In face of stressors associated with migrating, a demanding work environment, and social exclusion, my participants described rarely seeking professional medical help in Japan, as linguistic barriers, inadequate translated materials, and the high cost of interpreters hindered their access to such services. Rather, most resorted to positive informal coping strategies, such as going for walks, fishing, or relying on trusted family members for emotional support. A minority, however, described turning to self-damaging coping strategies in order to alleviate stress, such as alcohol and gambling. For at least
one participant, gambling seemingly developed into a mental disorder, thereby only exacerbating his distress.

Whereas research findings on the mediating effects of ethnicity on mental wellbeing have been largely variable (Yip et al. 2008; Yoo and Lee 2008), among the most noteworthy findings in this dissertation is the significance of Japanese Brazilians’ identity as a potentially protective resource against prejudice, discrimination, and, possibly, other stressors. While Tsuda (2003) has already discussed the value of the Brazilian counter-identity in facilitating Japanese Brazilians’ psychological adjustment to Japan, this dissertation suggests that the identity of Japanese Brazilians proves once again malleable and protective in the development of a beneficial hybrid ethnic identity after their return to Brazil. Thus, this study conceptualizes identity as a potential coping source and protective buffer that aids one’s adjustment to a new, perhaps stressful, environment.

Whereas acculturation to a distinct cultural setting may occasionally, as Davies et al. (2010) note, have a positive effect on migrants’ mental health, it may also incite a process of ethnic identity redefinition, as was the case with most of my participants in Japan. Though my participants described encountering numerous sociocultural challenges, as previously discussed, the development of the Brazilian counter-identity operated as a coping resource, which allowed most to derive a sense of pride and security in their identity while distancing themselves psychologically from the negatively perceived Japanese. The Brazilian counter-identity, therefore, served as a protective buffer against prejudice and discrimination based on my participants’ cultural shortcomings and Brazilian nationality: Despite lacking fluency in Japanese and hailing from a developing nation, most of my participants described taking pride in the Japanese
essence they were able to maintain as Nikkei away from Japan and in the Brazilian warmth, sociability, and creativity that they believe themselves to display, in contrast to the cold, rigid, and “modernized” Japanese.

Similarly, by developing the hybrid Japanese Brazilian Descendente identity after their return to Brazil, most of my participants derive significant pride and satisfaction from the perception that they hold the best of both worlds within themselves: a “Japanese privilege.” As Guilherme noted in Chapter Five: “I think that we are privileged [as Japanese descendants].” Through the formation of a hybrid identity, my participants developed a positive social identity that allows them to benefit from the positive reputation enjoyed by the Japanese in Brazil while simultaneously distancing themselves psychologically from the essence-less and untraditional Japanese they encountered during their migratory sojourn. Most of my participants expressed pride in their bicultural status, which allowed them to remain in touch with the traditional (albeit outdated) elements of Japanese culture that are often admired by western Brazilians, while benefiting from the creative, hopeful, and positive attitude they believe Brazilians to hold. In other words, my participants believe themselves to combine the positive aspects of being Japanese and of being Brazilian within their Japanese Brazilian Descendente identity.

However, as discussed previously in this Chapter, being a Descendente and return-return migrant in Brazil also entails processes of negative social comparison against a reference group of non-migrant Japanese Brazilians, which had detrimental effects on my participants’ mental wellbeing. Nevertheless, this dissertation argues that negative social appraisals do not negate the Descendente identity’s potential as a protective buffer against negative factors. Whereas non-migrant Japanese Brazilians
emerged as a reference group against which objective educational and professional achievements are evaluated, the general Brazilian population continues to serve as another reference group (as it did prior to migration) to which my participants compare their own personal characteristics as members of the general Japanese Brazilian population (with little migrant status distinction). My participants’ comparisons to the general Brazilian population generally favor Japanese Brazilians, who self-describe as more honest and hardworking, and consequently elevate their self-esteem and self-worth.

The development of the Descendente identity, therefore, is beneficial for my participants’ mental wellbeing as it entails greater self-complexity in my participants’ identification. As biethnic individuals, they possess the tools to distance themselves psychologically from negative characteristics and stereotypes associated with both the Japanese and Brazilians. A multifaceted identity oftentimes serves as a useful coping mechanism: In order to protect oneself from stress, one may cautiously deemphasize the significance of a certain aspect of one’s identity or confine the effects of a negative event to a portion of this identity (Thoits 1999; Linville 1987). Thus, my participants are able to draw on their biethnicity as a protective resource against stressors such as Brazil’s disorganization or the Japanese’s cold aloofness. Similarly, they are able to rely on comparisons to the general Brazilian population, a devalued reference group, as a source of elevated self-esteem.
Significance and Contributions

By examining the fluid ethnic identities and allegiances of Japanese Brazilian return-return migrants and beginning to understand a portion of their journey that, until now, remained unaddressed, this dissertation provides support for situational and reflexive approaches to identity development as a social process that is undergone by active agents and dependent on contextual and structural factors (Rockquemore 2009; Goffman 1959; Giddens 1991; Omi and Winant 1994). Thus, it suggests an interactionist and constructionist understanding of identity as one that diverges from outdated assimilationist views (Park 1928) and is, therefore, not concerned with an end-point in the process of identity development nor constrained by previously defined social categories (Root 1992; Cornell and Hartmann 2007). Rather, my findings indicate that ethnicity is created and recreated in an active ongoing process driven by experiences of globalization and the changing meanings of community, tradition, and home (Giddens 1991; Malkki 1997). Ethnic identity, therefore, is presented in this dissertation as a multifaceted and dynamic identity that results from a reflexive process of situational adjustment and validation of one’s presentation of self (Goffman 1959; Miller 1992; Stephan 1992).

In addition to the contributions this dissertation research makes toward our continuous understanding of ethnicity and race as “fundamental organizing concepts of the contemporary world” (Cornell and Hartmann 2007:12), it is also important to note the attention it brings to the subjective and flexible meanings of these terms for a culturally ambiguous population in Brazil, where the definition of and distinction between these terms is often muddled and unclear. When asked about their ethnicity or ethnic identity, it
was not uncommon for my participants to cite racial markers (e.g., skin tone, hair texture, and eye shape) as ethnic characteristics. My participants’ conceptual overlap between race and ethnicity demonstrates the lack of clarity that exists in defining these two terms in Brazil and reflects their general discomfort surrounding discussions of race. In order to accommodate this, this dissertation, therefore, considers ethnicity and race as separate, but not mutually exclusive concepts (Cornell and Hartmann 2007). Rather, it follows a Weberian (1978) understanding of ethnicity as a subjective characteristic shared by people who believe in their common descent, share similar physical traits and cultural practices, and/or hold similar historical memories – “whether or not an objective blood relationship exists” (389). By following this definition and viewing physical characteristics as racial elements that help to comprise one’s ethnic identity, this research accommodates my participants’ understanding of ethnicity, while simultaneously calling attention to the ways in which understandings of “race” and “ethnicity” may vary across populations.

In a world where identity is becoming increasingly deterritorialized and images of home are becoming but symbolic, my participants embody the possibility of creating their own hybrid (or border) identity, as others have discussed in relation to the development of liminal racial identities among mixed-race individuals (Rockquemore and Brunsma 2002). By doing so, my dissertation indicates that scholarly approaches to understanding multiracial identity development may be similarly applied to an analysis of the development of ethnic identities – even when these are not associated with biological heritage but, as with my participants, occur as a manifestation of diverse cultural and
social inheritance. This is likely to become of even greater relevance as migration patterns are transformed and new “return-return” populations begin to emerge.

This dissertation, additionally, contributes to our knowledge of identity and mental wellbeing through its analysis of the Brazilian counter-identity and the Japanese Brazilian Descendente identity. While a consensus has not yet been reached regarding the buffering and exacerbating functions of ethnic identity in moderating the effects of discrimination (Yip et al. 2008; Yoo and Lee 2008), this research lends support to the notion that increasing minorities’ and multicultural populations’ feelings of self-worth and self-esteem could potentially serve as protective buffers against prejudice, discrimination, and other adversities (Mossakowski 2003; Kiang et al. 2006). My participants’ development of a hybrid Japanese and Brazilian ethnic identity – one that they perceive to be comprised of positive traits and qualities often associated with both ethnicities and countries – produces, in Rockquemore and Brunsma’s (2002) words, an almost “protean” effect on their self-esteem. Whereas Japanese Brazilians do not actively engage in frequent identity shifts, unlike the examples discussed by Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002), they nevertheless share in the belief held by individuals with a protean identity that to possess a multicultural background and identity is a gift, as it endows one with unique cultural shrewdness. As individuals of mixed-heritage status, they believe themselves to enjoy a number of benefits, including increased contact with a diverse population, language ease (for some), and increased levels of tolerance.

Though some of this study’s most meaningful findings seemingly point to the importance of understanding hybrid ethnic identities as a buffer against perceived discrimination, it is also important to note that the malleability of identities presents
another possible coping resource for minorities in general, as demonstrated by my participants’ development of the Brazilian counter-identity in Japan (Thoits 1999; Stryker and Burke 2000). By forming a nationalized identity that allowed them to adjust psychologically to Japan while maintaining a high sense of pride and self-esteem, it appears that most of my participants added another layer of complexity to their self-conception. This, in turn, may have allowed them to limit criticisms of their cultural inadequacy and nationality to a small, de-emphasized fraction of their self-conception, thereby protectively utilizing the fluidity of their identity as a coping mechanism (Linville 1987; Thoits 1999). This dissertation suggests, therefore, that ethnic identity serves as an additional coping resource beyond social support and self-damaging behaviors, such as those mentioned by my participants.

**Conclusion**

This dissertation examined the ethnic identities of Japanese Brazilian migrants from Japanese in Brazil, to Brazilian in Japan, and Japanese and Brazilian after their return to Brazil. In doing so, it addressed an important gap in the existing literature: While their pre-migratory Japanese identity in Brazil and their Brazilian counter-identity in Japan have been extensively documented and analyzed by previous studies, this dissertation’s exploration of Japanese Brazilians’ post-migratory identity in Brazil presents a novel and valuable contribution to the literature. This dissertation, furthermore, provided evidence for an interactionist, dynamic, and reflexive approach to issues of
identity formation: Through my participants’ changing self-conceptions, it demonstrated the malleable dynamics of our identities in facilitating adjustment to new settings and establishing a positive social identity.

Similarly, by examining the migratory and identity stressors encountered by my participants, this dissertation provided support for the notion of identities as protective resources that buffer the effects of negative events and factors, such as prejudice, discrimination, and adjustment to unfamiliar or undesirable structural elements. As socially excluded Japanese Brazilians in Japan, my participants successfully relied on a Brazilian counter-identity in order to differentiate themselves positively from the native population. As Japanese descendants in Brazil, most developed a sense of biethnicity, which eased their cultural readjustment to the country.
Chapter Eight

Conclusion

This dissertation examines the process of return-return migration and how it is experienced by Japanese Brazilians. More specifically, it explores how Japanese Brazilians return-return migrants self-identify ethnically in three different contexts: (1) in Brazil prior to migrating to Japan; (2) in Japan as temporary labor migrants; and (3) in Brazil after their return from Japan. Additionally, this study examines how multiple migrations and the ethnic identity shifts associated with each context positively and negatively affect the mental wellbeing of Japanese Brazilians through both migratory and identity-related stressors. In doing so, this dissertation addressed the following questions:

1. How do Japanese Brazilians in Brazil self-identify ethnically (before migrating)?
3. How do Japanese Brazilians negotiate potentially conflicting ethnic identities after returning to Brazil?
4. How are Japanese Brazilians’ mental wellbeing affected by migratory and identity-related processes?

This study’s conclusions, as presented in Chapters Four, Five, and Six, indicate
that Japanese Brazilian return-return migrants experience multiple shifts in their ethnic self-identity and, consequently, undergo a multitude of experiences. Whereas most participants generally identified as Japanese prior to migration, they redefined their ethnic self-conceptions in Japan by assuming a Brazilian counter-identity, and eventually adopted the hybrid Descendente identity after their return to Brazil. Not all participants, however, followed the same identification trajectory, as some reported having no identity and/or no country in Japan and after resettling in Brazil. My participants’ processes of ethnic redefinition were seemingly prompted and shaped by the pursuit of a positive social identity in different social contexts and occurred in reaction to several social and cultural factors, including perceptions of social acceptance, social appraisals, and appraisals of the surrounding environment. This dissertation conceptualizes these elements as “push” and “pull” factors that contribute toward identity formation and definition.

My data suggest that participants experienced migration and stressors consistent with those documented by the existing literature on the mental health of migrant populations (Viruell-Fuentes 2007; Pumariega et al. 2005; Asakura and Murata 2006). In Japan, they described suffering from the negative, distressing effects of common stressors such as social isolation, loss of networks of social support, and linguistic challenges. However, as a unique population returning to their ethnic homeland, my participants encountered several identity-related factors that affected their mental wellbeing. These included a negative change in social status, unfulfilled expectations of an ethnic homecoming, a pressure to assimilate based on the Japanese myth of ethnic homogeneity (Howell 1996), and prejudice and discrimination associated with their social identity as
Brazilian Nikkei. Thus, despite expectations of the contrary, my participants’ Japanese ancestry generally resulted in emotional distress in Japan. In order to cope with sadness and other negative feelings, participants turned to different coping strategies, including social support from family members as well as avoidance-oriented, self-damaging behaviors such as gambling and alcohol abuse.

Whereas a framework that explicitly differentiates between migratory and identity-related stressors is useful toward an understanding of the factors that potentially affect the mental wellbeing of Japanese Brazilians in Japan, the same approach is less effective when examining their experiences in Brazil. My data suggest that, after returning to Brazil, their experiences and perceptions are affected by an accumulation and interaction of both migration and identity factors. In other words, it is impossible to begin to understand my participants’ resettlement experiences and challenges without acknowledging how these are intrinsically linked to the elements that have affected their journey so far.

Thus, while common resettlement stressors are clearly present in their lives post-return migration, they are ultimately connected to issues pertaining to their identities. Experiences of social readjustment were particularly problematic: While some acknowledged that their ascribed positive minority identity in Brazil served as a welcome boost to their self-esteem, others engaged in processes of social appraisal and comparison against non-migrant peers. This, in turn, often led to emotional distress, as my participants perceived themselves to hold low social status and to have squandered their lives in Japan. Similarly, it is possible that my participants internalized some of the prejudiced, anti-Brazilian beliefs expressed by the Japanese in Japan, as they expressed
highly critical views of the country’s organization, cleanliness, and safety post-return migration. Interestingly, these views did not emerge as significant factors that “pushed” my participants to migrate to Japan.

My data further indicate that the Brazilian counter-identity and the Descendente identity serve as potential protective resources for my participants. In Japan, the formation of a Brazilian counter-identity functioned as a coping resource that allowed Japanese Brazilians to develop a strengthened sense of self-identity, which likely buffered the negative effects of prejudice and discrimination. Similarly, it allowed my participants to distance themselves from the Japanese identity they previously held in Brazil and, consequently, to distance themselves from disillusionment and disappointment. In Brazil, the Descendente identity serves as a positive social identity that benefits my participants’ self-esteem, as most believe themselves to combine the positive aspects of being Japanese and of being Brazilian within a single identity. While embodying the Descendente identity may also entail negative social appraisals relative to non-migrant peers, it is important to remember that the general Brazilian population similarly serves as a reference group for Descendentes. Comparisons to Brazilians, in my participants’ perspectives, often favor Japanese Brazilians, thereby increasing their levels of self-esteem and self-worth. Conversely, participants who claim to be identity-less or country-less are likely deprived of the mental wellbeing benefits of the Brazilian counter-identity and the Descendente identity.

Processes of ethnic identity negotiation in Brazil and Japan and my participants’ resulting self-concepts demonstrate that the possible identities one can hold are vast, mutable, and adaptable. In its exploration of the ethnic identities adopted and constructed
by Japanese Brazilian return-return migrants (from Japanese to Brazilian to Japanese Brazilian), this dissertation provides support for the conceptualization of ethnicity as a flexible and fluid identity that is not constrained by existing social categories. Furthermore, it suggests that the concept of multiethnic, changing identities is likely to become progressively prominent as, like my Japanese Brazilian return-return migrants, different populations come to be increasingly affected by processes of globalization and are consequently forced to reconsider the meanings of community and home. By identifying the Brazilian counter-identity and the Japanese Brazilian hybrid identity as potentially protective resources against perceived prejudice and discrimination, as well as a response to social and contextual changes that were perceived to decrease the value of one’s social identity, this dissertation also provided support for the notion of ethnic identity as a valuable buffer against threats to one’s mental wellbeing (Mossakowski 2003; Kiang et al. 2006).

**Theoretical and Policy Implications**

By beginning to understand the experiences of return-return migrants as they resettle in their country of origin – an important phase of their migration process that is sorely underexplored in the literature – this dissertation uncovers several matters with significant theoretical and policy implications.

The findings of this dissertation regarding the flexible and mutable ethnic identities of Japanese Brazilian return-return migrants are not intended to be
generalizable to all Japanese Brazilians, as each participant in this study has a unique set of experiences and a unique manner of perceiving the world around them. However, the theoretical framework applied in the examination of my participants’ ethnic identities can be applied toward an understanding of the changing racial, cultural, and ethnic identities of other migrant populations in other transnational contexts. As social actors socialized in their country of origin, most migrants leave their country with a certain set of expectations that may or may not be met in their destination. Furthermore, specific elements in the country of origin (e.g., beliefs, upbringing, and self-perception) may shape the ways in which migrants settle into their new country and navigate the new society’s racial, ethnic, and overall stratification system. The self-perception of migrants after returning to their country of origin is, in turn, shaped and influenced by their experiences abroad. Thus, whereas my participants are unique in their ethnic return-return status, lessons learned from an analysis of their experiences may also be applied toward a broader understanding of the identities of migrant populations in general. This is likely to become of even greater significance as identities become increasingly deterritorialized and globalized.

Similarly, this dissertation’s conceptualization of ethnic identity as a significant factor associated with mental wellbeing – one that is both a predictor and a consequence of one’s mental health – can be applied toward an examination of other forms of identity and their relationship with psychological health. Among my participants, their ethnic identities emerged as responses to negative social factors and elements, thereby serving as protective buffers, as well as medium through which they were able to raise the value of their social identity in face of challenges to their self-esteem. This study’s approach to
understanding the factors shaping ethnic identity and its consequences can, thus, be applied toward an examination of identities in general and, particularly, minority group identities, such as those pertaining to different genders, religions, political groups, among others.

In addition to contributing to our understanding of ethnicity and identity, the findings of this dissertation also have valuable implications for policy and practice. These implications could potentially begin to address the challenges faced by Japanese Brazilians and, subsequently, improve their lives at different stages of migration.

Most of my participants discussed lack of social support as a significant cause for experiencing emotional distress (e.g., feelings of loneliness, sadness) at some point during their time in Japan, which was only exacerbated by the animosity they sensed from Brazilian peers. In order to foster social support among Japanese Brazilians in Japan, thereby also ameliorating their mental wellbeing, Brazilian community leaders, health professionals, and others in Japan should work to develop programs that aim to promote social cohesion and establish a sense of community and social support among Brazilians residing in Japan. In addition to providing a buffer against the negative effects of stressful work environments on mental wellbeing, community-building programs would also help to strengthen Brazilians’ social ties, mitigate the negative effects of isolation, and, hopefully, discourage negative coping behaviors.

My participants’ sense of social exclusion was similarly felt in their interactions with the Japanese healthcare system, particularly as a result of linguistic difficulties. Because translators were not always available or affordable, and the available translated
materials in healthcare settings did not sufficiently or adequately meet my participants’ needs, some of my participants described forgoing medical assistance. Thus, it is important that Japanese Brazilians in Japan have access to affordable and reliable interpreter services that will encourage and facilitate interactions with the Japanese healthcare system.

Likewise, it is important to ensure the availability of services and programs that facilitate the readjustment and readaptation of Japanese Brazilians who have returned from Japan. Unfortunately, NIATRE, the organization that assisted my participant recruitment, closed its doors in December of 2014 after the Ministry of Labor decided to end its sponsorship; however, returned migrants are still able to access job services and attend informational talks promoted by CIATE (Centro de Informação e Apoio ao Trabalhador no Exterior44) in São Paulo. While an overlap exists between the services provided by NIATRE and CIATE, the former focused exclusively on providing support for migrants after their return to Brazil. It is necessary to recognize the importance of providing such services with an exclusive focus on returning migrants and ensure that they continue to exist.

Furthermore, it is important to note that, while São Paulo holds the largest concentration of Japanese descendants in Brazil, it is not the only migrant point of origin in the country. As many of my participants noted, visiting the Liberdade neighborhood and participating in Nikkei community events in São Paulo are significant positive elements of their Japanese identity. Thus, it is important to ascertain that even those who

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reside outside of São Paulo have adequate access to services and sources of support during the resettlement period.

Also of note is the significance of one’s ethnic identity as a coping resource and protective buffer against potential stressors. As other studies (Kiang et al. 2006) have shown, other forms of group identity (e.g., gender, profession, race) may have similarly protective effects on one’s mental wellbeing. Therefore, recognizing the significance of a positive group identity and promoting its development through social programs and campaigns among Japanese Brazilians and other populations may serve as useful tools for minorities who might find themselves in positions of social vulnerability.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

The results of this dissertation serve as a foundation for future research on the identity and mental wellbeing of Japanese Brazilian return-return migrants and other populations with similar experiences, particularly after return migration. In order to understand the ethnic identities of Japanese Brazilians in greater depth, future studies might benefit from including non-migrants in their sample, as it would allow for a more accurate comparative assessment of pre- and post-return migration identification. Similarly, obtaining the perspectives of non-Japanese Brazilians as well as native Japanese persons would likely provide greater detail and uncover different dimensions of the ethnic identification process.
Additionally, although this dissertation identified the stressors typically encountered by Japanese Brazilian migrants during and after migration as well as their impact on my participants’ mental wellbeing, examining some of these impacts in depth was beyond the scope of the available data. Thus, future work might wish to examine in greater detail the mental wellbeing effects of migration stressors on return-return migrants, while paying particular attention to those that are identity-related.

Future research would similarly benefit from a longitudinal study design that allows for a more detailed and accurate understanding of return-return migrants’ mental wellbeing experiences at various points and at different stages of migration. This would allow for a more precise evaluation of indicators of mental health and mental wellbeing issues (e.g., self-esteem, sadness, loneliness) through quantitative methods, such as self-reported surveys. Likewise, future longitudinal studies would benefit from self-reported surveys measuring different dimensions of ethnic identity (e.g., centrality and salience), which would yield results that are unaffected by retrospective bias or other memory-related issues. A longitudinal and quantitative approach would, finally, allow for an improved examination of the changes in migrants’ ethnic self-concept and mental wellbeing throughout the migration process and, thus, the identification of potential associations between migration, ethnic identity, and mental wellbeing.

On a more general level, future research on immigration, identity, and mental health might supplement the existing research on biracial and multiracial populations by examining biethnic and multiethnic groups as well. As demonstrated by this dissertation and studies of similar populations, the rise of globalization and the deterritorialization of identities signify an increasing need to direct our attention to migrant groups, their
identities, and the potential positive and negative effects of developing different self-conceptions.

Limitations

In addition to the contributions this dissertation research makes to the existing literature on race and ethnicity, identity, and mental wellbeing, it is important to recognize its limitations.

This study explored the perceptions of 38 Japanese Brazilian return migrants in the greater São Paulo area. By recruiting participants from the greater São Paulo region, this study’s sampling strategy ensured that most (if not all) had fairly easy access to elements of the Japanese culture (e.g., Nikkei associations, festivals, etc.). Thus, it excludes those whose access to the Japanese culture might be more complicated and whose pre-migratory identity might be different from those in my sample. The findings of this study, therefore, only reflect the experiences of the interviewed participants and are not meant to be all encompassing and definitive; however, it provides a starting point for additional studies in a largely unexplored area.

As a cross-sectional study, a significant portion of the data is derived from the participants’ recollection of past experiences, thereby posing another limitation to this study. Due to the interviews’ retrospective nature and my participants’ discussion of events that occurred a significant amount of time ago, the data gathered by this study is
subject to recall error and other issues related to memory, such as a skewed distortion of past events. Relatedly, it is also important to note that the quality of interviews may have been affected by my participants’ emotional state and reaction to sensitive topics (e.g., discrimination and mental health), which may have contributed toward responder bias (Patton 2002).

My social identity as a third-generation Japanese Brazilian and its possible implications in this study’s results were addressed in Chapter Three. Additionally, because all interviews were conducted in Brazilian Portuguese, the participants’ native language, and translated to English, it is possible that some cultural elements of my participants’ perceptions were lost in translation.

This study explored and shared the ethnic identity journey of 38 Japanese Brazilian return migrants as they came to understand themselves in relation to their social and cultural surroundings, as well as the very personal mental wellbeing impacts of undergoing this unintended process of self-discovery. This dissertation is a call for an enhanced understanding of a unique population and its experiences, which will hopefully yield greater conversations of the intersections between flexible identities, culture, and mental wellbeing.
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Appendices

Appendix A

Consent Form (in English)

Northeastern University, Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Dr. Alisa Lincoln (Principal Investigator) and Tainah Michida
Identity and Well-Being: Japanese Brazilian Return Migrants in Brazil

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
We are asking you to take part in this study because you:
- Are a Brazilian adult of full or mixed Japanese descent
- Have lived and worked in Japan for more than six months
- Are currently living in Brazil

Why is this research being done?
The purpose of this study is to understand how Japanese Brazilian “return-return” migrants identify themselves ethnically in Brazil, following their return from Japan. “Return-return” migrants are individuals who return migrated to their ancestral homeland and subsequently migrated back to their country of birth. In this case, Japanese Brazilian “return-return” migrants are individuals who have “return” migrated to Japan and later on returned to Brazil. This study also explores how the way “return-return” migrants identify may be associated with the feelings they experience after their return.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to take part in an individual interview. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded for future transcription and analysis.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
The interview will take place at a mutually agreed upon public space and will take between 60 and 90 minutes to complete.

**Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?**
There is a small possibility that you will experience some discomfort if you choose to disclose negative experiences and/or feelings to the interviewer. However, you will not be asked any direct questions about upsetting events and any disclosures about sensitive experiences are voluntary. If you become upset at any point during the interview, you may choose to take a break. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may choose to end your participation whenever you like. Should you feel the need to seek assistance after the interview, the researcher will provide you with the information for NIATRE, a social organization that provides services to labor migrants who have returned from abroad.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?**
There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information learned from this study may help to contribute to our current general knowledge of the Japanese Brazilian “return-return” migrant population.

**Who will see the information about me?**
Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researcher on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you or any other individual in any way. If you allow the interview to be audiotaped, all recordings will be destroyed following transcription and analysis.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to, you may choose not to be audiotaped, and you may refuse to answer any questions you wish. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**
If you have any questions or problems regarding this study, you may contact Tainah Michida via e-mail (t.michida@neu.edu) or cell phone (11-98428-8556 in Brazil and 1-610-513-9155 in the USA). Alternatively, you may contact the principal investigator of this study, Dr. Alisa Lincoln, via e-mail (al.lincoln@neu.edu) or phone (1-617-373-3485).

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**
If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park,
Northeastern University Boston, MA USA 02115. Tel. 617-373-7570, E-mail: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**
You will not be paid for your participation.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**
You may incur costs pertaining to your transportation to the interview site (public transportation fare, parking, etc.).

☐ I agree to take part in this research.

☐ I agree to be audiotaped

_________________________ _________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part Date

_________________________
Printed name of person above

_________________________ _________________
Signature of person who explained the study Date
to the participant above and obtained consent

_________________________
Printed name of the person above
Appendix B

Consent Form (in Portuguese)

Northeastern University, Departmento de Sociologia e Antropologia
Dra. Alisa Lincoln (Investigadora Principal) e Tainah Michida
As Identidades Étnicas e o Bem-Estar Mental de Migrantes Nipo-Brasileiros Retornados do Japão

Consentimento para Participação em um Estudo

Você está sendo convidado(a) para participar de um estudo de pesquisa. Este documento providenciará informações sobre o estudo, porém, o pesquisador o explicará verbalmente antes. Você poderá fazer quaisquer perguntas que surgirem ao pesquisador. Quando estiver pronto(a) para decidir se vai participar deste estudo, por favor informe o pesquisador. Você não é obrigado a participar se não quiser. Caso decida participar, o pesquisador pedirá que assine este documento e providenciará uma cópia para que você guarde.

Por que estão pedindo que eu participe deste estudo de pesquisa?
Estamos solicitando a sua participação porque você:
- É um(a) brasileiro(a) de descendência japonesa
- Morou e trabalhou no Japão por mais de seis meses
- Atualmente reside no Brasil
- Tem mais de 18 anos

Por que esta pesquisa está sendo realizada?
O objetivo desta pesquisa é explorar como imigrantes nipo-brasileiros se identificam, em termos de etnia, após seu retorno do Japão. Imigrantes como os nipo-brasileiros passam por um processo de “retorno-retorno”, ou um retorno duplo, pois retornam ao seu lar ancestral e, subsequentemente, retornam ao país onde nasceram. Este estudo também visa explorar como a identificação destes imigrantes, que retornam duplamente, pode ser associada aos sentimentos que vivenciam após o retorno ao Brasil.

O que pedirão que eu faça?
Caso decida participar deste estudo, pediremos que participe de uma entrevista individual com o pesquisador. Com a sua permissão, a entrevista será gravada para futura transcrição e análise.

Aonde será realizada a entrevista e quanto tempo durará?
A entrevista será realizada em um local público escolhido pelo(a) participante e pelo pesquisador e terá uma duração de entre 60 e 90 minutos.

**Correrei algum risco ou sentirei algum desconforto?**
Há uma pequena possibilidade de desconforto para você caso decida compartilhar experiências negativas e/ou sentimentos com o entrevistador. Porém, não perguntaremos diretamente sobre tais experiências e/ou sentimentos. Caso sinta-se mal a qualquer momento durante a entrevista, você pode interrompê-la para se recompor. Também o(a) lembraremos de que a sua participação é completamente voluntária, portanto pode optar por encerrar a sua participação neste estudo a qualquer momento. Caso sinta a necessidade de buscar assistência após a entrevista, o pesquisador irá providenciar-lo(a) com a informação de contato para o NIATRE, um centro que providencia apoio a trabalhadores retornados do exterior.

**A minha participação trará algum benefício para mim?**
A sua participação não trará benefícios diretos para você. Porém, a informação obtida pelos pesquisadores possivelmente contribuirá para o nosso conhecimento atual sobre a população de imigrantes nipo-brasileiros retornados do Japão.

**Quem terá acesso aos meus dados?**
A sua participação neste estudo é confidencial. Os pesquisadores serão as únicas pessoas autorizadas a acessar informações sobre você. Nenhum artigo ou publicação utilizará informações de forma que a sua identidade, ou a identidade de outros, seja revelada. Caso permita que a entrevista seja gravada, todas as gravações serão destruídas após o processo de transcrição e análise.

**Posso encerrar a minha participação nesta pesquisa?**
A sua participação é completamente voluntária. Você não precisa participar caso não queira, não precisa consentir em ser gravado e pode se recusar a responder quaisquer perguntas. Mesmo que tenha iniciado a sua participação, pode optar por terminá-la a qualquer momento.

**Com quem posso entrar em contato se tiver perguntas ou problemas?**
Caso tenha perguntas ou problemas relacionados a este estudo, entre em contato com Tainah Michida por e-mail (t.michida@neu.edu) ou telefone (11-98428-8556 no Brasil e 1-610-513-9155 nos EUA). Caso prefira, entre em contato com a Dra. Alisa Lincoln por e-mail (al.lincoln@neu.edu) ou por telefone (1-617-373-3485).

**Com quem posso entrar em contato sobre meus direitos como participante?**
Caso tenha perguntas relacionadas aos seus direitos como participante, favor entrar em contato com Nan C. Regina, Diretora, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University Boston, MA, EUA 02115. Tel.1-617-
373-7570, E-mail: irb@neu.edu. A sua ligação pode ser feita anonimamente, caso queira.

**Serei pago(a) por minha participação?**
Você não será pago(a) por sua participação.

**Quanto custará a minha participação?**
Você poderá ter gastos relacionados ao seu transporte para o local da entrevista (passagem de metrô/ônibus, estacionamento, etc.).

☐ **Concordo em participar deste estudo.**

☐ **Permito que a entrevista seja gravada.**

_________________________________________  ________________________________
Assinatura do(a) participante                Data

______________________________
Nome do(a) participante

_________________________________________  ________________________________
Assinatura do(a) responsável por obter consentimento                Data

______________________________
Nome do(a) responsável por obter consentimento
Appendix C

Interview Guide (in English)

1. Let’s begin by talking about your life before going to Japan…
   a. How did you make the decision to move?
   b. How did you feel about living in Brazil before you left?
   c. Did you consider yourself Japanese, Brazilian, or both before you moved?
      How so and why?
   d. How involved would you say you were in the Japanese community here?
      i. Were you part of any ethnic organizations or clubs? What do they do?
   e. What were your expectations about Japan before you moved?
      i. How did you think you would be received by the Japanese?

2. Could you tell me about your life in Japan?
   a. Who did you go with and who did you live with?
   b. What was a typical day like for you?
   c. Did you feel more comfortable being around the Japanese or Brazilians?
      Why?
   d. Did you find yourself speaking Japanese or Portuguese most often? Why?
   e. Did you keep in touch with the Brazilian culture? If so, how?
      i. How would you describe your relationships with other Brazilians?
      ii. Was being Brazilian important to you while you were in Japan? How so?
   f. Were you part of any Japanese groups, organizations, or cultural activities?
   g. How would you describe your relationships with the Japanese?
   h. Were your expectations of Japan fulfilled?
   i. What are some challenges that you faced while living there? How did they make you feel?
   j. Was it common to have people ask about or comment on your cultural background? Can you recall one of the times that someone did?
      i. Did you ever make any efforts to conceal your Brazilian nationality?
   k. Did you think of yourself as Brazilian sometimes and as Japanese other times?
      When did this happen? Could you give me examples?

3. Let’s discuss your return to Brazil…
   a. How long have you been back?
   b. How did you make the decision to return?
   c. How have you adapted to your return?
d. What are some of the differences you notice between Japan and Brazil?
e. Do you have any plans to return to Japan – as a tourist or to work again? Why or why not?

4. Now that you’re back and have first-hand experience with the Japanese…
   a. Has your opinion of Japan and the Japanese changed?
      i. What do you think are the good and bad characteristics of the Japanese?
   b. Do you think of yourself as Brazilian sometimes and as Japanese other times? When does this happen? Could you give me examples?
   c. Is there an ethnic group that you feel closest to? In what ways do you feel close to it?
   d. You described some of the ways in which Brazilians view the Japanese people and culture. Do you still think this is accurate?

5. We spoke a lot about your experiences in Japan and in Brazil. I would now like to talk a little bit more about how you felt during these experiences.
   a. Have you ever felt you were treated differently in Japan because of your nationality? Can you tell me more about your experiences?
      i. If you had any negative experiences, did you ever speak to anyone about them? Who? Why?
      ii. How did you make yourself feel better?
   b. What about in Brazil? Have you ever felt you were treated differently in Brazil because of your Japanese ethnicity? Can you tell me more about your experiences?
      i. If you had any negative experiences, did you ever speak to anyone about them? Who? Why?
      ii. How did you make yourself feel better?

6. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?
Appendix D

Interview Guide (in Portuguese)

1. Vamos começar falando um pouco sobre a sua vida antes de ir ao Japão...
   a. Como foi a decisão de se mudar para lá?
   b. O que você achava do Brasil antes de se mudar?
   c. Você se considerava japonês/japonesa, brasileiro(a) ou ambo(a)s antes de se mudar? Como? Por quê?
   d. Como descreveria a sua participação na comunidade japonesa em São Paulo?
      i. Participava de alguma organização ou clube? O que faziam?
   e. Quais eram suas expectativas do Japão antes de se mudar?
      i. Como achava que seria recebido(a) pelos japoneses?

2. Poderia me falar um pouco sobre a sua vida no Japão?
   a. Com quem foi? Com quem morava?
   b. Como descreveria um dia comum no Japão?
   c. Se sentia mais à vontade com brasileiros ou japoneses?
   d. Falava português ou japonês com mais frequência?
   e. Mantinha contato com a cultura brasileira? Como?
      i. Como descreveria o seu relacionamento com outros brasileiros?
      ii. Era importante para você ser brasileiro(a) enquanto estava no Japão? De que forma?
   f. Participava de algum grupo, organização ou atividade japonesa?
   g. Como descreveria o seu relacionamento com os japoneses?
   h. As suas expectativas do Japão foram atendidas?
      i. Quais foram alguns obstáculos que encontrou enquanto morou no Japão?
         Como se sentiu?
   j. Era comum pessoas perguntarem ou fazerem comentários sobre o seu lado brasileiro? Se lembra de alguma ocasião em que isto tenha acontecido?
      i. Alguma vez tentou esconder a sua nacionalidade brasileira?
   k. Se considerava brasileiro(a) algumas vezes a japonês/japonesa outras vezes? Quando isto acontecia? Pode me dar algum exemplo de quanto isto aconteceu?

3. Vamos falar sobre o seu retorno ao Brasil...
   a. Faz quanto tempo que retornou?
   b. Como decidiu retornar?
   c. Como foi o processo de readaptação ao Brasil?
d. Quais são algumas diferenças que notou entre o Japão e o Brasil?

e. Tem planos para retornar ao Japão, como turista ou como trabalhador(a)?
   Por quê?

4. Agora que está de volta ao Brasil e conviveu diretamente com os japoneses...
   a. A sua opinião sobre o Japão e sobre os japoneses mudou?
      i. Quais são algumas características boas e ruins dos japoneses?
   b. Se considera brasileiro(a) algumas vezes e japonês/japonesa outras vezes?
      Quando isto acontece? Pode citar alguns exemplos de quanto isto aconteceu?
   c. Se sente mais próximo(a) de alguma cultura? Como e por quê?
   d. No começo desta entrevista, você citou algumas maneiras em que os brasileiros enxergam os japoneses e a cultura japonesa. Ainda concorda com estas opiniões?

5. Falamos bastante sobre as suas experiências no Japão e no Brasil. Agora, gostaria falar um pouco sobre como se sentiu durante essas experiências.
   a. Alguma vez sentiu que foi tratado(a) de forma diferente por causa da sua nacionalidade no Japão? Pode me falar um pouco mais sobre o que aconteceu?
      i. Se teve alguma experiência negativa, alguma vez compartilhou com alguém? Quem? Por quê?
      ii. O que fez para se sentir melhor?
   b. Alguma vez sentiu que foi tratado(a) de forma diferente no Brasil por causa da sua etnia japonesa? Pode me falar um pouco mais sobre o que aconteceu?
      i. Se teve alguma experiência negativa, alguma vez compartilhou com alguém? Quem? Por quê?
      ii. O que fez para se sentir melhor?

6. Há algo mais que gostaria de compartilhar comigo?
Appendix E

Demographic Questionnaire (in English)

Questionnaire

1. Name:

2. Age:

3. Sex: Male / Female

4. Educational level:

5. Marital status:

6. Number of children:

7. Occupation:

8. City of residence:

9. Age when you first migrated to Japan:

10. How many times have you been to Japan (to work)?

11. Fluency in Japanese:
   a. I don’t know any Japanese
b. Basic – I can understand and use some words and common daily expressions

c. Intermediate – I can sometimes conduct a conversation in Japanese

d. Fluent – I know the language well and can communicate easily

e. Native – Japanese is my first language

I agree to be contacted in the future for a possible second interview.

_________ YES  ________ NO

If yes, please provide the following:

Phone: ______________________________

E-mail: ______________________________

Preferred method of contact: Phone / E-mail

Is there a day and time when you prefer to be contacted?
Appendix F

Demographic Questionnaire (in Portuguese)

Questionário

1. Nome:

2. Idade:

3. Sexo: Masculino / Feminino

4. Nível de escolaridade:

5. Estado civil:

6. Número de filhos:

7. Profissão:

8. Local de residência:

9. Idade quando migrou ao Japão pela primeira vez:

10. Quantas vezes esteve no Japão (para trabalhar)?

11. Nível de fluência em japonês:
    a. Não sei japonês
b. Básico – Compreendo e uso algumas palavras e expressões comuns do dia-a-dia

c. Intermediário – Consigo, algumas vezes, conduzir um diálogo em japonês

d. Fluent – Conheço bem a língua e me comunico com facilidade

e. Nativo – Japonês é a minha língua materna

Concordo em ser contactado para uma possível segunda entrevista.

________ SIM ________ NÃO

Se respondeu que sim, por favor informe o seguinte:

Telefone: ______________________________

E-mail: ________________________________

Prefiro ser contactado por: Telephone / E-mail

Qual o melhor dia e horário para entrar em contato com você?
Appendix G

Recruitment Flyer (in English)

Volunteers Needed!

INTERVIEWS

“Japanese Brazilian Identities and Well-Being”

A researcher is conducting a study* involving Brazilians of full and mixed Japanese descent who have lived and worked in Japan and are currently living in Brazil. Participants must be over 18 years-old.

Interview duration: 60 – 90 minutes
When and where: A mutually agreed upon time and location

If you are interested in contributing to this study, please contact Tainah:
E-mail: estudojp@gmail.com
Phone: (11) 94972-7889

*This study is affiliated with Northeastern University in Boston, MA, USA.
Appendix H

Recruitment Flyer (in Portuguese)

Precisamos de voluntários!

ENTREVISTAS

“As Identidades e o Bem Estar do Nipo-Brasileiro”

Uma pesquisadora está conduzindo um estudo com brasileiros de descendência japonesa (incluindo mestiços) que moraram e trabalharam no Japão e atualmente residem no Brasil. Participantes deverão ter mais de 18 anos de idade.

**Duracao da entrevista:** Entre 60 e 90 minutos

**Onde e quando:** A combinar com a pesquisadora

Se tem interesse em participar, favor entrar em contato com Tainah:

**E-mail:** estudop@gmail.com

**Phone:** (11) 94972-7889

*Este estudo é afiliado com a Northeastern University em Boston, MA, EUA.*
## Appendix I

### Study Participants

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