

# Sociedade Japonesa e Migrantes Brasileiros

*Novos Caminhos na Formação  
de uma Rede de Pesquisadores*

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ブラジル  
交流年  
Ano do  
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✎ *Editado por*

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# The Role of Religion in the Process of Adaptation of Brazilians of Japanese Ancestry to Japanese Society: The Case of the Roman Catholic Church

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**Keywords:** Brazilians migrants; Japanese ancestry; adaptation; Roman Catholic Church; spiritual dimension; religious organizations.

宗教は、いかなる時代においてもあらゆる移民運動の一つの要素である。どのトランスナショナル・コミュニティにおいても文化や言語、社会資本と共に、宗教はホスト社会に適応するプロセスにおいて重大な役割を果たしている。日系ブラジル人も例外ではない。彼らがこれまでに日本に伝えてきた数々の宗教的バックグラウンドの中でも、ローマカトリック教は特に重要な一つである。同じカトリック教徒、さらに同じ教区のブラジル人と日本人の関係は最も対立が生じにくい関係の一つであることが証明されている。

一方で、ローマカトリック教会によるエスニック活動、例えば、ブラジル人のためのポルトガル語のミサ曲、といった教会の活動は彼らを励まし、より広い範囲で日本の社会に適応する際に力強い存在であることが認められている。私に関東に所在する6ヶ所の教区で行ってきた研究から、今も社会でみられる人種的、民族的な分裂を反映する機関としてのローマカトリック教会と、エスニック活動を続けることで移民を勇気づけ、彼らが日本で安定した生活をおくれるように働き掛けるローマカトリック教会の間には大きな相違があることが確認された。

A religião está sempre presente nos fenômenos migratórios. Junto com a cultura, a língua e o capital social de toda e qualquer comunidade transnacional, a religião representa um papel importante no processo de adaptação dos imigrantes à sociedade receptora. Brasileiros de ascendência japonesa vivendo no Japão não são exceção. Dentro das inúmeras experiências religiosas que estes migrantes trazem ao país, o catolicismo romano é predominante. Entretanto, o encontro entre católicos brasileiros e japoneses nos limites de uma mesma paróquia provou-se, no mínimo, conflitante. Por outro lado, dentro do rol de atividades étnicas da Igreja Católica Romana, a missa em português para a brasileiros surge como um exemplo de atividade com papel encorajador no processo de adaptação à sociedade japonesa. Esta pesquisa foi desenvolvida a partir de trabalhos de campo simultâneo em múltiplas áreas de seis paróquias da região de Kanto. Revelou-se uma disparidade entre o catolicismo romano enquanto instituição, que reproduz as mesmas divisões raciais e étnicas da sociedade; e as atividades étnicas, que incentivam os migrantes a se estabelecer na sociedade japonesa.

Migration today furthermore imposes new commitments of evangelisation and solidarity on Christians and calls them to examine more profoundly those values shared by other religious or lay groups and indispensable to ensure a harmonious life together. The passage from monocultural to multicultural societies can be a sign of the living presence of God in history and in the community of mankind, for it offers a providential opportunity for the fulfillment of God's plan for a universal communion.

*Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*

## 1. - Introduction

A brief review of the state-of-the-art in research about Brazilians migrants of Japanese ancestry in Japan reveals common trends. First, most of the case-studies tend to focus their attention in regions where density of Brazilian population is high. Those regions are characterized for having many social networks already established. Second, most of the researches tend to prioritize issues related to economy or the job market, and only consider issues of daily life as collateral effects of those realms. Third, in consequence, they tend to ignore issues such as religion and religious organizations; political beliefs and activism; or gender and sexuality; by considering them too personal or too controversial. However, ignoring those areas prevent us to apprehend the fullness of the migrants' experiences. Finally, the discussion between quantitative *vis-à-vis* qualitative research renders Brazilian migrants of Japanese ancestry in two different worlds where their lives are examined partially. In this sense, new directions on the research about this topic are not only important but necessary in order to understand the full extent of the presence of Brazilian migrants amidst Japanese society. This is especially significant in regions where there is a low density of Brazilian population.

My research aims to take a step forward into that direction. For the past two years I have conducted multi-site fieldwork in the Kanto region, especially in Tokyo City and the prefectures of Chiba, Ibaraki, Saitama, and Gunma. Additionally, I have visited places in the prefectures of Kanagawa, Shizuoka, Osaka, Kyoto and Hyogo. Through qualitative research, I focus on the case of Brazilian migrants within the Roman Catholic Church (RCC). I seek to explore how religious organizations as the RCC function as a social network that deals with issues of daily life of migrants. Also I have conducted surveys in order to determine the profile of the population under study.

In many of the places where I conducted fieldwork, the density of population is very low, having some of the parishioners to travel up to two hours in order to attend religious services (which the RCC calls *mass*), or to find a Brazilian supermarket. Although issues of work and economy are present in the interviews that I conducted among Brazilians migrants who attend the RCC, many other issues are also brought into light. Such issues, among many others, are the struggles families undergo in adapting to the Japanese society; the education of the children; the problems arising as a consequence of inter-racial dating and partnerships; the language barrier when they do not speak Japanese; health problems and the lack of doctors who could speak Portuguese; concerns about the future; and the like. The myriads of issues make this kind of places an attractive space for discovering the many layers of the daily life of migrants in Japan. The present article presents preliminary findings of my study.

## 2. Different notions about the incorporation of migrants

How do Brazilian migrants of Japanese ancestry incorporate themselves into the life of the Roman Catholic Church in Japan? How does this affect their incorporation into the broader Japanese society? The RCC as an institution faces similar dilemmas to those present amidst broader Japanese society. In other words, there is not a unique way for the incorporation and

adaptation of migrants into the host society. Thus, the responses are also varied and dissimilar from place to place.

It could be helpful to trace the different schools that propose notions about the incorporation of migrants into a new society. This has been extensively developed in the United States, and it has become a source for other countries in the world to face their own situations. Applying those notions to hypothetical cases within the RCC in Japan could offer us some interesting clues.

The prevalent sociological paradigms in the United States have traditionally been the *assimilationist* and the *cultural pluralist* schools. Nonetheless, in the last decades these approaches have been questioned by new scholarly analysis, especially from scholars who argue in favor of multicultural and multiethnic societies.

### 2.1. Assimilationist school

*Assimilationism* was first proposed in the book of R. E. Park, *Race and Culture*, where he develops his ideas based on the concern of racial homogeneity and the formation of the nation-body (1950: 206). The assimilationist school has traditionally been known as “the melting pot” image, which was first described by Emerson in 1845, as it is analyzed in Gordon’s key-work, *Assimilation in American Life* (1964:117). According to this notion, immigrants undergo several stages of assimilation to a host society. On this, Grosfoguel (2004) summarizes:

First, they become acculturated to the values, norms and culture of the host society. Usually it takes two or three generations to lose their native language, values and culture of origin. Second, once assimilated (...), the residuals of the ‘country of origin’ identity are eradicated as well as any discriminatory obstacles that could affect their successful incorporation to the labor market (315-316).

In following Grosfoguel we notice that those who incorporate into a host society are required to *de-culture* themselves in order to absorb the given dominant culture. In turn, it does not require any change for the dominant culture. However, it seems that Park could not disregard the reality of “skin differences” or “physical traits” as mechanisms of separation between racial groups and the consequent impossibility of full assimilation. Park states that these “differences” or “traits” provoke “natural” sentiments of distant racial relationalities (208-209).

Applying the notion of assimilationism to the case of Brazilians of Japanese ancestry within the RCC in Japan we could delineate its consequences as a de-“brazilianization”, that is requiring them, for example, to only worship and pray in Japanese and not in Portuguese; to bow at the moment of peace instead of physical expressions such as shaking hands; and to abandon their cultural heritage in order to assume Japanese culture. The result would be considering the new generations as “Japanese” without any mention of their ethnic origin.

In my observations at gatherings of the RCC staff where this issue has been discussed, the predominant view still sees the incorporation of migrants to the life of the church through the lenses of an assimilationist pattern. In other words, they expect the new generations to abandon Portuguese language and to conduct life exclusively in Japanese. Schmidt (1992) analysed the cases of the United States and Canada, countries with a long tradition of migration and debates over language acquisition by migrants in host societies. He states that for many supporters of “multicultural education policy (...) asking people to give up their native language as the price for full participation” in society is in fact a denial of equality (253). The idea of cultural melting has been present within the RCC. Traditionally since Vatican Council II (1962 - 1965) RCC scholars have seen ethnic masses as a transitory contribution (Newman 1968:228-229). According to this notion, once the new generations are merged into

mainstream society, the ethnic masses would disappear. Nonetheless, following the aforementioned observations of Park in terms of “skin differences”, we could question if a full assimilation can occur among Brazilians in Japan, especially when they are of mix-race ancestry. Gordon has also noticed this fact. In his work he took into account the main religious organizations of the United States (Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism), and reported how in the processes of assimilation to a host society, some ethnic groups tend not to assimilate into one melting pot but keep “multiple melting pots” or “sub societies” within a larger society (1964:130-131). Therefore, in light of the experience of countries with a long history of migration, such as the United States, the expectations of Brazilians of Japanese ancestry of melting completely within Japanese society seem not to be supported by the socio-historic processes developed in other countries. In the same way, descendants of Koreans or Chinese in Japan as well as mix-race people are not completely assimilated into Japanese society. (Murphy-Shigematsu 2003: 214).

## 2.2. Cultural Pluralist school

The *cultural pluralist* school, is the result of the work of N. Glazer in collaboration with D.P. Moynihan. Inspired by the work of Park, they expand on how assimilationism in the United States works distinctively according to specific ethnic groups by preventing a homogeneous assimilation and producing a culturally differentiated one (1963:13-14). The cultural pluralistic notion still expects a linguistic and cultural assimilation of migrants while maintaining an ethnic component to their identity. On this Grosfoguel (2003) states:

Groups lose their language and customs but ethnicity continues to be recreated in a new form of identity that is neither a ‘melting pot’ nor a simple repetition of their communities of origin’s ethnicity (316).

In the United States, for example, this has been the case of second and third generation of Italian migrants’ descendants who no longer speak the Italian language and who do not follow all the cultural traditions of Italy, but keep their ethnic origin very clearly through the use of the label Italian-American. In the case of Canada, cultural pluralism has taken a particular path. It has framed multiculturalism in a bilingual system (Porter 1975: 284-285). Applying this to the case of Brazilian of Japanese ancestry within the RCC, we could expect a church that still requires them to worship and pray in Japanese after abandoning the need for a mass in Portuguese, and, therefore, to conduct themselves according to Japanese cultures and norms, while at the same time considering them “Brazilian of Japanese ancestry”. Some staff people within the RCC believe this to be the option.

Nevertheless, in his analysis of the cultural pluralist notion, Gordon (1964:138) also states that the different incorporation of specific ethnic groups into the broader society carries out consequences that in some cases are negative. In the same way, Glazer and Moynihan suggest that it is the “national ethos” of a country that “structures people (...) into groups of different status and character” (1963: 291) in order to differentiate those who are not part of the national body. Thus, it also enhance social stratification on the ground of ethnic origins. In fact, social stratification occurs ad-extra of migrants’ decisions and is in place prior to their arrival to a host society. In the same way, the fact that new generations of Brazilians’ children of Japanese ancestry born in Japan are being called “Brazilians” or *zainichi burajirujin* (Brazilian residents). Takenoshita (2006:62) states that social stratification occurs despite the efforts of migrants to contribute with their own cultural capital to the cultural capital of the broader Japanese society. Observing the history of assimilation of other ethnic groups into Japanese

society, such as Koreans and Chinese born and raised in Japan,<sup>1</sup> we can infer that the situation of the new generations of Brazilian children would undergo a similar path. For example, Murphy-Shigematsu (2003: 200) has reported that children of Korean and Chinese migrants who are born in Japan cannot attain citizenship except through a process of naturalization. The children of Brazilians in Japan are experiencing the same circumstances.

### 2.3. Adaptation and the negotiation of spaces

Evidently, we are at the thresholds of a process which we cannot completely anticipate. What we are seeing is that Brazilian migrants are taking agency in recreating ethnic spaces in order to survive the ethnic melting as well as the differential incorporation to Japanese society. As aforementioned, Takenoshita has already pointed out that the human capital of migrants is not a guarantee for their social mobility or for changing their different incorporation into the Japanese social stratification (2006: 62).

Therefore, Brazilians in Japan have done what other Brazilians have also done, for example, in the United States. They have recreated ethnic spaces amidst the host society. Margolis' research among Brazilians migrants in New York reports about the creation of "Little Brazil", a commercial and cultural Brazilian pocket within the island of Manhattan (Margolis 1994: 142-143). A similar situation is currently happening in Oizumi town in Gunma Prefecture, where the 6,200 Brazilians (over a population of 42,000 inhabitants) are the majority among foreigners (Coleman 2007). Oizumi is called "Little Brazil" by some people. In the same way, within the RCC parishes, Brazilians have managed to re-create spaces with mass in Portuguese where they can continue to live faith in the cultural pattern that is familiar to them. However, the issue of relationality of both Japanese nationals and Brazilian migrants and their integration within the same church remains an unresolved issue. In other words, Japanese and Brazilian migrants share the same building but they have little or no contact between them.

In their attempts to adjust to the new reality of Japanese culture and society, Brazilians of Japanese ancestry have to negotiate aspects of their own identity and culture while resisting assimilation. One of the results of assimilation is the erosion of the ancestral cultural identity, or in lesser cases, the recognition of a symbolic cultural past that nevertheless is subsumed within the hegemonic cultural pattern of the host society. Strategies to resisting this situations do not possess ready-made steps to follow but do require experiential negotiations. Therefore, in their attempts to cope with the process, Brazilians of Japanese ancestry in Japan select elements of Brazilian culture that are necessary to survive in Japan, while selecting elements of Japanese culture that they need to acquire to function beyond the ethnic circles. The result is an adaptation to the new environment that not always meets the expectations prevalent in Japanese society but it is a process that bears the marks of Brazilian migrants' own agency. It is worth quoting Tsuda (2003) at length. Following De Vos, Hallowell, Zhou and Bankston, he defines adaptation as follows:

Social adaptation refers to a group's ability to cope with its 'culturally constituted behavioral environment' (Hallowell 1955) by either modifying or maintaining its behavioral patterns. (...) Adaptation is an assessment of social success and is usually measured in terms of occupational, educational, and social mobility in a given society (...). Therefore, judgments of the behavior of a minority group as socially adaptive or mal-adaptive are culturally relative and depend on each society's collectively held standards of social success or failure (268).

<sup>1</sup> Although less in use, Korean and Chinese residents who are born in Japan are also referred to as *zainichijin* or *foreign resident aliens*. See Kondo (2001:9).



In this sense, the new generations of Brazilian migrants of Japanese ancestry retain, discharge, or re-shape elements of their ethnic culture depending on how that culture meets their needs in the host society, in this case, the Japanese society. Removed from an *either/or* pattern, this “Brazilian” way of performing the adaptation process would produce a third space, a hybrid space whose by-product could destroy the binary opposition of fixed cultures, and enable migrants for renegotiations of their fluid identities. I understand *hybridity* not as a negative element but as a place of resistance and negotiation of identities (Tan 2001: 124). Furthermore, it also points out to the fact that when migrants are seen as “lacking” social and cultural capital necessary to fit into a host society, we are applying upon the migrants a set of cultural expectations that do not correspond with their own reality (Belmes 2001). Back to their home country, all migrants do possess social and cultural capital to fit in society. Once living in a host society, migrants need to negotiate their social and cultural capital in order to adapt to the new environment. This is very different from considering them as completely “lacking” any cultural and social capital.

### 3. The Roman Catholic Church in Japan and the adaptation of migrants

In many of the churches that I have been conducting fieldwork, there are elements for the promotion of the negotiation of identities as a distinctively pattern of adaptation that does not fall into the framework of assimilationism. Moreover, migrants within the RCC account for more than half of its membership, which in turn prevents us from talking about them as a *minority*. This bears some consequences at the time of considering not only the negotiations of identities but also the relationality that migrants establish with the nationals.

At present time, Christians in Japan count as around one million. Migrants from Latin America along with Filipino and other ethnic groups constitute the majority among Christians in Japan. According to Mullins (2006), who relies on official reports, ‘the total number of Japanese belonging to a Christian Church of any kind’ is about 0.892 percent of the total population of Japan. This projection of Mullins shows us that Christianity is a minority in Japan.

Contrasting the numbers of Japanese Catholics with that of non-Japanese Catholics shows, according to the Minoshima Pastoral Center (2007), that Japanese Catholics in Japan are about 441,906 (46%) of the total number of Catholics while non-Japanese are 480,000 (54%). This data is still in the range of approximation due to several reasons. First, although it is estimated by Mullins that less than one percent of the 127 million population of Japan is Christian, it is very difficult to have certainty about the exact number as the Japanese national census does not include a section related to religion. Second, we also encounter a problem when it comes to estimations about Christianity, which is the lack of incorporation of migrants into the statistics of the different denominations, as they usually focus solely on national parishioners. The recent increment of membership registered by the Catholic Bishop’s Conference of Japan (2007) still lacks the data on migrants within the RCC. Although, according to Kawaguchi (2007:95) in some places, migrants account up to 81% of the Catholics.

The lack of information about migrants within the RCC is paradoxical, as in larger Japanese society statistics as well as information from the registration system constantly report about the total number of foreign residents at national and local levels. The “numerical” absence of foreigners within the RCC has repetitively been observed in my research, especially when it shows the scarce interaction between nationals and foreigners within the same parish. Despite the fact that official teachings of the RCC recognize universal membership (*Erga Migrantes*, #39), migrants are guests in their own church.

This emphasizes that religious organizations are always part of the process of adaptation of migrants to a host society while sharing with the broader society the dilemmas of that process.



As foretold, we cannot misinterpret adaptation as assimilation. In consequence we can also relativize the assumption that religious organizations would be a place for the total erosion of the ethnic components of a migrants' community' background and tradition. Mullins (1987: 326) has pointed out that ethnic churches would definitively assimilate over the course of several generations once the original migrant's generation has disappeared. However this process could be reverted with the arrival of a significant number of new migrants (Mullins 1987: 327-328). In migratory patterns of transnational communities the links from the sending country and the host society are kept open through constant waves of new-comers and/or the development of a cycle migration. According to Tsuda (2003: 239), Brazilians of Japanese ancestry in Japan have already begun a process of circular migration, something that has already started among Brazilian migrants in the United States during the 1990s (Margolis, 263). Given this scenario, it is likely that new Brazilian migrants along with their families would arrive at the same time that the second and third generations of previous migrants' waves are debating whether to assimilate into Japanese society. As Japanese labor market still needs foreign workers, and Brazil continues to face economic instability, the conditions for people to migrate remain in place. Thus, it reproduces the migrants' flow between Brazil and Japan. In my case study, this would, in consequence, allow for new migrants to incorporate into different religious organizations, including the RCC. As foretold, the expectations of some RCC staff that ethnic masses would eventually disappear are likely not to be accomplished under the current process of migration between Brazil and Japan.

One characteristic in Christianity, particularly Roman Catholicism, as well as other religions that have memberships in both countries, is that the need for exclusively ethnic churches or temples does not exist. As it is the case of other ethnic groups in religious organizations, within the RCC in Japan national and foreign members merely co-exist in the same place. Nonetheless, with exception of a few places, the majority of parishes show the reality that the interaction of both groups is almost nonexistent. Tendency is to keep masses in different languages at different times and, even, different days, thus enhancing the scarcely low contact among nationals and foreigners. Furthermore, the limited time and space that migrants are permitted for activities at local levels also transforms their religiosity. This has been observed in other transnational communities within the RCC, such as Dominicans in the US as reported by Levitt (2001: 170-171). Low contact between nationals and foreigners in the RCC constitutes a common situation that parallels those also observed at factories where, for example, nationals and migrants eat at different tables during lunch break (Roth 2002:46; Tsuda 2003: 16).

In few places, representatives from the ethnic communities are present in the parish council, the local body of government in the RCC, but their role is to transmit back to their ethnic groups the decisions that have already been made by the nationals. The exceptions to these situations are those places where nationals and foreigners have managed to integrate their activities. They represent the minority of cases. What they have achieved is integration around a certain social project (Córdova Quero 2007: 37). Nevertheless, the process has been slow and colored by different obstacles that had to be overcome. In those places, it is customary to hold an "international mass" once a year, where all cultures and languages are taking into account.

#### **4. The three-fold role of the Roman Catholic Church**

Notwithstanding, within the ethnic space of the Roman Catholic Church -in my case study the masses held in Portuguese- the benefits for the migrants are significant at large. I have found out in my research that the Roman Catholic Church, as well as other religious institutions, maintains at least a three-fold role in relation to the migrants.

First, the Roman Catholic Church offers the newcomers with a space where their language is spoken, their culture reproduced and their situations understood. For someone who has recently not only left her or his own country, but also the known culture through which life is experienced; relatives and friends who guarantee social and emotional support; and the security of a home; this is a tremendous contribution. It counters feelings of anomie, loneliness (or *saudade*, as Brazilians call it in Portuguese) and isolation in a strange land. Thus, the role of socialization into the fellow's community in the diaspora is facilitated.

Even the people who serve the migrants at church encounter the same problems. One of my interviewees, Sister Pamela, a Roman Catholic nun in her late 50s expressed:

I came to Japan after living in many countries apart from Brazil. I came without knowing how to speak Japanese language, although I was able to speak many other languages. In Japan, for the first time in my life, I felt that I was analphabet. I could not read signs or understand what the people were telling me. I was not young and I have to learn the language in a hard way.

Because of her work, she was able to finally learn the basics of Japanese language. Along her years in Japan, she has dedicated to take classes in order to master the language. On the contrary, many workers neither have the time nor the money to afford a Japanese language class, which are extremely expensive. The role of the RCC in granting a space where the language of the migrants is spoken is a major contribution to them. Notwithstanding, some parishes have started to offer Japanese language classes in an attempt not only to foster the knowledge of the migrants but to help with the expensive price that migrants would otherwise be unable to pay at a regular Japanese language school. On the other side, it could also create, enhance, reproduce and perpetuate a "ghetto" state that would not allow people to leave the safe delimitations of the ethnic community. Furthermore, within some parishes where several ethnic groups share the same space at different times and in different days, it maintains a separation that mirrors that of broader Japanese society. The boundary between both situations is at the least fragile. In places where the concentration of Brazilian population is high, it could be even not necessary to speak Japanese, which in turn deepens the lack of social integration of the migrants into the broader Japanese society.

Second, the space of the Roman Catholic Church becomes a bridge fostering connections with the broader social networks such as international programs at the city or town level, legal information, counseling or contact with health organizations, among many others. This constitutes an important step into the process of adjusting to life in Japan, at least allowing migrants to connect to those sectors of society that are related to their daily lives. This implies for those organizations within the RCC serving the migrants to navigate the difficult waters of Japanese legal system, which increasingly emphasize "regulation" and "control" (Kawaguchi, 97). Thus, the Church helps the migrants to face different situations in daily life.

Third, the Roman Catholic Church, an organization that deals with the faith of people, fulfills the inner/existential dimensions that allow Brazilian migrants to maintain a spiritual well-being. I will expand on this in the next section.

## 5. New faith in the new land?

### 5.1. Rosinha

The majority of the migrants interviewed have expressed that they did not attend church in Brazil. When consulted about their experience after migration, my informants expressed that they have "found" their faith while in Japan. Rosinha, one of my informants narrated her

experience as follows:

In Japan I have found faith again. I was born catholic in Brazil, but did not have really faith. Now I have faith... I have knowledge of Jesus, and I am happy! If I have a problem, I have Jesus. Therefore, if I have problems, I know I will overcome them...

Rosinha even expressed her opinion about other migrants' religious experience:

Many Brazilian only think in earning money and more money in Japan... They do not think about religion. But I believe that almost 70% of the people sooner or later find again [*reencontram*] their faith while in Japan...

Rosinha is not so far from the reality of many of the people that I have interviewed. Some people even have discovered a religious vocation while in Japan. Two of my informants have decided to follow religious training. Flavio, a man in his early 20s, will become a diocesan priest. Stela, a woman in her early 30s, will become a nun within an international religious order. Both decided to follow their religious vocation after their arrival and committed participation within the RCC in Japan.

## 5.2. Flavio

I met Flavio in one of my fieldwork sites. He was very enthusiastic about the idea of a researcher paying attention to issues of faith and migration. In an interview he spoke about his faith experience as follows:

I was born into a Roman Catholic family. My father is Japanese and converted to Roman Catholicism. My mother is descendent of a traditionally Catholic Portuguese family. So when I was a baby, I was baptized at the [Roman Catholic] parish in our neighborhood. However, I did not take the rite of confirmation, and as I grew up, I did not practice Roman Catholicism actively. It was when I arrived to a church in Japan and decided to volunteer for a special project that I discovered other aspect of the Church. There was an spiritual dimension to the Church that was completely new tome. I took a catechesis course and was confirmed the same year at the Roman Catholic Church. I remember that first year after my arrival to the Church as to "being in love". I wanted to be at church every day, to play the guitar and enjoy the company of people, especially young people in whom I found new friends.

Flavio discovered a new face of the Church. As our conversation went further, I asked about the issue of conversion, he expressed:

I have to change some things in my life in order to get a better communion with God and with the people at church. I was less and less interested in going to bars or discos. I never smoked, so that was not a problem for me. I was not interested in dating girls, either. It was easy for me to follow my decision to become a priest. I felt that in loving God more and more I could be a better human being for others.

Along our interview, Flavio constantly highlighted that loving God is the ultimate goal in his life. Since he has been involved with the Roman Catholic Church, his life has become better, especially now that he feels his life has a clear direction, which is to serve God. Hence,

becoming a priest was for Flavio the best option in his life.

The experience of Flavio is not unique, but it shares a common trend with other migrants. Hirshamn (2003) have pointed out that migrants tend to become more religious in the host society. He states:

Customary religious practices, such as attending weekly services, lighting candles, burning incense in front of a family altar, and reciting prayers are examples of communal and family rituals, which were brought from the old country to the new. However, these activities often take on new meanings after migration. The normal feeling of loss experienced by immigrants means that familiar religious rituals learned in childhood, such as hearing prayers in one's native tongue, provide an emotional connection, especially when shared with others. These feelings are accentuated from time to time with the death of a family member or some other tragedy. (...) [R]eligious beliefs and attachments have stronger roots after immigration than before (6-7).

In this sense, people reach out to religious organizations not only for the already known social services and networking, which could also be offered by non-profit organizations (NPOs), but also to take care of their inner persona.

Nonetheless, the degree to which the religious experience is reached by migrants varies from individual to individual. Not every person who discovers faith in Japan is prone to become a religious leader, but with the strength coming from their faith, the majority of people start to adjust to Japanese society in different degrees. For example, the relations at work are not easy but some of my informants have mentioned that they seek to be in good terms with their fellow Japanese workers. In their daily life, people have better tools to face the struggles to live in a society and culture that is very different from their own.

### **5.3. Father Mauro**

Many of the clergy that I interviewed are aware of these situations and, therefore, attempt to be present in the life of their Brazilian parishioners in a more active and understanding manner. Father Mauro, one of my informants expressed:

The needs of Brazilians migrants are very different from those of the Japanese people. Migrants constantly worry about jobs and money, and always dream with returning to Brazil... They can come to church if there have time, if they do not have to work on Sundays... In Japan, the migrants embrace faith in a different way. But they do not have enough knowledge of their faith... Although most of the time second and third generation of Brazilians of Japanese ancestry inherited Roman Catholicism, they still have to understand that faith... Nonetheless, when they are stressed, alone, or lacking affection, they feel that there is a church waiting for them...

From the words of Father Mauro, we can see that the spiritual function of the RCC is very important for the life of Brazilian migrants and cannot be separated from its social functions in a clear-cut manner. They interact and produce a process that helps Brazilians to live their daily life amidst Japanese society, by encouraging and supporting them morally and socially.

Many researchers have only pointed towards the social role of the Roman Catholic Church in different geographical contexts. However, my research agrees with Mira (2003:149) that nowadays the RCC in Japan is not the only organization that guarantee a space of socialization. As foretold, many other organizations, NPOs and governmental organizations fulfill this

role accordingly. Therefore, the role of the RCC has expanded to other areas that are also vital for the survival and adaptation of Brazilian migrants to Japanese society, including moral support, hope, ethical counseling and spiritual well-being. Without those elements, life in Japan becomes a routine that menaces the fragile stability of their existence as migrants. It is that support which is helping families to be together despising the many struggles of living in a foreign land. Without family cohesion, many people would succumb to depression and hopelessness. It is that moral and ethical support that may prevent some people to err in their actions in an increasingly surveillance society. Moreover, the role of the RCC in the process of adaptation of Brazilian migrants to Japanese society ventures in terrains that other organizations may not consider to be part of their mission.

In this way, the lines of interaction in present times could be drawn closer if migrants are incorporated at the level of structures of hierarchy, formation of future priests, political decisions and/or budget planning. This empowerment could also foster their adaptation to Japanese society. To the valuable support at a personal level, allowing migrants to also participate in the political organization of the RCC could not only prove to be the way to acknowledge the richness and variety that the RCC posses worldwide, but also to venture further into the lands of multiculturalism in an increasing global world. In doing this, the negotiations of identities of Brazilians of Japanese ancestry would be placed into a positive perspective.

## 6. Conclusions and continuance

Throughout this article I have presented some preliminary findings of my on-going field-work throughout the kanto region of Japan. In participant observations and interviews I have seen many Brazilians migrants taking agency of their life and fostering a better future for themselves and their families while in Japan. I have also observed that the Roman Catholic Church, within the boundaries of the ethnic religious services, help them in that process.

As a religious organization, the RCC adds the spiritual role as a third dimension to the traditional roles of socialization among the ethnic groups members and networking of the migrants with organizations of broader society. It is that third role that allows the RCC to be a positive environment for migrants while adapting to the hardships of Japanese society, thus promoting their well-being.

Notwithstanding, the fact remains that the RCC as an institution needs to renew itself in terms of the relationality between nationals and foreigners. In most of the RCC parishes, migrants have almost no contact with the nationals. This is a fruit of the reproduction of dynamics from broader Japanese society. A positive step towards overcoming this has been the creation of the *Catholic Commission of Japan for Migrants, Refugees and People on the Move*. Created by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan in 1988, this commission has taken an active role in bridging the contact and communication between nationals and migrants in many aspects. Due to the fact that the steps towards a church that fully welcomes and incorporates migrants at a national level are just beginning, it still constitutes a challenge for the RCC in Japan. This is not the case at the level of some local parishes, which have been able to overcome this situation. They could be an example for the Roman Catholic Church at its national level to pursue a different path.

The three-fold role of the RCC among Brazilian migrants of Japanese ancestry is important for their well-being and daily life in Japan. This makes the RCC a valuable organization in the networks supporting migrants in Japan. Migrants benefit from this while also contributing slowly to the continuance of this valuable space. The challenge remains in relation to broader Japanese society in terms of finally achieving bridges to connect nationals to foreigners. The RCC at the local level can offer important experience to this process.

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