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Searching for New Approaches to Studying ‘Nikkeijin’

報告書

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**“To be *Nikkeijin* or... Not to Be”:
Identity Formation Dilemmas Among Brazilians of Japanese Ancestry
Migrating to Japan**

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要旨

バブル経済期以降、日本には多くの外国人労働者が流入してきた。その中で、30万人もの日系ブラジル人が日本に移住したとされる。日本にルーツを持つこの日系ブラジル人たちは、ブラジル社会では独自のアイデンティティを保持していた。しかし、日本では「日本人」として認識されることなく、彼らは新たなアイデンティティの再定義を迫られたのである。本稿では、日本に移住した日系ブラジル人のアイデンティティ構築のプロセスを考察の対象にする。移住者が立ち向かう問題は、言葉の壁のようなものだけではなく、ブラジルで社会化された日系人としてのアイデンティティを具体的に再評価・再交渉することである。その結果は、文脈や個人経験によって差異があるが、いずれにしても権力関係の過程と外部からのカテゴリー化に対する自己定義を内包するものである。

1. Deconstructing the Categories *Nikkeijin* and *Nihonjin*

At present time there are about 300,000 Brazilians of Japanese ancestry who have migrated to Japan mostly as blue-collar workers.¹ Along with other people of Japanese ancestry who have either migrated or still reside in the Americas, they are called *Nikkeijin* by Japanese society.² However, that terminology already conveys several questions: what

¹ Ministry of Justice of Japan, *Heisei 18 nenmatsu genzai ni okeru gaikokujin tôrokusha tôkei ni tsuite* [On the number of foreigners registered at the end of year 2006] (Tokyo: Japan Immigration Association, 2007). Internet, accessed February 1, 2008; available at: <http://www.moj.go.jp/PRESS/070516-1.pdf>.

² See Jane H. Yamashiro, “*Nikkeijin*”, in *Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society*, ed. R. T. Schaefer (London: Sage, forthcoming 2008).

does the term *Nikkeijin* mean? Does it mean the same to different people? Who does define to whom it should be applied? Are we talking about something that someone *is*? Are there mutations in the use according to different places? Or, the category is somehow universal and essential?

The title of our panel already contains an answer for these questions. We have called it “Constructing *Nikkei*”. In other words, we emphasize in this workshop that to be *Nikkeijin* is something that someone *becomes* rather than something that someone is *essentially*. I do not want to repeat the ideas of our key note speaker and those of the morning panel, but I believe we need to inquire on the implications of that terminology applied to real people. My paper concentrates on the deconstruction of the implications of applying that terminology to Brazilians of Japanese ancestry currently living in Japan. It presents some on-going reflections emerging from multi-site fieldwork, which I have conducted for the past two years in the Kanto region of Japan.

As used in Japan, the category *Nikkeijin* requires some questioning. It must be said that the questioning of categories or terminology applied to people is not new. In 1944, Sartre published his book *Anti-Semite and Jew*, where he deconstructed the category “jew” as the *other* of “anti-semite” at the time when the Nazi regime was at its peak in Europe. Put another way, the category “jew”, says Sartre, is a construction made by those who apply the category “anti-semite” to themselves.³ Two decades later, Fanon embarked in his analysis of the category “negro” when confronted with the reality of Martinique and French colonialism. He concluded that there is a symbiotic construction and reification of that construction among two categories: “white” and “negro”. He states that the former category originates by the very existence of the latter.⁴ Lately, Ethnic Studies have focused on the deconstruction of racial and ethnic formations in relation to the construction of *otherness*, a term originated in phenomenology through the hand of Hegel.⁵

A common threat to all this studies is the agreement that category constructions are placed within a symbiotic relationality that points towards their alterity. Furthermore,

³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans. George J. Becker (New York: Schocken Books, 1948), 69.

⁴ Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Groove Press, 1967), 217.

⁵ See David Theo Goldberg and John Solomos (eds.), *A Companion to Race and Ethnic Studies* (Malden, MS: Blackwell, 2002), 23.

these studies also challenge an assumed *essence* thought to be contained within those categories. Both categories within a binary pattern simultaneously construct and re-construct each other. In consequence, as categories are always constructed *vis-à-vis* other categories, deconstructing one category necessarily takes us to deconstruct its opposite. In our case, the category *Nikkeijin* is constructed *vis-à-vis* the category *Nihonjin*, being this construction a product of Japanese racial formation and stratification. Therefore, deconstructing or questioning the category *Nikkeijin* leads us to deconstructing or questioning the category *Nihonjin*.

2. Racial formations and Stratifications and the Term *Nikkeijin*

Japan is not an exception as racial formations and stratifications occur in every society. Racial formations and stratifications are done within a binary system that separates people in *either/or* patterns or categories, which is socially constructed and reinforced.⁶ Because these constructions are ideologically inspired, real people is pushed to fit within them. In the case of Japan and the categories *Nikkeijin* / *Nihonjin*, we can understand their construction by opposition as follows:

Nikkeijin IS what *Nihonjin* IS NOT.

Or the other way around:

Nihonjin IS what *Nikkeijin* IS NOT.

In my case study several of my informants have commented on how difficult was for them to be called *Nikkeijin*. Coming from an experience of being socialized in Brazil, and given the history of assimilation of people of Japanese ancestry to Brazilian culture and society, some of my informants see this as an act of disempowerment. Regardless of the fact that migrants from Japan incorporated to the lower strata of Brazil (mainly as workers in plantations or, later, in factories), most of them managed to ascend socially. Especially after WW II, most of the people were determined to procure higher education

⁶ See Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1986), 60.

for their children as well as to secure a better economic status.⁷ Important universities such as University of São Paulo count thousands of Brazilian students and *alumnae* whose ancestry is Japanese. It is true that in Brazilian racial formation, people of Japanese ancestry still remain below white people of Portuguese ancestry. Nevertheless, it is also true that people of Japanese ancestry is placed above other racial groups such as Afro-Brazilians, indigenous nations and people of mixed ancestry. When people of Japanese ancestry in Brazil are called *Japonês* (Japanese), the term denotes a positive valorization of their heritage. They are proudly a model minority.⁸ In terms of Tsuda, Brazilians of Japanese ancestry do pass from being a positive ethnic minority in Brazil to being a negative cultural minority in Japan.⁹

In the 1990s, as a consequence of the economic instabilities of Brazil due to a military dictatorship that impoverished the country, which was followed by several unsuccessful economic plans carried out by consecutive governments, many people of Japanese ancestry decided to migrate responding to the offer of Japan to grant them visas as workers.¹⁰ Downward class mobility was not the only consequence that came to the life of those who migrated. As soon as their arrival in Japan, they were also stripped off their proud of being *Japonês* (lit. “Japanese” in Portuguese). In Narita, Osaka and other airports, the *Japonês* from Brazil became the *Nikkeijin* in Japan. But at the very same moment, the *Japonês* from Brazil became more aware of its *Brazilianness* while in Japan.

As in every binary construction, what results is the *essentialization* of stereotypes that are not in accord with the people to which they attempt to characterize. Those stereotypes are placed upon people as if they were the only constitution of their selves. In my fieldwork I have heard different people conveying the following characterizations:

⁷ The report of the Japan International Cooperation Association (JICA) marks WWII as a “turning point” in the history of the Japanese descendants in Brazil. See *Os Nikkeis e a Sociedade Brasileira nos Próximos 20 anos* [Nikkei and Brazilian Society in the Next 20 Years] (São Paulo: JICA, 2003), 13.

⁸ Nobuko Adachi, “*Japonês*. A Marker of Social Class or a Key Term in the Discourse of Race?”, *Latin American Perspectives* 136, Vol. 31, No. 3 (May 2004): 49.

⁹ Takeyuki Tsuda, *Strangers in the Ethnic Homeland: Japanese Brazilian Return Migration in Transnational Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 103.

¹⁰ See Saskia Sassen, “Economic Internationalization: The New Migration in Japan and the United States,” in *Globalization and Its Discontents: Essays on the New Mobility of People and Money* (New York: The New Press, 1998), 60.

<i>Nihonjin</i>	<i>Nikkeijin</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Always take good care of the trash.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Litter everywhere, they do not know how to take care of garbage”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Highly educated.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Uneducated, they do not even care to send their children to school.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Middle class.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Poor.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Always respect Japanese traditions and laws.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Do not know anything about Japanese traditions and laws; they do not even speak Japanese.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Honest and polite.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Leaning to crime, they are dangerous.”

Certainly nobody uses all of these stereotypes at once. Notwithstanding, it is by putting them all together that we appreciate their questionableness in reality. It is true that some people among the *Nikkeijin* could match any of those characterizations, but not all of them. Japanese people not always match all this characterizations either. For example, the binary of “*Nihonjin* equals honesty” vs “*Nikkeijin* equals crime” should be reflected in reality. A quick search through police statistics might show that the crime rate of foreigners in Japan represents only 2% of the total account, which by consequence means that the other 98% is produced by *Nihonjin* people.¹¹ Therefore, we can conclude that those ideal constructions are ideologically misrepresenting the people they are tagging. In turn, the binary “*Nihonjin* equals educated people” vs. “*Nikkeijin* equal uneducated people” should also be reflected in reality. However, in my fieldwork I have encountered several professionals who are currently working in factories or have difficulty finding a job in Japan outside the confinement of the blue-collar jobs. Some of my informants are artists, architects, engineers, and even, one holds two Master and two Ph.D. degrees in Genetic Science and speaks four languages fluently, including Japanese. It certainly misrepresents them when defined narrowly as “uneducated”, “poor”, or “criminal” *Nikkeijin*.

Nonetheless, those characterizations are the ones that are most of the times featured in mass media, for example in the news programs, and in some advertisements made by the police in Japan, for example around ATMs or train stations.¹² It is true that some

¹¹ See Solidarity Network with Migrants Japan, *Living Together with Migrants and Ethnic Minorities in Japan: NGO Policy Proposals* (Tokyo: SMJ, 2007), 117. From now on SMJ.

¹² SMJ, 116.

migrants have committed crimes in Japan, but to essentialize an entire group of people solely in the actions of a few is, at the least, unfair. Furthermore, lacking a law against racial discrimination in Japan, many migrants cannot defend themselves from those characterizations.

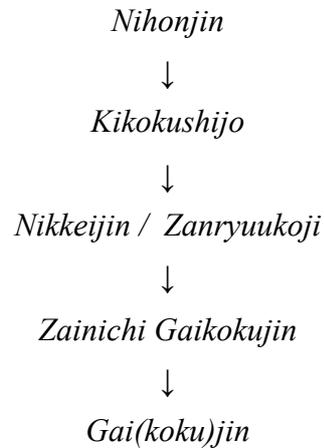
If the category *Nikkeijin* exists within a binary system along with the category *Nihonjin*, it could be said that the category *Nikkeijin* in fact exist to reify the category *Nihonjin*. In other words, by constructing *Nikkeijin* we are simultaneously constructing *Nihonjin*. In present times, *Nikkeijin* could be understood as a mechanism of definition by otherness, which allows Japanese people to find cohesion and identity *vis-à-vis* the changing fluctuations of an increasingly ethnically diversified Japan. However, the category *Nikkeijin* still functions within an *either/or* pattern and, therefore, it remains exogenous to the experience and identity formation of Brazilians of Japanese ancestry in Japan. Even the term *Nikkei*, used in Latin American by different organizations run by Japanese descendants has a different meaning. Both *Nikkeijin* as used in Japan and *Nikkei* as used in Latin America by these organizations cannot parallel the power of the term *Japonês*, which has successfully allowed Brazilians of Japanese ancestry to ascend socially and gain respect in Brazilian society. Moreover, in Japan, the term *Nikkei* could be used as a contestation to the construction of the term *Nikkeijin* by Japanese society. Nonetheless, I have never heard any of my informants to call themselves either *Nikkei* or *Nikkeijin*. They just simply use the terms *Brazilians* or *Brazilian of Japanese ancestry*.¹³

The category *Nikkeijin* is contained and defined by the racial formation and stratification of Japan, which has a totally different historic and social development from its counterpart, that is, the Brazilian racial formation and stratification.¹⁴ Thus, *Japonês* and *Nikkeijin* used to define the same population, convey different meaning due to their place within those specific racial formations and stratifications. In my research, and based

¹³ This is because Japanese descendants in Brazil have come to considered themselves as Brazilians. See Joshua Hotaka Roth, *Brokered Homeland: Japanese Brazilian Migrants in Japan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 23.

¹⁴ According to anthropology Gilberto Freyre, Brazil does not posses a binary system but tertiary system for its racial formation and stratification, something that has been questioned by other scholars recently. See G. Reginald Daniel, *Race and Multiraciality in Brazil and the United States: Converging Paths?* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 27-28.

on Shipper¹⁵ and other scholars, I find that Japanese racial formation could be pictured as follows:¹⁶



Slowly in Japan the notion of multicultural coexistence (*tabunka kyosei*) reaches public spaces. Nevertheless, it is almost unheard of *multi-ethnic* coexistence. Although those notion could be important to solve many situations arising in Japanese society due to the interaction of many ethnic groups, they still lack an analysis on how racial formation and stratification already have determined the place of people in Japanese society. No matter how fluent and proficient someone is in Japanese language or how many traditions and customs someone is able to follow, *Nikkeijin* will never be *Nihonjin*. This is because of two reasons.

First, we need to bear in mind the issue of citizenship. Long traditions of assimilationism such as the United States, Brazil or Argentina, have as a attribute to grant nationality based on the concept of *ius solis* (placed of birth) and not *ius sanguinis* (shared blood kinship), which is the case of Japan.¹⁷ Therefore, no matter how much a person could pass as Japanese, because of the issue of nationality, *Nikkeijin* will never be

¹⁵ Apichai W. Shipper, "The Political Construction of Foreign Workers in Japan," in *Critical Asian Studies* 34:1 (2002): 42.

¹⁶ Although aware of the importance that Ainu, Okinawans and Burakumin have placed within Japanese social structure, I purposely do not include them in this stratification, as their inclusion implies a discussion that is not the scope of this research. For the many situations involving the cases of the three groups, see: Richard Siddle, "The Ainu and the Discourse of 'Race,'" in *The Construction of Racial Identities in China and Japan: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Frank Dikötter (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 136-157; Ian Neary, "Burakumin in Contemporary Japan", in *Japan's Minorities: The Illusion of Homogeneity*, ed. Michael Weiner (London: Routledge, 1997), 50-78; and Richard Siddle, "Return to Uchinā: The Politics of Identity in Contemporary Okinawa", in *Japan and Okinawa: Structure and Subjectivity*, eds. Glenn D. Hooks and Richard Siddle (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 133-147.

¹⁷ For the discussion on the importance of blood in the formation of Japanese Identity, see Kosaku Yoshino, "The Discourse on Blood and Racial Identity in Contemporary Japan", in Dikötter, 199-211.

Nihonjin. This has been historically the case of *Zainichi Gaikokujin* or Japan-born Koreans and Chinese, who only through a process of naturalization can be granted Japanese citizenship.

Second, because of the racial formation and stratification of Japan, which needs in the words of Bashi and McDaniel an “ideal-typical” other, the assimilation of people to Japanese society is never complete.¹⁸ There are, as foretold, racial stratifications that prevent this to happen. In this sense, an American citizen of Japanese ancestry will be mostly incorporated into the white-collar job sector while a Brazilian or Peruvian citizen of Japanese ancestry will be mostly incorporated into the blue-collar job sector, despise her or his professional education.¹⁹

Undoubtedly, assimilation models cannot be supported because they require people to de-culturalize and de-ethnicize themselves in order to fit into an idea of local (ideally constructed) norm. Thus, eroding the identity of migrants who will never be completely assimilated into the society. In the United States this is the case, for example, of Italian migrants descendants that are now called Italian-American, while there is not British-American citizens. Even within assimilationist models or racial construction, incorporation is never fully achieved.

On the other hand, racial identification within a given society involves a social status, something that could either benefit or hamper those migrants who are incorporated into certain strata of society.²⁰ Newcomers are situated in those racial stratifications already in place prior to their arrival, even when their background does not match the place they are assigned by their perceived phenotype. Therefore, some of my informants are placed within the *Nihonjin* category while on the streets, but when they enter a shop and speak a broken Japanese or Japanese with an accent, they fall back into the category *Nikkeijin*, all within the lapse of a few minutes. The social stratification does not change with the different of social capital, as Cornelius and Tsuda explain:

¹⁸ See Vilna Bashi and Antonio McDaniel, “A Theory of Immigration and Racial Stratification”, *Journal of Black Studies* 27, no.5 (May 1997): 671.

¹⁹ See for a whole discussion of this issue, the comparative analysis of Hirohisa Takenoshita, “The Differential Incorporation into Japanese Labor Market: A Comparative Study of Japanese Brazilians and Professional Chinese Migrants”, *The Japanese Journal of Population* 4, no. 1 (March 2006): 56-77.

²⁰ See Bashi and McDaniel, 671.

Ethnographic and survey interviews with employers help explain why educational background and Japanese-language competence as human capital do not significantly improve the wages of foreign workers in Hamamatsu. Since Japan is a recent country of immigration, its labor market for foreign workers is still relatively undeveloped and does not provide access to a wide range of jobs at various skill levels. Therefore, most foreign workers are hired only for unskilled, manual jobs in which education does not affect performance (Sellek 2001, 100-101). For instance, 91% of *nikkeijin* (overwhelmingly from Brazil) are performing unskilled or semi-skilled jobs involving simple, repetitive tasks that require no training or that can be learned within a week. Therefore, although these *nikkeijin* often were well-educated and had been white-collar workers in Brazil, in job interviews, few of their employers seriously inquired about educational background and past occupation. (...) As a result, a higher educational level among immigrants does not correspond with higher wages and better labor-market incorporation, as would normally be expected.²¹

In this quotation, we can see that the notion that migrants can be assimilated into a society does not correspond with the fact that societies are already structured and migrants incorporate into those structures that precede them regardless their symbolic or cultural capital.

3. Searching for self-understanding: performing identities

A question arises: Does the *Nikkeijin* exist? A few years ago, Linger asked the same question about the term *Japanese Brazilians*. I, like him, wonder if to continue using such terminologies to refer to people with different histories and cultures whose only link if to have an ethnic ancestry. Linger states:

(...) [I]n choosing to focus on presumed groups such as “Japanese Brazilians,” one directs attention to, and tends to reify, a theoretical abstraction. One runs the risk of contributing to perceptions of race, ethnicity, origins, and communities that may be of dubious analytical (though significant ideological) value. (...) [T]he very term “Japanese Brazilians” conjures up a group that does not necessarily, in any existentially or analytical significant form, exist.²²

And I find two answers. The first one is that the *Nikkeijin* does not exist but becomes, it is

²¹ Wayne A. Cornelius, Takeyuki Tsuda and Zulema Valdez, *Human Capital versus Social Capital: A Comparative Analysis of Immigrant Wages and Labor Market Incorporation in Japan and the United States*, IZA Working Paper No. 476 (Bonn: Forschungsinstitut zur Zukunft der Arbeit, 2002): 8-9.

²² Daniel Touro Linger, “Do Japanese Brazilians Exist?”, in *Searching for Home Abroad: Japanese Brazilians and Transnationalism*, ed. Jeffrey Lesser (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 212.

made by Japanese society. Consequently, the second answer is that someone becomes *Nikkeijin* in order to be understood by the context in where the term makes sense, but always as an ideal construction from the outside. For that reason, *Nikkeiness* is at the most a *performance*²³ among the many performances that a person acts. In my case study I have found that the same person performs the identity of being *Japonês* in Brazil to maintain her or his social status. In Japan she or he performs the identity of *Brazilian* among their fellow Brazilians and other Latinas/os. And, because of the Japanese society, she or he is pushed to perform the identity of *Nikkeijin* in order to be located within the categorizations of Japanese racial stratification. However the individual becomes fluidly the sum of all of those performances. Certainly, those performances of the self do not occur without what Linger calls *discontinuities*.²⁴ The degree to which one individual decides to stress more one performance than other is what constitutes the richness of our work. In my research I have encountered people who, although being of Japanese ancestry, refuse completely to be recognizing as related to Japanese people or culture. While at the same time, I have found people whose ancestry is only through one remote ancestor strongly stressing their identification with Japanese culture and society. The tension between self-identification and external labeling does not resolve in the same way for every individual. And based on different elements, our conclusions could be different from the ones that an individual self-perceive. Furthermore, even if within Japanese society there is a clear consensus on how to define the term *Nikkeijin* and all its complex social ramifications,²⁵ this should not imply that the people to whom the label is apply will automatically perform that categorization imposed in accordance to such consensus. Agency along with the social circumstances of their life journey potentiate the many layers of identity performativity of Brazilians of Japanese ancestry in Japan.

For example, how do we categorize a child born in Japan to a mother who herself was born in Japan but socialized in Brazil since age 3 and who have returned at age 30 to

²³ I take the term *performance* applied to ethnic identities from the works of Judith Butler about gender performativity and identity. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 171-190.

²⁴ Daniel Touro Linger, *No One Home: Brazilians Selves Remade in Japan* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 308.

²⁵ See Keiko Yamanaka, "Feminization of Japanese Brazilian Labor Migration in Japan", in Lesser, 192-193.

work in Japan? *Nikkeijin* or *Nihonjin*? How do we characterize that child if we also take into account that the father is of Japanese ancestry, born in Brazil but socialized in Japan since age 1? Is that child *Nihonjin* or *Nikkeijin*? Let us revise the elements used in daily life in Japan to distinguish *Nihonjin* from *Nikkeijin*:

- a) The child was born in Japan.
- b) The child has Japanese blood.
- c) The child will learn Japanese language.
- d) The child will be socialized by learning Japanese customs and traditions.
- e) The child will probably know exactly how to separate the trash to be recycled.
- f) The child bears Brazilian nationality.

In this example, how do we consider that child? *Nikkeijin* or *Nihonjin*? Depending on what we want to stress or recognize, the child will be considered either *Nihonjin* or *Nikkeijin*. But whatever the outcome would be, because of the binary system of thought, *Nikkeijin* is never *Nihonjin*. The child always has to fall under a dynamic of *either/or* pattern when her or his reality falls *in-between* those categories. It is located in a *third-space* that is not plotted within the cartography of Japanese racial formation and stratification. Therefore, in Japan, until now, there is no cultural history of *in-betweenness*.

4. Final words

In this presentation we have seen that the category *Nikkeijin* is constructed *vis-à-vis* the category *Nihonjin*. We have also seen that this is part of the Japanese racial formation and stratification that differs to its counterpart in Brazil. Finally, we have seen how Brazilian migrants of Japanese ancestry are placed under the category *Nikkeijin*.

All these ideas are important when referring to *Nikkeijin* studies, as we need to be conscious that the identities of people of Japanese ancestry in the Americas and around the world. Those identities are multiple. Thus, they are not essential by dynamic identities, that is, they are constantly changing, mutating, and adapting. In this manner, the term *Nikkeijin* reflects the standpoint on the Japanese society, which attempts through it to

understand itself as well as the Japanese descendants outside Japan. It is not the self-identification of all the descendants of the Japanese people outside Japan, who mostly define themselves as *Brazilians* or *Brazilians of Japanese ancestry*. In consequence, the risk is to transform *Nikkeijin* studies as an extension of Japanese Studies, which would definitely erase the particular histories of the many communities of people of Japanese ancestry around the world as well as their mechanisms of negotiations of identities while displaced from their homelands.

Preferably, to talk about *Nikkeijin* studies could be an opportunity to encounter interdisciplinary and multiplicity of standpoints, without falling into the pattern of essentializing and romanticizing the many particular historical, social and cultural trends of the many communities of descendants of Japanese people. Hence, it also enables us to focus in both Japanese descendants outside Japan (especially in the Americas) and those who have migrated to (especially Brazilians and Peruvians who represent the majority of migrants). Definitely, the voices of the people that constitute the subjects of our studies should be heard. In my case study, the struggles and search of Brazilian people of Japanese ancestry is as important as to understand their place and possibilities within Japanese society. As individuals live between their self-identification (the chosen display of their self) and the construction of otherness made by the surrounding society, *Nikkeijin* studies will always be a point for the intersection of different experiences and notions. But the real life of people will still be conducted without the expectation that the outcome should match neither our presuppositions nor those of the host society, in this case, Japan. Aware of this, “to be *Nikkeijin* or not to be” remains an unresolved paradox in whose interstices resides the real life of Brazilians of Japanese ancestry currently living in Japan.