



**AALBORG
UNIVERSITY**

**“Performing Belonging: Hybridity and Intergenerational Negotiations
among Japanese Brazilian Families in Japan**

“How do Japanese Brazilian children living in Japan negotiate and perform their cultural
identities?”

International Relations and Global Refugee Studies.
Master Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis explores how Japanese Brazilian children living in Japan negotiate and perform their cultural identities within a society shaped by strong ideals of homogeneity. Situated at the intersection of migration, ethnicity and intergenerational relations, the study examines both those born and raised in Japan and those who migrated from Brazil as children, illuminating how experiences of belonging are shaped across different generational and migratory contexts. While previous research on Japanese Brazilians has primarily focused on adult migrants or structural assimilation, less attention has been given to how the younger generation actively negotiates identity within schools, peer groups, and families. Using a grounded theory approach and based on semi-structured interviews with three Japanese Brazilian families, the analysis draws on theory of the third space, performativity and generational contract. Findings reveal that participants negotiate belonging through everyday acts such as silence, language mastery, and selective expression of Brazilianness that both conform to and challenge the dominant expectation of “Japaneseness”. Within families, intergenerational relationships emerge as moral spaces where obligation, care and identity are continually redefined. By foregrounding these relations and affective processes, the study reconceptualizes hybridity as an ongoing moral and performative practice of belonging, contributing new insights to migration and diaspora scholarships.

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List of Japanese Words and Key Concepts

Words/Concepts	Definition
Dekasegi	Migrant workers who move (often temporarily) for economic reasons, especially Japanese Brazilians returning to Japan for work.
Kika	Naturalization-the legal process of acquiring Japanese citizenship.
Nikkei	People of Japanese descent living outside Japan, including second, third, and fourth generations.
Hāfu (ハーフ)	Colloquial term for “mixed-race person” in Japan, often implying half-Japanese heritage.
Gaijin (外人)	Literally “outsider”; colloquial and sometimes pejorative term for “foreigner.”
Ijime	Bullying, particularly within Japanese school contexts.

Majime	Serious, earnest, or diligent; often used as a moral and social virtue in Japan.
Nihonjinron	Discourse or theories about Japanese national and cultural uniqueness.
SABJA	Non-profit organization supporting Japanese Brazilians and Brazilians in Japan.
Taiyō Corporation	Company employing many Nikkei migrants, and one of the fieldwork sites.
Identity Negotiation	The process through which individuals continuously construct and adjust their sense of self in interaction with others, and across different social and cultural contexts.
Identity Crisis	An Identity crisis is a phase many people go through when they question or reassess who they are. A search for Identity is common during the teenage years(Villines,2023).

Chapter 1: Introduction

Aim and Motivation

In this thesis, I explore how Japanese Brazilian children living in Japan negotiate and perform their cultural identities within the intersections of family, school, and society. By examining the complexities of living between two cultural worlds, I aim to understand how these children make sense of their cultural belonging in Japanese society and the strategies they employ when navigating cultural difference, exclusion, and expectations of “Japaneseness.” Through this focus, the study seeks to illuminate how identity is not fixed but continuously shaped through everyday interactions, performances, and intergenerational relationships within Japanese Brazilian families.

My interest in this topic was sparked by a personal conversation with a friend of *hāfu* (mixed heritage) Japanese Brazilian who, despite being born and raised in Japan, still holds Brazilian nationality and has never been to Brazil. During our conversation, she shared how the word *kika*-the Japanese term for naturalization carried a heavy emotional and symbolic weight. Legally, naturalization is a commonly practiced legal process by which “a non citizen becomes a citizen after a birth”(Orgad, 2017:339). Since Japan does not permit dual nationality, individuals undergoing *kika* (naturalization) must formally renounce their original citizenship. Acquiring Japanese nationality through *kika* grants access to certain legal and social privileges, such as the ability to obtain a Japanese passport and adopt a Japanese name.

Japanese citizenship is based on *jus sanguinis*, meaning that nationality is inherited through lineage rather than place of birth. As a result, individuals born and raised in Japan are not necessarily considered Japanese in the eyes of the law or society (Yamashiro, 2013:154). Socially and culturally, the expectations surrounding naturalization vary. In Japanese migration and identity studies, scholars have long debated what constitutes “Japaneseness.” While many assume that people of Japanese descent naturally belong to the “Japanese race” through “Japanese blood,” Sugimoto argues that Japaneseness encompasses a combination of factors: ancestry, nationality, birthplace, language ability, cultural literacy, residence, and self-identification(Sugimoto, 2010 as cited in Yamashiro, 2013:153). Despite Japan’s common portrayal as ethnically homogeneous, many studies challenge this image.

Arudou has pointed out the presence of the Ainu, Koreans, Burakumin Chinese, Okinawans and Nikkei South Americans. Although these groups are indeed minorities in Japan, they are not necessarily visible minorities, as they are generally of Asian descent and can often “pass” as “Japanese” in many social interactions(Arudou, 2015:704).

My friend’s story highlights how *kika* symbolized, for her, the need to relinquish everything connected to Brazil, her name, language, and cultural identity in order to “become Japanese.” This personal account raises important questions about how Japanese Brazilian children experience such expectations and negotiate their identities in Japanese society. Building on this, the aim of this thesis is to explore how Japanese Brazilian children negotiate and perform their cultural identities across the interconnected settings of family, school, and society.

I hope this research will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by Japanese Brazilian migrants, and, in doing so, shed light on the broader experiences of minority groups not only in Japan, but also in other nation-states with predominantly national populations, such as Denmark. Furthermore, I aim to contribute to understanding cultural identity not as essentialized and stable, but rather as fluid and relationally constructed by being performed. Understanding the fluid nature of cultural identities gives rise to new unanswered questions about how these Japanese Brazilian adults navigate this with their parents, while encountering cultural differences in everyday interaction at school. In order to capture the dynamic interplay between these dimensions, it is crucial to engage with them simultaneously, moving beyond simplistic subjective narratives and acknowledging their relationship to their parents as mutually important factors in shaping their trajectories.

Against this backdrop, I pose the following research question:

Research Question

“How do Japanese Brazilian children living in Japan negotiate and perform their cultural identities?”

In this thesis, the term children refers not necessarily to minors but to the offspring of Japanese Brazilian parents, many of whom are now in their 20s and 30s. The term is used to emphasize the intergenerational dimension of the study.

Research Outline

This study begins by providing the contextual background of Japanese-Brazilian migration to establish a foundation for the research. The literature review follows, identifying emerging themes from the interview data and situating them within existing scholarship to highlight the research gap this study aims to address. The theoretical framework section then introduces the conceptual tools that will guide the analysis of the interview data. In the methods and data section, I outline the methodological approach, with particular emphasis on the use of grounded theory, which informed both the formulation of the initial research question and the design of the semi-structured interviews. This section also includes an introduction to the interview participants. The subsequent analysis aims to answer the main research question throughout three chapters. This analysis draws connections to the theoretical framework and key emerging concepts, creating a cohesive analytical narrative. The thesis concludes by synthesizing the findings and reflecting on their implications.

Chapter 2: Contextual Background of Japanese Brazilian Migrants

Although not always widely acknowledged, Brazil is home to the largest Japanese diaspora community in the world. With an estimated population of approximately two million, Japanese Brazilians constitute the most significant population of Japanese descendants residing outside Japan. As of 2024, Brazilians rank as the sixth-largest foreign national group in Japan, following Chinese, Vietnamese, and South Korean nationals, and remain the only South American population among the top-ranked foreign communities([Nippon.com](https://nippon.com.br/en/2024/01/05/japanese-brazilians-in-japan/), 2024). To provide a solid foundation for this study, it is essential to trace the historical trajectory of Japanese migration to Brazil, the formation of ethnic communities, and the socio-political dynamics that have shaped their experiences both in Brazil and during subsequent return migration to Japan. This section is organized chronologically, with each subsection addressing key events and historical periods that have influenced the Japanese-Brazilian migratory experience.

The historical and contextual information presented here is primarily drawn from materials collected during field visits to the JICA Yokohama Japanese Overseas Migration Museum. These include exhibition displays, curated timelines, personal narratives, and archival summaries related to Japanese migration to Brazil. As this information is largely

derived from museum-based sources that are not formally cited in academic literature, every effort has been made to accurately and responsibly represent the material encountered.

Pre-War Migration and The Beginning of the Japanese Diaspora in Brazil(1908~)

“It wasn’t like I was struggling to survive, but I couldn’t help thinking ...if this kind of painful life keeps going on like this...there’s no further for us in Japan”(Female, 82s, Takaki, Amazonia 2012:213).

This quote from a first-generation Japanese migrant captures the broader sentiments of uncertainty and aspiration that motivated the early waves of Japanese migration to Brazil. While not always escaping dire poverty, many migrants sought greater stability and opportunity abroad. The first wave of migration began in 1908 with the arrival of the Kasato Maru in São Paulo. Driven by Japan’s economic downturn and Brazil’s growing need for labor particularly after a decline in Italian immigration Japanese private emigration companies (Kokoku Imin Kaisha) promoted emigration to Brazil. Between 1908 and the end of World War II, the majority of Japanese immigrants signed contracts to work as laborers on coffee plantations in the state of São Paulo. Approximately 189,000 Japanese migrated during this period, of which around 71,000 arrived before World War II.

According to Smith, however, they were shocked when they arrived in Brazil especially because Brazil had not yet undergone industrialization at the time, and labor conditions were extremely harsh, characterized by low wages, frequent physical mistreatment, and inadequate nutrition(Smith, 1979:57). They worked hard to grow vegetables, fruits, coffee, cotton, soy beans, rice and flowers while grappling with tropical agriculture in the Amazon forest.

“No matter what we try to grow, it’s hopeless. We can’t even produce a single vegetable. We’re already done for... Sometimes I think maybe I should say only good things about this place back home, so I can lure others into this hell too.”(Wakatsuki, quoted in Amazonia,Takaki,2012:212).

While some achieved great success in agriculture, this statement illustrates the disillusionment some migrants experienced, prompting many to break their labor contracts and relocate in search of better conditions. Nevertheless, the first Japanese emigrants stayed in Brazil not just due to financial constraints, but also because they were determined to succeed there and eventually return to Japan with enough savings to support themselves(Smith, 1979:57). Those who chose to stay sought to build a sense of community

throughout the establishment of "colônia" where they built Japanese language schools and formed various mutual aid associations despite difficult conditions (Nishida, 2009:438).

These early experiences of hardship and community-building laid the groundwork for the long-term settlement of Japanese Brazilians, a process that would be both disrupted and redefined during World War II. Although many saw their stay as temporary, referring to themselves as *zairyūimin* (temporary overseas residents), they maintained strong cultural ties with Japan.

War, Displacement and Settlement: Transformation during and after World War II (1930s~1960s)

Japanese immigration to Brazil was suspended from the late 1930s until 1952, due to Japan's involvement in World War II and the rise of Brazil's authoritarian Estado Novo regime. Nationalist policies during this period suppressed Japanese cultural institutions: newspapers ceased publication, Japanese-language education was banned, and Japanese diplomatic protection was severed. Although it is well recognized that Japanese Brazilian people did not greatly suffer during the war period compared to those in the United States, particularly due to ethnic background (Adachi, 2001:164), other scholars such as Smith pointed out that prejudice was still widespread in Brazil, and that the country has a vast body of racist literature (Smith, 1979:58). Cut off from their homeland, many Japanese immigrants abandoned the idea of returning to Japan and instead chose to settle permanently in Brazil, often for the sake of their Brazilian-born children (Nishida, 2009:427).

In the post-war period, Japanese Brazilian communities shifted toward urban centers like São Paulo and began to integrate more fully into Brazilian society. This transition included linguistic and cultural adaptation such as learning Portuguese, attending Brazilian schools, and converting to Catholicism as well as increasing rates of intermarriage.

By the 1960s, many second-generation Japanese Brazilians (*Nisei*) had obtained university degrees and were increasingly regarded as "intelligent" and "hardworking," marking a significant change from earlier stigmas (Kominsky, 2020:20). These educational advancements were not solely the result of individual effort but were also supported by the *colônia* networks, which facilitated access to preparatory schools and higher education,

allowing Nisei to serve as bridges between the Japanese community and broader Brazilian society.

Generational Change and the Redefinition of “Nikkei” Identity(1970s-1980s)

Until the 1970s, the *colônia*, the ethnically bound community formed by Japanese immigrants in Brazil, remained central to Nikkei identity, shaped largely by the leadership and cultural values of the first-generation immigrants (Issei). However, from the 1980s onward, younger generations began to distance themselves from these traditional structures, forming looser and more individual connections to their ethnic heritage.

In 1980, only 6.3% of Nisei (second-generation) were of mixed descent, but this figure rose sharply to 42% among Sansei (third-generation) and 61.62% among Yonsei (fourth-generation) (Nishida, 2009:428). This demographic shift brought increased ambiguity to the definition of “Nikkei.” Although the term originally referred to individuals of Japanese descent living abroad, including both emigrants and their descendants, its definition has evolved over time. According to the Association of Nikkei and Japanese Abroad (2018), *Nikkei* now broadly encompasses people of Japanese heritage who have settled permanently outside Japan, along with their second, third, and fourth generation descendants regardless of their current nationality or the extent of their Japanese ancestry.

Even the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, which had published annual surveys of “Japanese Nationals Overseas” since 1968, questioned the criteria for Nikkei identity. In its 1982 report, the Ministry raised the issue of whether individuals with only one Japanese parent should be included. The survey acknowledged the tension between bloodline-based definitions and the lived realities of mixed-heritage individuals. As a result, it discontinued the practice of reporting Nikkei population statistics, signaling a recognition of the growing complexity and diversity of Nikkei identity.

Later, in 2001, during a workshop called COPANI (Convention of Pan-American Nikkei) held by Nikkei representatives from North and South America, participants collectively redefined Nikkei identity. They concluded that “a Nikkei is anyone who has at least one Japanese ancestor and who self-identifies as Nikkei.” This inclusive definition reflects the evolving, hybrid nature of Nikkei identity in the contemporary era(COPANI, 2001,exhibition material,JICA Yokohama Japanese Overseas Migration Museum).

Return Migration and the Emergence of the “Dekasegi” Generation (1980s~2000s)

The evolving relationship between Japan and its overseas descendants culminated in a significant policy shift during the late 20th century, marking the beginning of a new phase of migration, one in which Japanese Brazilians returned to a homeland that was, in many ways, unfamiliar.

“In 1988, it had been 35 years since I last set foot in Japan. Honestly, when I landed at Narita Airport, it felt like I had arrived in a foreign country called Japan. The country had changed so much that I didn’t really feel like I was returning to my own homeland. It was like a homeland I no longer recognized.”
(Hamaguchi, quoted in Amazonia, Takaki, 2012:200).

This reflection encapsulates the dissonance experienced by many return migrants, who felt estranged from a homeland that had changed dramatically during their absence. Japan’s economic boom in the 1980s resulted in severe labor shortages, particularly in low-skilled sectors. In response, the Japanese government revised the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act in 1990, easing restrictions for descendants of Japanese emigrants (Fritz, 2024:2). According to Tsuda, this was not merely because Japanese Brazilians were believed to be more culturally similar to the Japanese than other foreigners, but also because some Japanese immigration officials assumed that, unlike other Asian migrants, Japanese Brazilians were relatively well-off (Tsuda, 1999b:688). Therefore, they believed only a limited number would move to Japan and that most would return to Brazil rather than settle permanently in Japan (Tsuda, 1999b:688). In fact, their migration is not driven by desperation; rather, they are typically “opportunity migrants” who plan to work in Japan for a short period, accumulate significant savings, and then return home within a few years (Tsuda, 1999b:689).

Simultaneously, Brazil was undergoing a severe economic crisis, marked by hyperinflation and widespread unemployment. This convergence of circumstances led to the rise of the “*dekasegi* phenomenon”, a wave of large-scale migration by Japanese Brazilians seeking economic opportunities in Japan.

Dekasegi is a Japanese term referring to individuals who migrate temporarily for work, intending to save money and eventually return home (Tsuda, 1999a:146). Many of these migrants were second- or third-generation Japanese Brazilians who took on what are often referred to as “3K jobs”: *kitanai* (dirty), *kiken* (dangerous), and *kitsui* (demanding). Despite

their Japanese ancestry, they were frequently treated as outsiders and faced systemic discrimination in employment, education, and housing (Kosminsky, 2020:17). The term *dekasegi*, often applied to foreigners including Nikkei such as Japanese Brazilians, became associated with low-status, low-skilled labor, reinforcing the social devaluation of these returning migrants (Kosminsky, 2020:17).

Over time, however, many *dekasegi* migrants brought their families to Japan, settled permanently, formed new communities, or maintained transnational ties by moving between Brazil and Japan (Tsuda, 1999b:691). The first reason for this is because their visas can be renewed indefinitely, many Japanese-Brazilians have effectively become permanent residents in practice. (Tsuda, 1999b:688). As a result, Japanese Brazilians up to the third generation were granted officially temporary visas to enter Japan, valid for periods ranging from six months to three years. Secondly, this is also because the migration of Japanese-Brazilians to Japan has been supported by strong cultural ties and the establishment of efficient labor recruitment networks. These factors have sustained the growth of this population, even as economic motivations for emigration have declined (McKenzie & Salcedo, 2009:66-67). By 2020, over 50% of Brazilians in Japan had obtained permanent residency, a significant increase from just 20% in 2007. A growing number of children born in Japan no longer speak Portuguese or identify closely with Brazilian culture (Exhibition material, JICA Yokohama Japanese Overseas Migration Museum).

Concludingly

Though the primary focus of this study is on Japanese Brazilian children of second/third generation parents who migrated to Japan during the “*dekasegi*” wave primarily between the 1980s and early 2000s, it is equally important to understand the contextual background of their migration history. This chapter highlighted not only who my interviewee participants are, but also the historical background of migration that encourages us to remind why it is interesting to look into their lived narrative. From early agricultural laborers in São Paulo’s coffee plantations to *dekasegi* migrants returning to an unfamiliar homeland, the Japanese Brazilian experience is marked by shifting cultural affiliations.

As I found out during my field trip to the Kanto region particularly in Kanagawa and Ibaraki prefecture where established Japanese Brazilian communities have taken root, most

of my interviewee-childrens of Japanese Brazilian parents, speak Japanese fluently, while some parents struggle with the language, having limited proficiency in Japanese. While their individual backgrounds differ, the shared migration trajectories, settlement patterns, and language practices of Japanese Brazilian families serve as a critical foundation for examining the intergenerational negotiation of cultural identity. These dynamics are particularly visible in families where children are raised in Japan, navigating fluency in the host language and school systems, while their parents often face linguistic and social barriers.

In order to situate this study within broader academic discussions, the following chapter reviews existing literature on the topic, primarily related to emerging themes from my interview data. It draws on sociological, anthropological and intergenerational perspectives and debates relevant to Japanese Brazilian migrants. Through this review, I aim to position the current study within ongoing scholarly conversations and highlight the specific research gap this thesis seeks to address, namely, how cultural identity is negotiated and performed by Japanese Brazilian families living in Japan.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

In this chapter, I will conduct an in-depth literature review guided by the recurring themes that emerged from the data. Consistent with the grounded theory approach, this process was crucial not only in preventing the imposition of preconceived ideas onto the findings, but also in identifying gaps within the existing literature. After conducting interviews and transcribing the participants' narratives, their statements were analyzed and categorized using thematic and narrative analysis. While analyzing the narrative of the interviewees, I noticed that three distinct themes emerged: **the struggles of children, the performance of identity and negotiating identity with their parents.**

However, I felt that these themes did not fully capture the complexity and interconnectedness of the content. It became apparent that “the struggles of Japanese Brazilian children’ were not separate from their narration of their performative behavior and the interaction with their parents, but rather intertwined with them. This led me to realize that the agency in navigating their cultural identity demonstrated by my interviewee is intricately shaped through their performance and their interaction with their parents. The main themes of the literature review that I have chosen to focus on are thus “**the**

performance of Japanese Brazilian Migrants” and “the Intergenerational dynamic shaping the identity performance of Japanese Brazilian children”. The review aims to explore the existing literature with these fields and how scholars have previously investigated, and addressed the topic’s complexities.

Performing Identity: Japanese Brazilian Migrants and the Negotiation of Belonging

Several studies focusing on Japanese Brazilian return migrants have shown that experiences of being othered or excluded are not merely the result of racial or cultural differences, but also play an influential role in shaping how individuals negotiate and express their identities (Tsuda, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2003; Takenoshita, Chitose, Ikegami & Ishikawa, 2013; Watarai, 2014; Kingsberg, 2014; Rivas, 2015).

In the ethnographic study by Tsuda Takayuki (1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2003), he explored how Japanese Brazilian return migrants respond to experiences of exclusion in Japan. He argues that their identity performance often takes a deterritorialized form—one that is not strictly tied to either Brazilian or Japanese national identity. Rather than fully assimilating, many Japanese Brazilians maintain what Tsuda refers to as a “counter-identity as an ethnic minority” (Tsuda, 1999a: 166). This identity is expressed through the active preservation of cultural differences. Tsuda attributes this response in part to the challenges migrants face when confronting Japan’s “narrow definition of what constitutes being Japanese” (Tsuda, 2000a: 56). In this context, their assertion of cultural difference can be understood as a counter-reaction to dominant national discourse that marginalises them.

To further explore this, Tsuda argued that Japanese Brazilians are often viewed positively in Brazil because they are associated with perceived “Japanese” cultural values and with Japan as a respected First World country. This association is linked to higher socio-economic and educational status relative to the general population in Brazil (Tsuda, 1998: 321). In contrast, in Japan, Japanese Brazilians frequently experience negative minority status. They are socially devalued, culturally stigmatized, and often associated with low-status manual labor. In his discussion surrounding ethnic derogation, he found the stigma surrounding Japanese Brazilians, which is often viewed negatively in Japan. Many Japanese perceive the first generation immigrants as social dropouts who abandoned Japan in search of better opportunities (Tsuda, 1998: 325). Furthermore, Tsuda discussed this in relation to low socioeconomic status as *dekasegi*, which showed that the term “*dekasegi*”

refers to temporary workers who leave Japan to seek employment opportunities, typically associated with low socioeconomic status. He noted that Japanese Brazilian return migrants are often classified in this category, leading to prejudiced views that align them with poverty and economic failure (Tsuda, 1998:326). Therefore, the author argued that prejudices faced by Japanese Brazilian people are rooted not only in their economic status as *dekasegi*, but also in their perceived lack of social prestige and the negative stereotype associated with their ethnic and cultural identity (Tsuda, 1998:357).

Furthermore, as Tsuda argues, these identity negotiations are further complicated by the hegemonic expectations of Japanese ethnicity, which impose narrow definitions of what it means to be “truly” Japanese. Tsuda distinguishes Japanese Brazilians who are of Japanese descent from other foreigners who are seen as complete cultural and racial outsiders. Unlike these outsiders, Japanese Brazilians are “expected to comply with Japanese cultural standards” due to essentialized assumptions that link ethnic ancestry with cultural competence (Tsuda, 2000a:59). Building on these points, Tsuda further argues that Japanese-Brazilians develop a form of “counter-identity” by intentionally expressing their cultural distinctiveness (Tsuda, 2000a:68). Through visible behaviors such as performing samba or using Brazilian-style greetings they assert that, despite their Japanese appearance, they do not conform to Japanese cultural norms and should not be expected to do so (Tsuda, 2000a: 60).

Roth’s ethnographic study *Brokered Homeland* (2002), as summarized by Hosoe (2003), examines how Japanese Brazilians navigate everyday life and belonging within Japan’s labor and social hierarchies. Unlike Tsuda’s emphasis on “counter-identification”, Roth focuses on how Japanese Brazilians negotiate “Japaneseness” through participation in local workplaces, community activities, and interactions with both Japanese and fellow *Nikkei* (Hosoe, 2003:257). Roth observed that Japanese Brazilian migrants often sought to align themselves with Japanese norms of discipline and diligence, even as they faced structural exclusion and social stereotyping. As Hosoe notes, Roth conceptualizes these dynamics within Japan’s limited multicultural framework, emphasizing how migrants’ experiences are mediated by brokers, employers, and institutions (Hosoe, 2003:257-258). Together, Roth’s and Tsuda’s studies reveal that assimilation and resistance are not mutually exclusive but coexist as intertwined strategies through which Japanese Brazilians navigate belonging and recognition in Japan.

Contributing more to this is the recent study by Nishida(2018), which highlights that some Japanese-Brazilians embrace their Brazilian heritage, while others attempt to assimilate by adopting Japanese customs and language, especially in professional and educational settings. Through interviews with Japanese Brazilians living in Japan, she presents that “mixed” Japanese Brazilian children often face greater challenges than their “racially pure” counterparts, attributing this to the enduring notion of “purity of blood” (Nishida, 2018:215). This led her to present compelling evidence that a “Japanese face”, remains a crucial marker of Japaneseness, regardless of one’s nationality or upbringing, which Tsuda describes as “the slanted eyes, the flat face and the small nose (Tsuda, 2000b: 4).

Furthermore, Nishida links this notion of Japaneseness to the concept of “whitening.” In her interviews, some mixed Japanese Brazilians positioned themselves above both “pure” Japanese Brazilians and local Japanese by emphasizing their association with Brazilian or white identity. This strategic positioning reveals that their cultural identity is not fixed, but rather fluid shaped by time, place, history, and culture. As Nishida argues, identity for Japanese Brazilians is “a matter of becoming as well as being” (Nishida, 2018:217), reflecting their shifting positionality in different social contexts.

Expanding on the intersectional aspects, though these cultural expectations place particular pressure on Japanese Brazilian children, whose physical appearance often aligns with Japanese norms, Tsuda also points out that even individuals of “mixed descent (mestizos)” are subject to the imposition of Japanese cultural norms,(Tsuda, 2000a:60).

Watarai (2014) highlights the varied strategies used by Japanese Brazilian women to navigate their identities, revealing that mixed-race appearance does not necessarily mitigate experiences of struggle or marginalization. Her findings reveal that while Japanese Brazilian women are often labeled as *haafu*, a term that can imply a degree of inclusion within Japanese society, this inclusion is conditional and laden with narrowly defined expectations. The *haafu* identity is frequently idealized through the lens of Western beauty standards, placing pressure on individuals to conform to a specific, often unattainable, image of mixed-race femininity(Watarai, 2014:666). In response to these expectations, many Japanese Brazilian females often perform a duality of “Japaneseness” and "Brazilianness" to navigate the complexities of being perceived as “too Brazilian” or “lacking Japaneseness”(Watarai, 2014:667). This performative duality often includes adhering to

Japanese norms of politeness and social greetings, while simultaneously downplaying aspects of Brazilian culture such as clothing styles associated with tropical aesthetics in order to align more closely with prevailing cultural expectations(Watarai, 2014:670).

The Intergenerational Dynamic and the Performance of Cultural Identity among Japanese Brazilian Children

Building on the understanding that Japanese Brazilians continuously negotiate and perform their identities in response to structural and cultural expectations, it is crucial to examine how several scholars have explored the way Japanese Brazilians navigate their identity are intricately shaped not only by social political status but also by Intergenerational Dynamics.

An illustrative example is the study by Takenoshita, Chitose, Ikegami and Ishikawa. (2013) on the relationship between brazilian families and children's schooling.

Takenoshita,et al argued that Japanese Brazilian children may be discriminated against by other Japanese peers based on their racial differences, which has a profound impact on their educational experiences. This finding further led them to assert that despite having Japanese ancestry and sometimes physically resembling Japanese classmates, some Brazilian children with Nikkei heritage may conceal their Brazilian background to avoid bullying from their Japanese peers, as their appearance allows them to blend in more easily(Takenoshita,et al., 2013:3).Furthermore, their study suggests that Brazilian immigrant families play a major role in facilitating their children's enrollment in high school, which is conditional upon the acculturation patterns among Brazilian parents(Takenoshita,et al., 2013:11). Immigrant parents who are fluent in Japanese are better able to uphold their parental authority by offering support and maintaining clear communication with their children (Takenoshita et al., 2013:10).

In the study by Sekiguchi (2007), it was argued that the dual identities of Japanese Brazilian children as both "Japanese" and "foreigner", as well as their process of acculturation were influenced by the stratified factors. In her analysis of Japanese Brazilian families in Japan, she firstly identified parental human capital. Parents with human capital in terms of educational achievements, social networks and understanding of both cultures were clearly related to their ability to provide support to their children(Sekiguchi, 2007:77). Furthermore, Sekiguchi analyzed family structure in relation to parental role and emotional bond, which showed a supportive family structure in close relation to children's experiences,

sense of belonging, and cultural integration(Sekiguchi, 2007:78). The author, therefore, argues that the interplay between parental influence and children's interactions with broader social structures places individuals in what Sekiguchi refers to as a "liminal space", a state of being caught between two cultural identities(Sekiguchi, 2007:66).

Relating to this is the study by Serrano and Shibuya (2019), which investigated the identity of young Japanese Brazilians, revealing a crucial role of family relationship and their background in shaping their sense of identity. Serrano and Shibuya identified the crucial role of parents' level of acculturation and their balanced connection to cultural roots in shaping their children's self-perception as Brazilian, despite living in Japan(Serrano&Shibuya, 2019:33). These parental practices are influenced by the parents' choice of language at home and the extent of their engagement with Brazilian cultural practices. Their findings suggest that daily family interactions play a key role in children's identity negotiation, particularly in navigating a hybrid identity between Japanese and Brazilian cultures (Serrano&Shibuya, 2019:46).

Expanding on the topic of Intergenerational dynamics that influences the performance of Japanese Brazilian children, Oda(2010) demonstrated how the life stories of three family generations reveal identities shaped by complex interactions that go beyond a simple Japan-Brazil dichotomy. She identifies multiple narrative frameworks through which different aspects of the life course, such as the coexistence of opposing cultures, assimilation into Brazilian society, and the 'preservation' of an authentic Japanese heritage(Oda, 2010:788), shape self-perception and influence interactions with Japanese society. Her findings show that the identities of Japanese Brazilians emerge from the interplay between stable narrative frames, such as fixed ideas of what it means to be "Japanese" and the creative interpretations made by individuals across generations(Oda, 2010:788).

The Research Gap

The existing body of literature has provided valuable insights into the identity performances of Japanese Brazilian migrants, especially through the works of Tsuda (1998, 1999, 2000, 2003), Roth (2002), Nishida (2018), and Watarai (2014), who collectively explore how adult migrants negotiate belonging and exclusion in Japan. These studies have emphasized the dynamic interplay between cultural heritage and structural marginalization, as well as the

strategic performances of both “Japaneseness” and “Brazilianess” by migrants in everyday life.

Further, research on intergenerational dynamics, such as that by Takenoshita et al. (2013), Sekiguchi (2007), Serrano and Shibuya (2019), and Oda (2010), has illuminated how parental influence, family structures, and cultural transmission shape the identities of second-generation Japanese Brazilians. These studies underscore the significance of familial acculturation patterns and emotional bonds in shaping children's social integration and sense of self.

However, limited attention has been given to how Japanese Brazilians, particularly children of the generation of parents who arrived in Japan during the “*dekasegi*” wave, negotiate and perform their cultural identities through their day-to-day interaction within schools, peer groups, and family. Few studies have examined how these children respond to societal expectations of “Japaneseness,” or how they strategically embrace, reject, or redefine their identities in response to both inclusionary and exclusionary discourses.

Therefore, this thesis aims to address this gap by foregrounding the voices of Japanese Brazilian children living in Japan. Through qualitative inquiry with the use of a grounded theory approach, I hope to illuminate how these children understand, perform, and negotiate their cultural identities in relation to institutional settings, classroom interactions, and family dynamics.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework

The Third Space Theory as the Core Framework

This thesis adopts Homi Bhabha’s Third Space Theory (1994) as its overarching theoretical framework to explore how Japanese Brazilian children negotiate and perform their cultural identity through interaction within multi-social, linguistic and familial contexts. The theory emerged from postcolonial theory as a means of dismantling the binary opposition between self and other, colonizer and colonized or east and west (Bhandari, 2022:171). The Third Space theory has evolved, with different scholars contributing to its development (see Bhabha, 1994, Bhandari, 2020, 2022, Gandana, 2008). Its primary aim has always been changing “the inherent way of thinking about the cultural identity of essentialism” (Yang, et

al., 2021:178) and understanding the “in-between cultural space” in which identities are formed and negotiated(Bhandari, 2020:82).

Emerging from Bhabha’s critique of Edward Said’s Orientalism, the Third Space framework resists the tendency to reduce cultural encounters to fixed relationships of domination. Instead, Bhabha emphasizes hybridity, a process through which the colonizer and the colonized, or dominant and minority groups, continually reshape one another in an ambivalent relationship marked by both resistance and anxiety(Gandana, 2008:145). This hybridity gives rise to the Third Space: an in-between arena where meaning is produced through the interaction of different “cultural enunciations”(Bhabha, 1994:52). Meaning, in this view, is never entirely derived from one cultural position, but emerges through negotiation within a space shaped by both the general conditions of language, which always require contextual interpretation and the specific social, institutional, and performative contexts in which communication occurs (Bhabha, 1994:53).

Importantly, Bhabha recognizes that cultural identity is formed through the interplay of past and present. This process blends inherited traditions with contemporary experiences, producing new and original identities through transformative cultural shifts (Bhandari, 2022:172). For example, a person raised in a Korean household in Japan may retain linguistic and familial traditions while simultaneously adopting Japanese social norms and educational practices. In daily life, their sense of self is continually redefined within this in-between space.

While the Third Space framework highlights the creative potential of hybridity, it has also faced critique. Hall Stuart, for instance, argues that Bhabha underplays the importance of historical genealogy and cultural roots. Hall’s perspective foregrounds being and becoming, suggesting that identity is shaped both by deep connections to origin and by the capacity for transformation(Bhandari, 2022:175) For Hall, cultural identity emerges from shared histories and common ancestries, but is never fixed, it is always “in process” and inseparable from “the different ways we are positioned by and position ourselves within the narratives of the past” (Hall, 1990:225).

This emphasis on origins is particularly relevant in migration contexts, where individuals often navigate inherited cultural heritage alongside the norms, languages, and practices of the host society. Such encounters with difference may lead to varying strategies

of identity negotiation. Some individuals feel pressure to assimilate into the dominant culture, while others consciously integrate elements from both cultural spheres, creating hybrid identities that resist simple categorization.

Applying the Third Space theory to this study involves examining the complex processes through which Japanese Brazilian children negotiate their cultural identities in relation to both peers and parents, and exploring how these interactions shape and influence their overall navigation of cultural identity. While the third space provides the overarching foundation for my analysis, I employ three complementary concepts, sameness and otherness, performativity and the generational contract as analytical tools that illuminate distinct but interrelated dimensions of this negotiation. These concepts deepen the third space framework by explaining the conditions, mechanisms, and relationship through which identity is enacted and experienced.

The Concept of Sameness/Otherness

The concept of sameness and otherness are central to understanding how boundaries of belonging are drawn within the Third Space. Otherness refers to the discursive process by which a dominant group "us" constructs and stigmatizes a subordinate group "them" and this process is what Staszak calls "othering" transforms difference into hierarchy (Staszak, 2020:25). Meanwhile, as Hall suggests, cultural identity reflects a group's sense of who they are, shaped by shared traits such as race, ethnicity, language, or religious tradition (Yang et al., 2021:178), people identify the sameness and the possibility of inclusion. In the Japanese context, strong cultural expectations of sameness such as speaking perfect Japanese, understanding unspoken social rules, adhering to group harmony often amplify the visibility of those who fall outside these norms. Japanese Brazilians, despite their ethnic ancestry, frequently encounter such forms of othering, being positioned as "foreigner". At the same time, they may also experience partial inclusion based on perceived physical or cultural similarity.

Applying sameness and otherness within Bhabha's Third Space framework is crucial, as they are mutually constitutive, two sides of the same coin, each defined through the existence of the other. Within the Third Space, this tension between sameness and otherness becomes a productive site of negotiation, where individuals negotiate their identities and respond to societal expectations of Japaneseness,

The Concept of Performativity

Secondly, the concept of performativity provides a complementary lens to the third space theory to examine how identities, such as gender, ethnicity, and culture are not fixed or innate, but are continuously produced and reinforced through repeated actions within socially regulated norms (Butler, 1990:198). Drawing on Butler's conception of performativity, I understand cultural identity not as a stable essence but something enacted through everyday practices such as acts, gesture and linguistic expression. These actions are "being worked on" by social norms that "precede us and exceed us" (Butler, 2009:11).

Pennycook extends this idea to language, asserting that "identities are formed in the linguistic performance rather than pre-given" (Pennycook, 2004:17). From this perspective, language does not simply reflect who we are and it actively shapes who we become through its repeated use (Pennycook, 2004:16).

Building on Butler's framework, McKinlay emphasizes two interrelated modes of performativity: mimicry and citation. Mimicry involves the repetition of normative language, gestures, and behaviors associated with dominant cultural identities. It sits ambiguously between identificatory collusion and subversion, and repetition can affirm norms while simultaneously exposing their instability (McKinlay, 2010:235). Citation, by contrast, denotes the act of referencing or recontextualizing established cultural scripts, linking self-representation to broader imagined communities and traditions (McKinlay, 2010:235). Through the interplay of mimicry and citation, identity becomes a process of reiteration, but an ongoing negotiation, creating space for resistance, transformation and the re-articulation of identity (Butler, 1990:17; 1993:9). Within this dynamic space, performativity operates as a mechanism through which hybrid identities are enacted. Japanese Brazilians, for instance, may perform "Japaneseness" through language use or behavioral conformity to gain social acceptance, while subtly asserting difference through selective blending or resistance. Performativity thus illuminates how belonging is an ongoing process, continuously reproduced and contested through everyday practice within third space.

The Generational Contract: The Relational and Moral Dimension of the Identity Negotiation

Finally, to capture the intergenerational dynamics shaping identity negotiation, I draw on the concept of the “generational contract”. Although the concept remains imprecise, I specifically draw on Göransson’s conceptualization of it as a moral relationship characterized by mutual obligations and support between elders and younger generations, yet always in a state of reinterpretation and negotiation (Göransson, 2013:65).

Building on this, I also draw inspiration from Gu’s (2021) study of Chinese rural migrant families, where the generational contract was mobilized to explain how sacrifice, indebtedness, and children’s emotional labor structured family life under migration (Gu, 2021:522). In Japanese Brazilian families, parents and children often occupy different positions in the third space where parents as migrants grapple with linguistic and social barriers, while children often more fluent in Japanese navigate belonging through different cultural codes. While Gu highlights the family as a site where education, economic survival, and emotional labor were organized through intergenerational obligation, my study extends this notion by examining the family as a space where Japanese Brazilian parents and children negotiate belonging and hybridity through silence, space strategy, affectual solidarity and everyday practices of cultural performance.

Application of these Concepts in an Analysis

In the context of our project, consistent with grounded theory, these theories and concepts are mobilized across these themes as emerging analytical lenses that illuminate how Japanese Brazilian children negotiate and perform their cultural identities instead of treating their narratives as mere examples of these theories. This theoretical constellation allows me to interpret the narratives of my participants not as fixed accounts of identity, but an ongoing process of negotiation a continual “becoming rather than being” in Hall’s term (Hall, 1996:4).

The third space theory provides the overarching conceptual framework for analyzing how Japanese Brazilian children negotiate and perform their identities. Within this framework, sameness and otherness describe the structural and relational conditions that shape how they experience otherness at school in analytical chapter 1. Second, performativity explains how participants respond to these conditions through everyday

performance of adaptation, concealment or resistance. Finally, the generational contract situates these negotiations within family relationships and obligations.

By bringing these perspectives together, my analysis seeks to shed light on the complexities of negotiating belonging in contemporary Japan. It shows how Japanese Brazilians navigate exclusion and sameness, perform and rearticulate identities, and draw on generational contract, thereby enriching understanding intergenerational identity formation.

Chapter 5: Methodology, Method and Data

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the intergenerational dynamics and lived experiences of Japanese Brazilian families, including those migrated from Brazil and those born and raised in Japan. Here, grounded theory methodology guided the research from the initial stages, allowing broad research questions to emerge and evolve through the data collection and analysis process. Semi-structured narrative interviews with parents and children were conducted to capture their personal narratives and lived experiences, which will, in turn, inform the ongoing refinement of the research focus. In the following, I will explain the reason why I incorporated grounded theory as a method and how it guided my data collection and analysis process.

Grounded Theory as a Method and My Positionality

Given that my research question is centered on an individual's narrated experiences, I aim to employ a method that is highly detailed and context oriented, with a particular focus on the statements of the participants. Therefore, this study utilizes a Grounded Theory Approach (GT), which focuses on the development of theory that is directly “grounded” in the data collected. In this approach, the data itself serves as the foundation for theory generation (Noble & Mitchell, 2016:34).

There are two primary reasons why Grounded Theory (GT) was particularly well-suited for this study. First, grounded theory provides a framework that enables participants to express their thoughts, experiences, and identities in their own terms, an essential feature when engaging with individuals from diverse migratory backgrounds.

Although this research focuses on people within a specific ethnic group, I remained cautious about making generalizations, seeking instead to acknowledge and honor the significant diversity that exists within the Japanese Brazilian community. Second, grounded theory aligns well with the use of semi-structured narrative interviews, especially when the research begins with a tentative thematic focus. As an emergent and inductive method, it facilitates in-depth engagement with pre-identified domains while remaining open to the emergence of new and unanticipated insights that arise during the research process (Charmaz, 2016:36,41). While existing literature on Japanese Brazilian counter-identities and intergenerational dynamics informed the initial direction of the study as discussed in the literature review, Ground Theory helped ensure that these preconceptions did not predetermine the analytical outcomes.

In entering the field, I adopted a grounded theory methodology precisely to center participants' narratives and to let their voices guide the analysis. This is not to suggest that I approached the study without any prior assumptions or thematic orientations. As Lune and Berg argue, while Ground Theory emphasizes inductive discovery, it also recognizes the researcher's pre-existing knowledge and deductive insights as part of the early research process (Lune & Berg, 2017:189). Researchers often begin with a general understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, shaped by prior studies or personal familiarity, which is then refined through sustained engagement with empirical data (Lune & Berg, 2017:189). Thus, I approached the data with an informed perspective shaped by existing literature and personal insights, while remaining attentive to the emergence of novel patterns and meanings.

Furthermore, I was particularly attentive to the influence of my own positionality throughout the process. I approached this study as a Japanese researcher currently based in Denmark, with personal experiences navigating multiple cultural contexts. While I share a similar cultural background with participants, I do not identify as Brazilian and have not experienced migration in the same way. This positioned me as an insider able to relate to certain Japanese cultural norms, such as the implicit rule of not standing out in the school context and as an outsider able to critically question practices often taken for granted within the community, for instance the expectation that Japanese Brazilians should conform to the same social norms as Japanese people.

As Adu-Ampong and Adams argue in their reflections on dual positionality, insider and outsider roles are not fixed binaries but fluid and continuously negotiated (Adu-Ampong & Adams, 2020:591). I adopted this view in my own research, treating positionality as a dynamic process shaped by the research context, the topic of discussion, and the evolving relationships with participants. While my insider status facilitated rapport and trust, my outsider perspective enabled me to pose clarifying and open-ended questions that encouraged deeper reflection and articulation of participants' experiences. I also remained mindful of the limitations of my position, including the possibility of over-identifying with Japanese norms or misinterpreting Brazilian cultural references.

Considering my positionality was particularly important, as it aligned with grounded theory's emphasis on shifting perspectives and the co-construction of knowledge. This reflexive stance informed both the conduct of my interviews and the iterative process of analysis.

Data Collection and Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both parents and children, with the initial aim of interviewing family members as pairs to better understand intergenerational dynamics within the same household. While I was able to interview several parents individually, access to their children proved more challenging. As a result, this study focuses specifically on the families for whom paired interviews were possible. In total, I conducted interviews with three Japanese Brazilian families. To deepen the insights gathered from the initial interviews, I also conducted follow-up interviews in which I asked more targeted questions based on emerging narrative themes. The following section outlines the steps taken in the sampling process and details how the interviews were conducted and analyzed.

Sampling to Interviewee Selection

The sampling process for this research initially drew upon my personal network within SABJA, a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting the adaptation of Japanese Brazilians to Japanese society. SABJA offers assistance with various everyday challenges and works to expand future opportunities, particularly for children within the community. I contacted the organization via email to seek potential Japanese-Brazilian interviewees. At

the outset, I did not anticipate the specific backgrounds of the individuals who would be introduced to me, nor did I have pre-established criteria for selecting parent–child pairs for interviews.

Additionally, the research question was intentionally kept broad, focusing on Japanese Brazilian people in Japan. When I contacted SABJA via email, a staff member at the organization offered to connect me with a Japanese-Brazilian parent(**Masato**)for an interview. This initial interview made me realize that my initial target group was too broad, as the Japanese-Brazilian population in Japan consists largely of individuals who have migrated either temporarily or permanently, with diverse migration reasons and histories. I realized that the first interviewee's experiences, not only as a parent raising children in Japan but also as someone who had lived in both Japan and Brazil offered valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of intergenerational influence on their children. From this starting point, participants were recruited using a snowball sampling method, where initial contacts with relevant characteristics led to further participants through referrals, each respondent suggesting others who might also meet the study criteria (Lune & Berg, 2017:39). In this case, the initial interviewee Masato who is a Japanese Brazilian parent introduced me to other potential participants within his net-works. The most significant turning point in the recruitment process came through an introduction to the president of Taiyo corporation, a company that supports the employment of Nikkei migrants. At the company, many Japanese-Brazilian parents who had migrated from Brazil and were/have been raising their children in Japan were employed.

Since there were many parents with diverse backgrounds, I had to make careful decisions about whom to include in order to maintain coherence in the study. That being said, conducting interviews with a range of parents helped to nuance my perspective, allowing me to better appreciate the diversity of experiences within Japanese-Brazilian families. What surprised me in some of the interviews with parents was that their views on the experiences of children who grew up in Brazil and later migrated to Japan revealed both similarities and significant differences compared to children who were raised in Japan. These differences were particularly evident in how the children experienced exclusion, navigated expectations around performance, and related to their parents across generations.

Thus, this reflection during the interview process opened up a new line of inquiry, which extended beyond the initial scope of this research. This realization led me to narrow the focus group for follow-up interviews to Japanese-Brazilian parents and children with both immigrant and non-immigrants backgrounds. While this group still reflected diversity in terms of race, country of origin, and personal experiences, they shared the common thread of navigating their familial and social identities at different stages of migration and integration.

Semi-Structured Narrative Interview

Semi-structured narrative interviews were incorporated as a core part of the data collection process. Since the aim is to generate concepts and theories grounded in participants' accounts, it is essential to place participants at the center of the study. In conducting narrative interviews, several key considerations must be taken into account.

First, researchers employing narrative techniques do not follow a rigid, predetermined agenda. Instead, they allow the interviewee to guide the direction, content, and pace of the conversation. As Anderson and Kirkpatrick suggest, this approach empowers the interviewee to control their own narrative, deciding what to share and what to withhold (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016:632). Reflecting this, interviews in this study often began with broad, open-ended questions such as: *"Can you tell me about your life since you moved to Japan from Brazil?"*. After posing such questions, I allowed participants to speak freely and uninterrupted until they naturally concluded their responses.

Second, the flexible nature of the interview format allowed for spontaneous follow-up questions based on participants' responses, while still maintaining a focus on the overarching research theme "the intergenerational relationship between parents and children". These considerations informed both the design of the interview guide and the overall approach to data collection, ultimately contributing to the richness and depth of the data gathered.

Overall, Interviews were conducted primarily in Japanese, the shared language between the researcher and most participants. However, in some cases (Aoi and Haruka pairs) where their parents did not speak Japanese, their children accompanied them and provided translation between Japanese and Portuguese. This approach was chosen due to the accessibility and trust within the family context, allowing for smoother communication.

Each session lasted approximately one hour, offering a space for open dialogue and nuanced reflection on participants' lived experiences.

Additional time was set aside to allow for reflection throughout the interview, giving participants the opportunity to share any memories or thoughts that surfaced during the process. Following an initial round of analysis, follow-up interviews were conducted with selected participants to further emerging themes and in-depth accounts raised during the first interview.

Narrative Analysis

The interview recordings were initially analyzed using thematic coding to identify recurring patterns, topics, and areas of interest across participants. This preliminary stage helped organize the data and highlight key themes, “the struggles of children”, “the performance of their identity”, and “negotiating their identity with their parents”. Building on this, the study employed **narrative analysis** as the primary method, combined with elements of grounded theory coding as it discloses my informants own rendition of key experiences and their sense making process within their life story.

A narrative approach acknowledges that stories are not neutral or purely objective. Instead, narratives are resources people possess and use to organize and make sense of their experiences, identities, relationships, and the world around them (Smith, 2016:204). Therefore, narrative analysis shifts the analytic focus from discovering an objective “truth” about events to examining how participants narrate and interpret their experiences (Earthy & Cronin, 2008:4).

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of a narrative approach. First, my analysis must remain grounded in the accounts provided during a single interview, without making assumptions or interpretations beyond what participants shared. As Smith (2016) notes, narrative analysis emphasizes stories and often treats them as unique, yet this focus may overlook the broader complexity of a person’s lived reality. The narratives elicited in an interview represent only one possible version of experience, shaped by the interview context and the dynamics of the researcher–participant relationship.(Smith, 2016:212).

Secondly, challenges arise concerning interpretive processes. As Riessman observes, whether data are oral, written, or visual, we never have direct access to another person's unmediated experience, since such accounts are always socially constructed by individuals for particular audiences, something made especially apparent in the interview context (Riessman, 2008:40). In this study, the interview recordings must therefore be transformed into textual form for analysis. Therefore, as a researcher, I must acknowledge my role in deciding what to include and how to represent my participants' experiences and reflection into words.

As I move into the analysis of my data, I draw on Smith's notion of "narrative constructivism", which highlights how individuals internally construct and interpret their experiences (Smith, 2016:204). That being said, the analysis did not occur in isolation from theory. Guided by this perspective, I developed analysis through a coding process of my informants' narratives and interpreted them through the lens of my chosen theoretical framework, including the third space theory, the concept of sameness, otherness and performativity.

Introducing my Informants

In this section, I provide brief introductions to each parent and child participant, highlighting their individual trajectories as well as key aspects of their parent-child dynamics. To protect the anonymity of all participants while maintaining readability, **pseudonyms** are used throughout. Although these portraits are not exhaustive, they are intended to shed light on the formative experiences and intergenerational relationships that underpin the analysis in the following chapters.

Masato and Reina (Father/Daughter)

Masato is a 60-year-old Japanese Brazilian father who grew up in Brazil and migrated to Japan 35 years ago with the aim of pursuing graduate studies. He is now the president of a construction company. Masato's interview focused extensively on his life story, particularly his move to Japan and what it meant to grow up in a Japanese-Brazilian family. Early in the conversation, he spoke about the dissonance he experienced being fluent in Japanese, yet still regarded as non-Japanese. He reflected on how these experiences shaped his sense of identity and belonging in Japan. Furthermore, one moment he recalled with appreciation

was being scolded by a Japanese acquaintance for arriving late to a meeting, an encounter he now sees as a valuable lesson in local cultural expectations. Reflecting on this moment, Masato added, *“I don’t remember if I’ve ever talked about this to my daughters, but I think my daughters respect me. I can tell they really take things seriously and think things through”*, suggesting a sense of pride in the values he believes have been passed down to his children.

His daughter Reina is 31 years old and currently works as a **rakugoka (traditional comic storyteller)**. Unlike the other two children interviewees, she was not born in Brazil, and she attended Japanese schools. The interview with Reina focused extensively on both her career trajectory and the challenges she faced while adapting to life in the Japanese school system. She described her life journey in detail, weaving her reflections together with memories of conversations she had with her parents. Reina shared vivid recollections of her childhood, including her struggles with language, a memorable episode at school, and her feelings of difference in relation to her Japanese peers. When asked how she sees herself today, she responded, *“Since I was born and raised in Japan, I think Japanese culture is quite dominant in me, maybe about 60 to 70 percent Japanese...But there are still moments when I feel that’s not entirely the case”*. Her response suggests that her sense of self is shaped not only by her environment but also by the cultural influences inherited from her Japanese-Brazilian family.

Elisa and Caio (Mother/Son)

Elisa is a 48-year-old Japanese-Brazilian mother who grew up in Brazil and currently works at SABJA. She moved to Japan with her son as a *dekasegi* worker, initially planning to return to Brazil within two years. In the first part of the interview, E focused on the difficulties she faced adjusting to life in Japan and the circumstances that led her to settle there permanently. She expressed sadness about being perceived as a "foreigner," despite expecting a sense of acceptance due to her Japanese ancestry. Reflecting on her identity, she remarked, *“Even if I were to take Japanese citizenship, I think I would still feel like I’m not really Japanese. I’m truly grateful to Japan, but it’s not my country”*. Elisa’s recurring theme in her narrative was a sense of in-betweenness marked by personal achievement but accompanied by a persistent lack of belonging. While this sentiment does not necessarily mirror her son’s perspective, it provides a meaningful context for understanding intergenerational dynamics in identity formation.

Caio, aged 28, was born in Brazil and migrated to Japan at the age of seven. Unlike the other child interviewees, Caio currently lives and works in Brazil. Our conversation focused on his experiences of immigrating to Japan as a child, attending both Japanese and Brazilian schools, and later temporarily returning to Brazil when he was 14 years old. His educational journey reflected a blend of cultural influences, but notably, Caio was the only interviewee who identified himself more as Brazilian. As he reflected on the challenges of navigating between two different cultures, the conversation shifted toward his relationship with his parents. He shared, *“I didn’t really see much of my parents when I was a child. They were both working, and since they worked until late at night, they were never home when I got back from school”*. This experience of growing up with limited parental presence during formative years suggests insight into how Caio's sense of self was shaped across multiple spheres: family, education, and transnational movement.

Aoi and Haruka (Son/Mother)

My interview with Aoi’s mother Haruka, 69 years old, was conducted with the help of Aoi in translating between Japanese and Portuguese. Haruka’s decision to move to Japan with family including Aoi was prompted by the downturn of the family-run business in Brazil and thus came as a *dekasegi*. Interestingly, Haruka explicitly stated that *“Even when I was living in Brazil, I didn’t really see myself as Japanese. I spoke Portuguese and lived just like other Brazilians there.”*, while Aoi identified himself more as Japanese while he was in Brazil.

Aoi is a 39-year-old employee at Taiyo Corporation who migrated to Japan at the age of 14 with his Japanese Brazilian parents. After arriving in Japan, Aoi attended Japanese junior high school and later went on to university in Japan. In the interview, Aoi spent considerable time reflecting on his teenage years, describing feelings of uncertainty and tension related to navigating life in Japan. He spoke in detail about the internal conflicts he experienced around cultural belonging, as well as challenges in his relationship with his parents. However, he simultaneously referred to his realization that after many years of living in Japan, his bond within the family strengthened. When asked his current perception of himself, he considered himself as the hybridity navigating two different cultures.

Reformulating Research Question

The first round of data collection was designed based on what has been mentioned above. While my initial research asked ***How do parents' memories influence their children in Japanese-Brazilian families in Japan?*** With a focus on the intergenerational transmission of memory, I was initially struck by the substantial diversity in participants' responses, which challenged my assumptions and made it difficult to identify clear patterns or themes. At first, I attempted to organize the data by fitting key quotes into preconceived categories that made sense to me. However, I soon recognized the need to suspend my assumptions and allow the participants' narratives to guide the analytical process.

The open-ended nature of Grounded Theory (GT) allowed for a reformulation of this focus through inductive and iterative engagement with the data. By repeatedly revisiting and engaging with the data, I began to uncover perspectives that extended beyond the original scope of inquiry. This led to the formulation of a new research question: ***How do Japanese-Brazilian children living in Japan negotiate and perform their cultural identities?*** While initial focus aimed at how parents' memories influence their children, the iterative process of data analysis informed the focus on negotiation and performative acts of cultural identities.

Ethical Consideration

All participants were informed about the purpose and scope of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the measures taken to protect their confidentiality (Arvin, 2018:30). Verbal consent was obtained before each interview, confirming their willingness to take part and their understanding that they could withdraw at any time without any consequences. No identifying information was included in the analysis, **pseudonyms** were used for their names and data were securely stored.

Methodological Limitations

This thesis began its data collection process from interviewee sampling to the interviews themselves with a focus on the intergenerational dynamic among Japanese-Brazilian migrant families. However, several methodological and logistical limitations were encountered during the research process, which may have affected the data and depth of the findings.

One of the challenges in this process was the difficulty of consistently interviewing parents and their children together as pairs. While the initial aim was to capture both sides of the intergenerational dynamic, this was not always possible due to issues of privacy and limited access. Consequently, I focused primarily on the cases where I was able to conduct parent–child interviews, as these provided the most direct insights into intergenerational relationships. The interviews also varied in format depending on participants’ availability and circumstances: for instance, I interviewed Aoi in person, while Caio and Reina participated online. In one paired interview with Aoi and Haruka, Aoi acted as a translator, facilitating communication between his parents and me by translating between Japanese and Portuguese. However, relying on family members as translators can restrict the depth and nuance of participants’ expressions, and often created disparities in how much participants were able to share. This resulted in some unevenness in the data, shaped by differences in language abilities and comfort levels. Nevertheless, these accounts are interpreted with caution and still provide valuable perspectives on identity performance and generational negotiation.

Secondly, although I had planned to conduct **participant’s observation** in order to gain more immersive and in-depth understanding of participant’s everyday practices such as the involvement of the Japanese or Brazilian community and the code-switching of their language, several factors made the method infeasible. First, the **restricted timeframe of the fieldwork** placed significant limitations on opportunities to negotiate and sustain long-term access to participants’ workplaces or daily routines, which participant observation typically requires. Second, the **cultural context of Japan’s demanding work culture** posed additional barriers. Many participants had limited availability and were hesitant to allow prolonged involvement in their personal or professional lives, perceiving such engagement as intrusive or burdensome. Establishing the level of trust and rapport necessary for participant observation would therefore have required a much longer immersion period than was possible within the scope of this study. In response to these constraints, I relied instead on follow-up interviews with selected participants. Nevertheless, the absence of participant observation constrained the extent to which this research could capture the more subtle and embodied dimension of participant’s everyday practices.

Lastly, while this study draws from a small group of Japanese Brazilian families, there is notable variation in participants' migration histories and birthplaces, some children (**Aoi** and **Caio** were born in Brazil and migrated to Japan, while **Reina** was born in Japan to migrant parents. These differences shaped their experiences of language acquisition, identity formation, and their positions within intergenerational dynamics. Although this variation may limit direct comparability across cases, it also offers insight into how “difference” is encountered across multiple entry points into Japanese society. Rather than treating participants as a homogenous group, I have sought to highlight these nuances where relevant while identifying broader patterns across the narratives.

Chapter 6: Analysis and Discussion

In order to address the research question on how Japanese Brazilian children living in Japan negotiate and perform their cultural identities, the following analysis chapters are structured around three themes that emerged through grounded coding of the interview materials: **the struggles of children, the performance of identity** and **negotiating identity with their parents**. Each will be focusing on key themes and excerpts from semi-structured narrative interviews with three Japanese Brazilian children, Aoi, Caio, and Reina and their parents, Masato, Elisa, and Haruka. It explores how the children negotiate and perform their cultural identities. These acts are understood as interactive and relational practices through which their cultural identities are continually questioned, enacted, and potentially transformed.

As this analysis is grounded in participants' narratives and shaped by the author's interpretation through a theoretical framework and my positionality, it is important to acknowledge that descriptions of family members whether parents or children do not necessarily reflect their own perspectives. These accounts should not be read as objective representations of their actual thoughts, feelings, or experiences. For the sake of readability, this clarification will not be repeated throughout the chapters.

Single Interview with Japanese Brazilian Children

After conducting in-depth interviews with Japanese Brazilian children, Aoi, Reina and Caio, it became evident that all three embody forms of hybridity in how they negotiate their cultural identities, despite notable differences in their migration histories and places of birth.

While Aoi and Caio immigrated to Japan, Reina was born and raised there. Here, hybridity does not simply refer to a simple blending of Japanese and Brazilian cultures, but rather the creation of new meanings and positions of identity that emerge through everyday encounters(Bhandari, 2020:84).

However, both during their adolescence in Japanese schools and continuing into the present, they have encountered significant challenges, particularly with regard to language barriers, isolation, and changing-family dynamics. These difficulties were further shaped by the experiences of their Japanese Brazilian parents whose own migration trajectories shaped the environment in which their children came of age. Each of them had to navigate the societal norms and expectations of Japanese society while simultaneously maintaining their Brazilian cultural heritage. Thus, their narrated life stories were marked by struggles of adaptation, as they sought to reconcile ways of being and belonging shaped by cultural identities transmitted from both Japan and Brazil.

1. The Boundaries of Belonging: Sameness and Otherness at School

In analyzing my participants' narratives, several recurring themes emerged. A prominent one was the challenges they encountered at school. These accounts revealed schools as central spaces where differences in language, behavior, and expectations became visible, and where questions of belonging, exclusion, and adaptation were confronted. To frame these experiences, I draw on a relational understanding of identity. Woodward highlights that identity is "marked out through symbols" that distinguish who is considered "us" and who is "them"(Woodward, 2018:430). Building on this, Yang's study describes identity as unfolding across similarity and difference over time(Yang et al. 2021:179), while Balibar points to institutional processes of internal exclusion that sustained by the very structure that claim to promote inclusion because defining inclusion always requires drawing boundaries of sameness and otherness(Balibar, 2005:31-32). In my data, such processes appear where students' futures are differentiated inside the school system. At the same time, I suggest that schools can be understood as spaces of intercultural dialogue, where encounters open possibilities for renegotiating belonging (Deifelt, 2007:118).

This chapter is organized around the main sub-themes that surfaced in the data. First, I examine how language functioned as a gatekeeper of belonging, highlighting the different ways in which participants experienced exclusion due to linguistic struggles. Second, I

explore issues of self-perception and recognition. Finally, I turn to the concepts of sameness and otherness, which recurred across interviews and provide a useful lens for making sense of these negotiations of belonging.

Languages as a Gatekeeper of Belonging

During the interview with Aoi, his narrative primarily centered on the challenges of adapting to a new educational environment following his relocation from Brazil to Japan. Having attended school in Brazil until the age of fourteen, he encountered significant difficulties in adjusting to the academic and cultural expectations of the Japanese school system. Aoi's narrative illustrates how language operated as a symbolic boundary-making within the Japanese school system.

Aoi firstly described his struggles with peer relationships after the start of junior high school in Japan. In Aoi's own words,

"I haven't made any friends in middle school, even though a few people did reach out to me and tried to approach me with genuine interest"(Interview,Aoi).

When I asked him about how you reflect on these experiences at school, he answered.

"Back then, even just hearing someone laughing nearby made me think they were talking badly about me, that they were making fun of me, I was convinced of it." more than anything that was what hurt me the most, emotionally... However, in my case, I was fortunate I didn't experience obvious bullying. But I was very conscious of people's stares. Since I didn't understand Japanese at the time, I might not have noticed if something was said about me"(Interview, Aoi).

This reflection highlights how laughter, stares, and accents function as subtle yet powerful symbols of belonging. As Woodward reminds us, identity is "marked out through symbols," and what might appear to others as trivial interactions became, for Aoi, signs that he was positioned outside(Woodward, 2018:430). His sense of exclusion was further reinforced by moments of institutional sorting, such as when a teacher told him that, due to his limited Japanese skills, he would have to enter the workforce rather than pursue high school. These experiences exemplify what Balibar terms internal exclusion, a process in which marginalization occurs not through outright expulsion but through inclusion in subordinate or stigmatized forms (Balibar, 2005:31-33). Within this logic, institutions such as schools play a central role in defining who is considered educated and who is not. Aoi concludes:

“Back then, I really felt different from everyone else, even though I don’t feel that way so much now. There was no one around me with a similar background, so I often wondered, “why is it only me?” (Interview, Aoi).

Caio also reflected on his struggles with language use, though in distinctive ways, as he was the only participant who attended both Japanese and Brazilian schools. Entering school at age seven, shortly after migrating with his mother, he developed a strong aversion to attending. He attributed this to the frustration of being unable to communicate with his peers, which left him feeling isolated and misunderstood. This narration by Caio highlights his awareness that being the only Brazilian in his class further intensified this sense of exclusion, reinforcing his reluctance toward school. He expressed:

“Especially when I was in elementary school, everyone used to call me ‘the Brazilian’, ‘Brazilian’ or just ‘foreigner.’ Since I was the one learning Japanese and interacting with Japanese people, people around me started pointing out that my parents’ intonation was strange, that it sounded like a Brazilian accent”(Interview,Caio).

Being hailed as “Brazilian” or “foreigner” became a linguistic permanent marker of otherness. His story shows how exclusion was not only about his own Japanese ability but extended to his family, echoing Woodward’s point that identity is sustained through both symbolic marking and material social relations(Woodward, 2018:432).

A third example of language comes from Reina who described herself being othered at school because of her linguistic background. She recalled that these experiences led her to believe she was “stupid” and incapable of pursuing the same dreams as her classmates. Unlike Aoi and Caio, Reina was the only participant born and raised in Japan. Even so, she described her early struggles with Japanese upon entering kindergarten and elementary school, recalling the confusion and uncertainty she felt when trying to interact with teachers and follow classmates’ instructions. In her narrative, the abrupt shift from speaking Portuguese at home with her family to suddenly communicating in Japanese at school appeared as a defining challenge in her early life. She explained:

“I was always made to stay behind and practice, even though I didn’t understand what was going on. At school events like dances or practicing instruments such as the harmonica or piano, I could never remember the routines. While everyone else went off to play, I had to keep practicing alone. No matter

how many times things were explained, I just couldn't understand, and I practiced in fear of being scolded.”(Interview,Reina).

Her struggle extended beyond the classroom. In Reina's account, her difficulty in adapting to school was also partly due to her parents' limited Japanese proficiency at the time, which made it hard for them to understand letters from the school, especially those that included instructions about what Reina needed to bring. She recalled asking her father, Masato, for help with math homework, only to stop when she realized his method differed completely from the Japanese approach taught in class. For Reina, these accumulated experiences of not performing routines became proof that she was fundamentally lacking. Eventually, this led her to feel that “*she won't be good at studying and won't be able to get a decent job*”. She continued:

“That's when I started to think I must be stupid. Since I couldn't do things as well as others, I came to believe I was dumber than everyone else. I even thought that I'd never be able to work in the future, so my younger sister would have to support me.” (Interview,Reina).

Throughout the interview, this sense of dependence on her sister recurred as a quiet yet persistent hope. Her narrative overall demonstrates how symbolic marking can translate into material disadvantage, shaping imagined futures. As Woodward emphasizes again “identity is also maintained through social and material conditions”, in Reina's case, being positioned as linguistically deficient was lived as the loss of possible future(Woodward, 2018:430).

Negotiating Self-Perception and Recognition

While language was central, my participants also described the dissonance between how they understood themselves and how others positioned them. For instance, during my conversation with Aoi, he recalled an “identity crisis” of questioning “who I am” when he realized that his classmates in Japan did not perceive him as he had imagined himself in Brazil. In his comment:

“When I was in Brazil, I had always thought of myself as Japanese. I still believe that my way of thinking is more aligned with Japanese values. But when I came to Japan, it was a shock...this continued until university”(Interview,Aoi).

On one hand, Aoi's narrative highlights a dissonance between his self-perception and the reality he encountered in Japan. In Brazil, he imagined himself as "Japanese," identifying with values and ways of thinking that he associated with Japan. However, upon relocating, his reception within Japanese society positioned him as an outsider. This dissonance exemplifies Woodward's point that "Identity is relational" and depends on an outside that both enables and denies recognition(Woodward, 2018:430). Stuart Hall's framework similarly is useful here that cultural identity is not a fixed essence but a production "always in process" constituted within representation(Hall, 1990:222).

When asked to reflect further, Aoi compared what he saw as differences between Brazilian and Japanese styles of interaction:

"So when I compared myself to people born and raised in Japan, I felt our ways of thinking and interacting with others were noticeably different. For example, Brazilians are generally cheerful, positive, and quite friendly. Japanese people, on the other hand, are polite and serious...Also, I felt a bit of difference in the warmth within families. For example, I'm quite close to my mother and can talk to her about anything. But when I came to Japan and looked at my friends, some hardly spoke with their moms, and others felt embarrassed to talk with their parents. There's even that image of being a "mama's boy" or "papa's boy". (Interview, Aoi).

These comparisons reveal how Aoi negotiated self-understanding by positioning himself in relation to the perceived differences between Brazil and Japan. As the conversation unfolded, he reflected further on the reasons why he is simultaneously identified as both Japanese and Brazilian. While he believed that his Japanese-sounding name often led others to assume he was Japanese, his accent in speaking Japanese marked him as different, distinguishing him from native speakers despite his appearance. His reflections resonate with Hall's argument that identity carries an "inner compulsion" compelling individuals to measure themselves against cultural norms and even as recognition is provisional and unstable(Hall, 1990:226).

Caio also described recognition as shifting across contexts. At home in Japan, he contrasted his family life with what he perceived as "typical" Japanese households. When I asked what made him think this way, he explained:

“I hardly saw my parents when I was a child, since they were both working. By the time I came home from school, they were never there. They worked until late at night. Our family environment felt different. Even beyond the fact that both my parents worked, our whole lifestyle was different. For example, I think the biggest goal for many Japanese people is to buy a house and settle down. The typical path seems to be: get married, find a stable job, and build that kind of life.”(Interview:Caio).

This quote underscores Caio’s recognition that his household, shaped by different circumstances and priorities, such as saving money with the intention of eventually returning to Brazil, diverged from the lifestyle he associated with Japanese families. This divergence ultimately reinforced his perception of being “out of place,” In his own words “*I can’t become fully Japanese*”.

Yet, as his Japanese improved, he described becoming “more Japanese-like” and being treated less as a foreigner. Recognition seemed to stabilize until he returned to Brazil at age fourteen. There, he discovered that his appearance marked him as Japanese, unsettling his self-image as Brazilian. He expressed:

Caio: “I didn’t experience an identity crisis while I was in Japan, but when I came to Brazil where I had always been taught was my home country, I was very aware that I was Brazilian. So when I arrived in Brazil and was treated as Japanese, a question mark popped into my head. I thought, ‘Huh? So I’m not considered Brazilian here either”

Interviewer: "Is it that, in Brazil, people are judged based on appearance?"

Caio: "Yeah, I didn’t really consider myself Japanese, I thought of myself as Brazilian. But when I actually came to Brazil, people looked at me and said I was Japanese based on my appearance. That made me confused. I started wondering, ‘Wait, am I really Brazilian?’”(Interview,Caio).

This illustrates Hirst’s critique of Althusser that interpellation is not a one-off act but a shifting process, dependent on context(Hirst,1979, as cited in Hall,1996:7). At first, his increasing fluency in Japanese enabled him to be seen as “less foreign” over time. Yet this temporary sense of acceptance was unsettled when he returned to Brazil, where he realized that his appearance marked him as different from what he had imagined a “Brazilian” to be. In his view, speaking Portuguese alone was not sufficient to secure that identity of “Brazilian”. His narrative about shifting identities, being hailed as “foreigner” in Japan and

“Japanese” in Brazil illustrate Hall’s(1990) second position that identity is never complete but negotiated within the “play of difference” and similarity(Hall, 1990:228).

Reina’s story furthermore underscores this instability. Speaking Portuguese in public became a reminder that, no matter how much she adapted, she would always be perceived as “not quite Japanese”.

“So, when I’m in Japan, Japanese people say, “You’re not really Japanese, right? You’re half, right? You’re Brazilian, right? Even though I’m not actually half. So I was never treated as a “pure” Japanese person. That made me think, “Oh, I guess I’m Brazilian then”. But when I actually visited Brazil, I realized I didn’t fully understand Brazilian culture either.. I love Brazil, but the reality is that I live in Japan. So I ended up feeling like I’m not really Brazilian either. And I’m over there, I get treated as Japanese. It’s kind of like that.” (Interview, Reina).

Here, recognition shifted depending on context. In Japan, speaking Portuguese or simply not conforming to cultural expectations prompted others to question her “Japaneseness,” assuming she was “*haafu*” or a foreigner. This external labeling led her to momentarily align herself with a Brazilian identity, but even that identification was unsettled upon her visit to Brazil, where her partial unfamiliarity with the culture marked her as Japanese. This illustrates Woodward’s “crisis of identity”, when identities that were once assumed to be fixed or coherent become destabilized by contradictory experiences and shifting contexts(Woodward, 2018:434).

Interestingly, Reina also connected her own experiences with those of her parents. She recounted how her mother, unable to communicate in Japanese, was told by a doctor:

“I had heard about how hard things were for them at work and so on. My mother especially went through a lot, though I think my father did too. What I heard from my mother was, for example, when she was pregnant and went to the hospital, she didn’t understand Japanese, and the doctor told her, ‘If you don’t understand Japanese, go back to your own country.’ He said, ‘Don’t give birth in Japan. If you can’t speak Japanese, go back to your own country’”(Interview,Reina).

And she remembered noticing as a child how police treated her father Masato differently once he spoke with an accent:

“But more than myself, I really noticed even as a child how my parents were treated differently. For example, there were times when the police would stop our car at night to check things. When it was a Japanese person, the process would be quick, just a quick check and that’s it. But as soon as my dad started speaking, it was like, “Oh, where are you from?” The whole tone and attitude suddenly changed. It was like, “Oh, you’re a foreigner.” That kind of thing. Even as a kid, I remember thinking, That’s awful. Why do they suddenly treat him like that when he hasn’t done anything wrong?” I found myself questioning it” (Interview,Reina).

Her recollection of her parents being treated differently by society shows that experiences of belonging and exclusion were not limited to her own schooling but extended across her family. As a child, hearing the story of her mother and observing the abrupt changes in attitude once her father spoke reminded her that her family, too, could be positioned as not fully part of Japanese society. In turn, witnessing these events contributed to her early critical consciousness, as she has not only recognized the injustice in how her parents were treated but also connected this treatment to broader questions of who is afforded the status of being “truly Japanese”. Thus, Reina’s narrative above so far demonstrates how her sense of belonging was shaped less by birthplace and descent than by everyday experiences at school and home. Although she was born in Japan, her struggles with Japanese in school and the use of Portuguese at home led to her being positioned as “not fully Japanese.” Simply being born in Japan did not secure her acceptance. Instead, she felt that being recognized as Japanese depended on demonstrating the same linguistic and cultural competence as her peers. Classroom participation, academic performance, and the ability to follow routines became benchmarks against which she was measured, and her difficulties in these areas reinforced her feeling of being different. Her story highlights how identity is negotiated across shifting contexts, sometimes she was seen as Brazilian, sometimes as Japanese, but neither identity felt complete.

All of these examples thus suggest that school was more than just a site of learning, it was also a key arena where my participants confronted exclusion and, in turn, worked to redefine their belonging.

School as a Site of Negotiated Belonging: Language, Identity, and Otherness

The narratives in this chapter showed that schools were not merely arenas of academic institutions but central sites where belonging was constantly tested, reshaped and performed. For Aoi, Caio, and Reina, everyday interactions, in classrooms, corridors and extracurricular

settings became encounters with symbolic marking and internal exclusion. To make sense of these dynamics, I frame the discussion around two key concepts Bhabha's "third space" as a broader analytical lens to understand how identities are negotiated in-between and Deifelt's notion of ethical dialogue as a normative framework for rethinking how sameness and otherness can be engaged (Deifelt, 2007:116). Alongside, these symbolic marking and internal exclusion discussed above help reveal the mechanisms by which schools sort individuals into categories of belonging and non-belonging.

As Deifelt points out, encounters between cultural values, expectations, and norms demand processes of negotiation, not only when people engage with those regarded as "others", but also within interactions among those assumed to be the "same" (Deifelt, 2007:116). This was evident in the ways participants described language as a powerful boundary-making force, though each recounted it in distinctive ways. For Aoi and Reina, difficulties with Japanese shaped not only their classroom participation but also their sense of future possibilities. Fluency in Japanese and familiarity with school routines functioned as symbolic markers of belonging, positioning classmates as insiders while highlighting the difference of those who fell short. This reflects a broader cultural discourse in Japan, where language and national identity are tightly bound together. As Miller notes, Japanese is often represented as uniquely difficult and even infused with a distinctive "spirit" (*kotodama*) (Miller, 1982, as cited in Liddicoat, 2008:34). Within this discourse of Japaneseness, speaking Japanese is equated with embodying Japanese identity itself, making proficiency or its absence a powerful criterion for recognition.

My participants described inhabiting unstable positions between categories, where they were never fully recognized as Japanese or Brazilian. These accounts illustrate how sameness and otherness are mutually constitutive, defining who counts as Japanese simultaneously marks who does not. For instance, Aoi's self-perception as Japanese in Brazil only gained meaning against the backdrop of his Brazilian peers, while in Japan his exclusion as "not Japanese enough" depended on the expectation of linguistic and cultural sameness. Similarly, Caio's labeling as "Brazilian" in Japan and "Japanese" in Brazil shows how otherness and sameness shift across contexts, but always in relation to one another. Reina's case further underscores this dynamic: her positioning as "not quite Japanese" in Japan reinforced a boundary of pure Japaneseness, even as her recognition as Japanese in Brazil cast her as the opposite of Brazilian sameness.

The term *gaijin* (外人), literally “outside person,” exposes the discursive production of social boundaries. Rather than functioning as a neutral label, it operates as an exclusionary marker that positions certain individuals as perpetually outside the sphere of *uchi* the “inside” reserved for those recognized as authentically Japanese (Bell, 2011: 167-172). In this way, everyday language not only reflects but also reproduces the relational constitution of sameness and otherness. As Staszak argues, otherness operates by defining subordinate groups as the opposite of the dominant identity, thereby reinforcing symbolic and social boundaries (Staszak, 2020:25).

Yet, the same spaces where difference was marked also became openings for negotiation. Deifelt reminds us that intercultural ethics must resist reducing sameness and otherness to fixed categories, because doing so denies the fluid and relational nature of human encounters. When difference is treated as something to be erased or controlled, dialogue turns into domination and equality becomes conditional on conformity (Deifelt, 2007:116-117). My participants’ narratives, however, show how schools often enacted the opposite by enforcing sameness through linguistic conformity while essentializing otherness through labels such as *gaijin*. Within the third space, they navigated being both insiders and outsiders, rearticulating their belonging through learning Japanese school routines and code-writing between Japanese and Portuguese.

Bhabha’s (1994) notion of the “third space” helps illuminate this process. Rather than being stable or inherited, identity emerged in these narratives as negotiated in the in-between: between Brazil and Japan, between being “Japanese” and “Brazilian,” and between self-perception and external recognition. This “borderline work” created by “an encounter with the newness” reveals that belonging was not fixed but fluid, relational, and constantly in motion (Bhabha, 1994:10). What counted as sameness or otherness shifted across contexts, sometimes marked by language proficiency or cultural familiarity, at other times by appearance or institutional expectations.

Taken together, these narratives show that Japanese Brazilian children negotiate and perform their cultural identities by moving across shifting boundaries of sameness and otherness, enacting belonging through language, recognition, and everyday practices, while simultaneously reconfiguring what it means to be “Japanese” or “Brazilian” within the third space of the school.

2. Performing Japaneseness and Brazilianess : Everyday Acts of Cultural Negotiation

In the previous chapter, I showed how Aoi, Caio, and Reina encountered re-negotiation to their sense of belonging through language struggles and the tension between self-perception and external labelling. Their narratives, however, also reveal that belonging was not only something challenged from the outside but something they actively worked to perform in everyday life. Through speech, behavior, and efforts to align themselves with cultural expectations of “Japaneseness,” they engaged in strategies that negotiated their place among peers and within school. To make sense of this, I draw on Judith Butler’s notion of performativity, which helps explain how everyday acts constitute and reinforce social norms. In this chapter, I therefore focus on how participants’ performances of belonging shed light on the negotiation of cultural identity, extending the analysis from moments of negotiation (Chapter 1) to the performative strategies through which they actively navigated and reshaped their positions.

Concealment and Passing (Aoi and Caio)

Aoi’s case: silence, naturalization, name change

Throughout the interview, Aoi frequently emphasized the extent to which he adjusted his behavior to avoid being identified as a foreigner in Japan. Reflecting on his school years, he explained:

“For example, you can’t tell just by someone’s appearance or name, right? So if I stay quiet, people won’t realize I’m a foreigner. It’s the way I look too... people can’t tell.” (Interview, Aoi).

Here, silence emerged as a deliberate tactic. Remaining quiet allowed Aoi to temporarily suspend recognition as Brazilian, drawing instead on his physical appearance as a resource for belonging. Yet, silence could only take him so far. He also described more enduring strategies of adaptation:

“In high school, I definitely didn’t want to be bullied or looked at strangely, so there was a period when I desperately tried to hide the fact that I was a foreigner, a Brazilian.” (Interview, Aoi).

To prevent this exposure, Aoi undertook naturalization (kika), adopted a Japanese name, and invested heavily in learning the language. These efforts extended beyond concealing foreignness; they actively produced a visible and symbolic alignment with normative expectations of Japaneseness. As he put it:

“That’s why, at the time, I was desperately trying to assert that I was Japanese by my name. I wanted to be seen that way. I think it was precisely because I had that strong feeling that I tried so hard to study Japanese, and that’s probably how I was able to reach the level I’m at now” (Interview, Aoi).

Taken together, Aoi’s reflections show the dual layers of his identity work. On the surface, silence allowed him to “pass” momentarily, but in the longer term, naturalization, language study, and a new name became strategies to embody Japanese belonging. What appears as personal determination “I tried so hard” was also a response to external pressure, avoiding bullying, meeting expectations, and gaining recognition from peers and institutions.

This tension between agency and constraint highlights the performative character of belonging. Aoi’s actions illustrate what Butler describes as the requirement to comply with norms in order to be recognized as a subject at all (Butler, 2009:4). Passing as Japanese through silence, mastering the language, and adopting a name legible within cultural expectations can be seen as citational acts, repetitions of dominant codes through which legitimacy is sought. At the same time, as Butler argues, norms act on us before we have a chance to act at all, our actions recapitulate these norms, sometimes in new unexpected ways, yet always in relation to them (Butler, 2009:11). Seen in this light, Aoi’s strategies were neither free choices nor pure submission, but also the condition of possibility for action itself. They were negotiations shaped by the risks of exclusion on one side and the possibilities of recognition on the other. In school, silence could protect him in some moments, yet language and naming practices remained unavoidable markers of identity. Through these acts, Aoi did not merely endure other’s categorizations; he actively performed and reconfigured belonging in the spaces where it was most fragile.

Caio’s case: unconscious blending in

Caio described his experience of adapting to Japanese society as an almost natural, unconscious process:

“It was unconscious, really. When you live among Japanese people, I think you naturally start to become like them. I didn’t think I had to act Japanese, but somehow, I just ended up doing so. Personality-wise too, when you follow the rules, you start to take on Japanese traits. Especially when you’re following Japanese rules.”(Interview,Caio).

Unlike Aoi, who emphasized deliberate concealment, Caio framed his adaptation as unintentional. He explained that everyday practices such as following rules gradually shaped his personality and behavior, making him “become like” the people around him. He also highlighted the influence of unspoken social codes:

“Japanese people don’t really talk about things like culture or rules, but there are invisible standards, and I guess those also play a part. As the Japanese proverb goes, ‘The nail that sticks out gets hammered down.’ When you stand out too much as a Japanese person, you get criticized. So, I think people who are less noticeable or more reserved are seen as more typically Japanese.” (Interview, Caio).

These reflections illustrate how Caio’s adaptation was less about conscious effort than about exposure to tacit norms. The “invisible standards” he describes emphasize the implicit social codes of conformity that structured his everyday life in Japan.

A pivotal moment came when a peer remarked: “*You’ve become like a Japanese*”. This comment reveals how Caio’s identity was not only shaped by his own practices but also stabilized through recognition from others. By recounting this moment, Caio positioned himself within a relational framework: shifting from being perceived as “foreign” to being included as “Japanese”. Towards the end of our conversation, Caio reflected on these experiences from the perspective adulthood:

“When you go to Japan as an adult, even if you don’t quite fit in, you probably won’t try to become the same as everyone else. But as a child, I just wanted to be like the others and make friends quickly. To blend in at school, I felt I had to adapt, I had to learn Japanese as fast as I could, and that pressure was definitely there.” (Interview, Caio)

This reflection underscores the temporal dimension of adaptation. As a child, the pressure to fit in and secure friendships created a strong motivation to blend in; as an adult, however, Caio interprets these efforts with greater distance, recognizing that conformity felt more urgent in childhood than it would later in life.

From a theoretical perspective, Caio’s account illustrates three important dynamics. First, in Butler’s terms, even though he described his adaptation as “unconscious,” it was

still performative. Identity, for Butler, is not the result of deliberate choice but emerges through iterative acts that cite existing norms (Butler, 1993:95). In Caio's case, repeatedly speaking Japanese, following school rules, and suppressing differences constituted him as a recognizable subject within the framework of "Japaneseness." His insistence that this was "natural" or "unconscious" only reinforces Butler's point that norms work most powerfully when they appear invisible or taken-for-granted.

Second, the moment when his peer remarked, "You've become like a Japanese," highlights how performativity intersects with relationality. As Shimizu argues, subjectivity does not emerge in isolation but is triggered in unpredictable encounters with others (Shimizu, 2021:34-35). Recognition from peers stabilized Caio's identity and allowed him to narrate himself as moving from "them" (Brazilian/foreigner) to "us" (Japanese). Language was central here: the utterance itself marked a shift in his position and, in retelling it, Caio re-inscribed this transformation into his own narrative.

Third, Caio's adult reflection underscores the temporal dimension of adaptation. As a child, peer acceptance and the avoidance of exclusion were immediate pressures that compelled him to blend in; as an adult, however, he can reinterpret those experiences with distance. Butler reminds us that subjects are always "worked on" by norms (Butler, 2009:11), but Caio's retrospective narration shows that this process is never complete or final. Identity remains open to re-evaluation across time, revealing both the durability and fragility of performative belonging.

Resistance and Pride (Reina)

Reina's case : selective blending in

Reina's story introduces a more complex negotiation between blending in and expressing pride in her Brazilian heritage. Like Aoi and Caio, she recalls a period of trying not to stand out among her Japanese peers:

"When I was with Japanese people, I tried not to stand out, to blend in with everyone around me. But on the other hand, I also felt a sense of pride in being Brazilian. While I thought I had to be like everyone else, there were moments when I was really happy to be Brazilian. For example, I paid attention to things like my clothing or how I interacted with others. I even tried to imitate the Brazilian women around me, trying to act confidently and femininely. I was also conscious of things like the poses I made in photos". (Interview, Reina).

This quoted passage shows how Reina balanced competing pressures. On one hand, When she expressed the moment of “not to stand out” among her Japanese peers, it can be seen that Reina tried to cite the cultural code of “Japaneseness” such as modesty conformity as traits needed to “blend in.” On the other hand, she selectively embodied markers of Brazilian femininity, confidence, posture, and style as sources of pride. Language also shaped her visibility. She recalled moments of speaking Portuguese in public:

“I hadn’t been speaking much Portuguese in front of others, and on the other hand, when those parents spoke Japanese or Portuguese in front of friends, they ended up attracting attention. In that sense, there was a time I did feel a bit conspicuous.”(Interview, Reina).

These moments highlight how difference surfaces even without intention. While speaking Portuguese did not signal rejection of Japaneseness, it nonetheless marked her as “other” in public space, thus rendering her visible as “stand out”. At the same time, Reina connected her sense of pride to observing older Brazilian women around her:

“People in Brazil live with such confidence, and you can see it in everything, from the way they carry themselves to the clothes they wear, which exude self-assurance. When I saw slightly older girls around me looking up to those people, that admiration gradually grew inside me. I thought, If this culture is part of me, then I want to be a confident young woman too. It made me feel proud of being Brazilian like, Brazil is cool, right? Portuguese is beautiful, isn’t it? (Interview,Reina).

Here, admiration for confident Brazilian femininity provided her with an alternative source of identification, one that coexisted alongside her attempts at assimilation. Reina’s account so far highlights three dynamics that deepen the picture of performativity and relational subjectivity.

Analytically, three points follow. Firstly, her efforts to “not stand out” illustrate Butler’s notion of performativity as citational practice. By following norms of modesty and conformity, she sought intelligibility within the framework of Japaneseness. These acts of blending in did not express a pre-existing essence but iteratively constituted her as recognizable in a Japanese context. Second, her deliberate imitation of Brazilian femininity through clothing, posture, and photographic poses shows how discursive practices can also serve as resistance. Following Butler’s reinterpretation of Foucault, the very acts that produce subjection are also potential sites of disruption(McKinlay, 2010:235). Reina’s gestures did not reject Japanese norms outright but carved out space for pride in her Brazilian heritage within the same framework. Third, Shimizu’s concept of relational

subjectivity helps illuminate the fluidity of Reina's negotiation. Her identity was not a stable essence of "Brazilianness" or "Japaneseness," but arose continuously in encounters with peers, with her parents, and with admired Brazilian women. The Buddhist idea of *engi* (縁起, relational arising) underscores this dynamic. The term *en* (縁) means "relation," while *gi* (起) means "to occur." It suggests that "it is *engi* relationality that makes subjectivity possible" (Shimizu&Noro, 2023:382). This kind of relationality is not given or fixed, rather, it arises unpredictably in the present moment. In Reina's case, this meant that blending in and expressing pride were not contradictory, but part of an ongoing ethical negotiation of how to exist with others without collapsing into fixed categories.

Performing belonging across intersection

The analysis thus far has shown that each interviewee's story reflects distinct ways of negotiating belonging. On one hand, belonging was sought through strategies of concealment and alignment, such as hiding Brazilianness through silence, adopting a Japanese name, and striving to perfect language skills in order to "live up to being Japanese." On the other hand, the boundaries of belonging were not always clear-cut. In certain instances, performance took the form of resistance or pride. Reina, for example, described trying "not to stand out" among Japanese peers, while simultaneously imitating Brazilian women's confidence through clothing, posture, and photo poses, and admiring their self-assured femininity. Such inconsistencies in response underscore the complex and shifting character of cultural identity. Rather than a stable essence, identity emerged in my participants' accounts as something to be continually navigated in relation to cultural expectations, social encounters, and personal investments. At this point, however, it is important to delve deeper into what it means to perform in this way, and why the modes of performance differed across participants. In the following discussion, I revisit the narratives of Aoi, Caio, and Reina through the dual lens of Butler's theory of performativity and Bhabha's theory of the third space, while also attending to how intersections of race, gender, and legal status shaped their possibilities for belonging.

Bhabha reminds us that cultural identity does not emerge within fixed categories but in what he calls the "liminal stairwell", a space of in-betweenness, neither fully upstairs nor downstairs, and in this case, neither wholly "Japanese" nor wholly "Brazilian" (Bhabha, 1994:5). Occupying this space, however, depends on the repetition of practices that affirm one's place within society, a process through which the instability of the very categories

invoked becomes apparent (Butler, 1991:18). For my participants, this involved conforming to particular norms, such as speaking Japanese, concealing Portuguese, or performing Brazilian femininity. As Butler argues, such practices render subjects socially “recognizable” (Butler, 2009:4). Yet, recognition through performance is not sufficient. What emerges from my participants’ narratives is the fragility of their belonging, complicated by the intersections of race, gender, and class. Here, Jackson’s notion of “interruption” becomes useful: those moments when the repetitive enactment of a norm exposes its own instability. In her example of the “Southern woman,” Jackson shows how white Southern women’s roles and behaviors were shaped by the intersections of race, class, and religion, illustrating how discourse rooted in these categories structured both expectations and identities (Jackson, 2004:685). In relation to my analysis, my informants performed expectations embedded within dominant discourses, ranging from having a “Japanese face” and Japanese name, to speaking Japanese, showing modesty, and embodying femininity as Japanese Brazilian women. As Tsuda notes, Japanese Brazilians are often evaluated according to essentialized ethnic assumptions (Tsuda, 2000a:59), such as “Japanese face”, with phenotypic features, “slanted eyes, flat face and small noses” becoming a key marker in how they are perceived and categorized in Japan (Tsuda, 2000b:4). Aoi recounted to me a story where he became aware of the fine line between what might be considered “Brazilian” or “Japanese”:

“If my name was written in katakana, people could immediately tell I was a foreigner. But once it was written fully in kanji, I wasn’t treated as a foreigner right away. Of course, once I spoke, my way of speaking gave me away, so if people asked, I would honestly tell them I was from Brazil.” (Interview, Aoi).

In Aoi’s narrative, his name and his way of speaking Japanese became interruptions, moments that exposed his Brazilianness in the eyes of others. What this illustrates is that belonging is not determined by a single marker, but through the intersection of multiple signifiers: phenotype, name, speech, and comportment. In this sense, his “Japanese face” enabled a temporary suspension of foreignness, but only if supported by linguistic fluency and comportment aligned with ideals of modest, disciplined behavior. To navigate these shifting boundaries, Aoi acted consciously choosing silence, disciplining his speech, and studying Japanese intensively. This was not simply a matter of personal preference but a strategic response to the social demand to become “recognizable” within dominant categories (Butler, 2009:4).

Similarly, Caio experienced expectations tied to physical appearance like Aoi, his “Japanese face” often allowed him to be perceived as Japanese. However, Caio’s performativity emerged more unconsciously, shaped by his upbringing. He shared;

“I didn’t really know much about Brazilian culture, since I came here when I was seven. Back then, I just thought being Japanese was normal. I tried to act like a Japanese person, but when I went to Brazil at fourteen, I started to wonder, ‘So this is what’s normal in Brazil?’ and I felt the difference”
(Interview,Reina).

This quote highlights how race and ethnicity interact with age, generation and migration history to shape how belonging is lived. Having migrated at the age of seven, he grew up absorbing Japanese norms as ordinary, and thus his attempts to “act Japanese” were not deliberate strategies but rather internalized practices of belonging. Though his physical appearance allowed him to “pass” as Japanese, his generational position as a child who migrated young meant that he internalized Japanese norms differently than those who arrived later, like Aoi.

Intersectional discourse also emerged in Reina’s narrative,

“Ever since I was little, I always thought women who danced were really cool, feminine, and beautiful. My mother danced with me too, and it was so much fun. Through dancing, I felt like I gained confidence in myself, it wasn’t just fun, but I think it naturally let me feel the power of being Brazilian. In that sense, dancing was also a way for me to experience my own femininity.”(Interview,Reina).

Reina’s account highlights how femininity, ethnicity, and cultural practice intersect in her experience. Unlike many women in Watarai’s study, who described suppressing elements of “Brazilian-ness” to align with Japanese expectations of modesty and femininity(Watarai, 2014:670), Reina found empowerment in embracing Brazilian cultural practices, particularly dance. While she conformed to Japanese norms of modesty and restraint to avoid standing out, she simultaneously cited Brazilian femininity through style, posture, and pride. In both cases, “Japaneseness” and “Brazilianness” operated as normative for Reina, this meant performing the “haafu” identity that mainstream Japanese discourse anticipates. As Watarai emphasizes, failure to meet such expectations functions as a mode of exclusion, and vice versa(Watarai, 2014:672). The analysis thus underscored that belonging was lived in distinct ways, but always as a fragile negotiation at the intersection of language, race, gender, and generational position within the dominant discourses of “Japanese,” “Brazilian,” and “Japanese Brazilian.”

3. Family Dialogue: Reconfiguring the Generational Contract of Belonging

Throughout my interview with both children and parents, I found that parents play a significant role in shaping how my participants come to express and understand their sense of cultural belonging later in life. To address my research question, how Japanese Brazilian children negotiate and perform their cultural identities, this chapter turns to the Gu's (2021) concept of generational concept to argue that the family emerges as a "third space" where Brazilian practices and Japanese norms intersect, negotiated through speech, silence, role reversal and everyday practices. Importantly, parental narratives, such as those of Masato, Elisa, and Haruka are not simply supplementary data, but constitute critical insights into the relational context within which children's cultural belonging was formed, constrained and redefined. As Göransson reminds us, the inter-generational contract is "a moral contract, a relationship based on rights and duties" but one that is always under "ongoing processes of renegotiation and reinterpretation"(Göransson, 2013:65).

Obligation: Silence and Role Reversal

Gu's framework of the generational contract first highlights how children articulate a sense of "indebtedness," which in turn shapes how they perform and reaffirm their commitment to the family contract. Gu refers to this as "emotional labor," describing the process through which children manage their feelings and expressions in order to meet socially expected emotional obligations(Gu, 2021:522).

During my interview with Aoi, I asked how he managed what he described as an "identity crisis." In response, he shared a pivotal moment when he finally disclosed his internal struggles to his mother. When I followed up and asked why it had been difficult to open up to her, he explained:

"What I remember is that both my mother and father worked really hard for the family. My father was also a very serious man, and he would always tell me not to do anything wrong, to grow into a proper person. So that became the standard I tried to live by. Seeing that made me feel like I had to try my best too. Watching how hard they worked kept that motivation alive in me." (Interview, Aoi).

This reflection suggests that his reluctance to share his struggles was rooted in a profound sense of indebtedness. Observing his parents' relentless efforts instilled in him the belief that he too should persevere in silence. His comment on remaining silent resonates with his earlier reflections on role reversal, where he positioned himself as the mediator between his family and Japanese society. Aoi elaborated further:

“For me, it was the opposite. Back in Brazil, I relied completely on my parents, they took care of everything for me. I was still a child, only fourteen at the time. But after coming here, I felt that I had to be the one to take charge. It was hard when people didn't understand me, and because I was also going through adolescence, I sometimes took it out on my parents. I would think, I'm struggling so much here too, and maybe I became a bit rebellious. The roles felt reversed, since I was the one who understood things better and was reacting to the situation, I didn't really want to listen to what my parents said. Instead, I thought it should be done my way”(Interview,Aoi).

For Aoi, the role reversal he describes shifting from being dependent in Brazil to becoming a mediator between his family and Japanese society shows how a generational contract was negotiated under migration. Instead of the parent guiding the child, Aoi assumed responsibilities of translations, decision-making, adaptation. Aoi's reflection suggests that his silence was not simply avoidance, but a form of emotional labor through which he managed his feelings in order to honour his parent's sacrifice by being “mediator”, “proper person”and “working hard”.

Caio's silence illustrates another form of emotional labor. When I asked him how he managed to deal with challenges such as language and identity negotiation, he explained:

“I kept it all to myself, bottling it up alone.”(Interview:Caio).

Caio explained that the reason he refrained from sharing his struggles with his mother was largely linguistic. As his proficiency in Japanese improved, he found it increasingly burdensome to explain his feelings in Portuguese. At the same time, he described being caught in an in-between space: able to understand Portuguese but unable to speak it fluently, while also not yet fully comfortable in Japanese.

During the interview with his mother, Elisa noted that her son, Caio, managed everything related to school on his own, including deciding which letters from the school were important and needed attention. As we continued the conversation more, however, it became

evident that she was also aware of this silence between them. Reflecting on Caio's younger years, she explained:

"For example, when I started working at Sabuja, there was a consultation about bullying that had started because someone was Brazilian. I was really surprised by that, and it made me wonder if something like that had happened to my own son and daughter. So I immediately called Caio and asked, 'Caio, has anything like this ever happened to you?' And he said, 'No, no, it hasn't.' But I was a bit worried about it"(Interview, Elisa).

On one hand, Elisa's account highlights the challenges her son, Caio, faced as a result of migration and attending a Japanese school, struggling to learn in Japanese and to make friends, which Elisa sees as necessary to overcome for the sake of Caio's future in Japan. On the other hand, this moment also reveals the limits of her awareness; despite her concern, it is possible that she was not fully informed about the everyday difficulties her son may have experienced in terms of identity negotiation.

While Elisa exercised parental authority in deciding which school Caio should attend, the passages above suggest that his in-between linguistic position created a communicative barrier that redefined his responsibilities within the family. Instead of being the child who received support, Caio assumed the role of managing school correspondence and filtering what was shared with his mother. In this sense, the generational contract was enacted not only through his visible independence, but also through the silence shaped by what could not be spoken across family. Whereas Aoi's emotional labor of silence was rooted in a sense of indebtedness tied to role reversal, Caio's case shows how linguistic barriers themselves can generate silence as a form of emotional labor.

Reina's account further highlights this dynamic of distance, though in her case it was less about silence with parents and more about the limits of what parents could provide. Like Caio, she struggled with academic challenges, but unlike him, she emphasized structural gaps in knowledge rather than linguistic barriers. She explained:

"When it came to high school entrance exams, I didn't really know what was considered normal, which schools were difficult, or which would suit me. There was so little information available within my family, and I didn't have anyone I could really consult. I had my school teachers, but personally, I didn't really trust them, so I couldn't rely on them much either. My parents didn't know much about studying in Japan or rather, they had no experience with the Japanese entrance exam system at all"(Interview, Reina).

Reina's story illustrates another form of role reversal, one that unfolded specifically in the academic field. Within the framework of the generational contract, her parents' inability to provide guidance regarding the Japanese education system shifted responsibility onto her. Although she continued to respect their efforts and sacrifices, her own trajectory was shaped by the recognition that her parents' memories and experiences of education in Brazil could not be translated into the Japanese context. In this sense, Reina's generational contract was mediated through an absence of parental authority in matters of schooling. She had to navigate choices independently, weighing risks and opportunities without the scaffolding of parental knowledge.

Parental Shifts and Memory

The previous section illustrated how the shifting dynamic of family contract shaped their emotional labor, where my participants felt unable to rely on their parents for guidance. Yet, these ruptures do not remain fixed. Over time, each of interviewees described moments of change where their emotional labor was negotiated. Gu uses the term "space strategy" to describe how families distribute care and economic responsibilities across different spaces such as village, school and city in order to cope with structural constraints (Gu, 2021:519). Although Aoi, Caio and Reina did not experience geographic separation in the same way their narratives reveal comparable forms of spatial negotiation across linguistic, cultural and institutional spaces.

After discussing his reluctance to confide in his parents, Aoi shared a moment when he eventually disclosed his struggles to his mother. Her response surprised him:

"She told me, "You don't need to go that far to become Japanese" There's no need to fully become one. Just be yourself" (Interview, Aoi).

This reassurance contrasted sharply with the pressures Aoi had long internalized to assimilate completely and suppress parts of himself. His mother's acceptance redefined the cultural space in which identity was negotiated, opening a third space where hybridity could be embraced rather than erased. This spatial shift allowed Aoi to transform hybridity from a perceived disadvantage into a form of strength, as he later explained:

"To be honest, until now I often thought of being born and raised overseas as a disadvantage. But I've managed to turn that into something positive by changing the way I look at it. For a long time, I saw

being from abroad only as a negative, but now I think of it as a strength because living overseas has given me a different perspective. On top of that, I can speak three languages, which I now see as something valuable rather than a burden.(Interview,Aoi).

Through this reframing, Aoi demonstrates how spatial strategies can unfold within the family. His mother's repositioning of cultural expectations created a supportive space that redistributed the burden of assimilation and validated hybridity as capital. A similar reconfiguration is visible in Haruka's evolving parenting approach. She reflected:

"At first, I intended to be strict, but as I went along, I started to feel that this wasn't the right approach. Things just weren't working, and times have changed. So when it came to raising my children, I decided to focus on the basics, being polite, working earnestly, and becoming a decent human being. Beyond that, I allowed them a fair amount of freedom" (Interview,Aoi).

Her decision to abandon rigid methods in favor of flexibility reflects how she repositioned herself across temporal and cultural spaces. Drawing on her own painful childhood under a punitive father "*I really didn't want my own children to go through the same things*", she chose not to reproduce those practices, instead crafting a space where her son could exercise autonomy. This strategy redistributed parental responsibility rather than tightly controlling Aoi's path, Haruka emphasized core values while granting him freedom to define his own future. In Gu's terms, this represents a spatial strategy where caregiving is not confined to inherited norms but rearticulated across past and present experiences to meet new circumstances.

A similar dynamic is evident in Reina's narrative, though here the negotiation centred on linguistic space and the stigma attached to her accented Japanese. Reina recalled a formative moment during elementary school:

"I clearly remember something from elementary school. During a sports day event, my dad came up to me and said, 'Reina, you're doing great, keep it up.' Then a boy nearby suddenly said, 'Why does Reina's dad speak such weird Japanese?' right in front of him. I was shocked and angry, thinking, How could he say that in front of my dad? That's so rude. But my dad just smiled and replied, 'Oh, that's because I'm an alien.' Everyone got excited 'Wait, really? You're an alien?' Then someone joked, 'So does that make you an alien too?' I just went along with it: 'Yep, I'm an alien too.' Even as a kid, I remember thinking, Wow, my dad is amazing, he completely changed the meaning of that moment"(Interview,Reina)

Rather than leaving Reina to internalize shame, she made it clear that her father transformed the moment into humor and play, showing her how stigma could be reframed.

Although she observed both positive and negative aspects in her parents, she explained that these experiences shaped her personality, in particular, reframing her struggles with language as a strength: the ability to navigate two different cultures. In this sense, the family deployed a spatial strategy within the linguistic and cultural space of stigma.

This perspective was echoed in my interview with her father, Masato. Reflecting on his own experiences, he recalled:

“I went through the same thing. For example, I used to feel embarrassed speaking Japanese with my parents in front of friends. Similarly, my daughters didn’t want to speak Portuguese with us in public. But when I realized this, I told them, ‘There’s nothing to be ashamed of. In fact, you should be proud, you can speak two languages, which is more than most of your classmates. That’s a strength, not a weakness.’ After that, they started speaking Portuguese more confidently and stopped trying to hide it”
(Interview, Masato).

Here Masato’s strategy was to reposition Portuguese as a marker of strength rather than weakness, thereby constructing a familial space where bilingualism was valued. By drawing from his own past feelings of embarrassment, he shifted the boundaries of linguistic space for his daughters. Instead of concealing Portuguese in public, they began to use it openly and confidently. When asked what values he wished to preserve, Masato emphasized the closeness and affection alongside bilingual pride.

He explained that while his children are Japanese, they are also Brazilian, and therefore should take pride in maintaining Brazilian language and culture. *“Yes, that isn’t bad at all,”* he added.

“You know how kids often feel embarrassed about being kissed and hugged in front of their friends? But in my case, I’d always hugged and kissed my daughters in front of their friends since they were little, so I don’t think they ever really minded. I made an effort to maintain that kind of closeness.”(Interview, Masato).

Masato’s deliberate pride in his children’s bilingualism and his intentional creation of an affectionate home environment together illustrate a spatial strategy that redefined the family’s cultural and linguistic space. By refusing to frame bilingualism as shame and instead making it a resource for pride and intimacy, he carved out a space in which Reina could embrace both Brazilian and Japanese identities without feeling torn between them.

Lastly, in my conversation with Caio's mother, Elisa, she described her decision to enroll Caio in a Japanese school, despite knowing that she would not be able to assist him academically. When I asked her about Caio's experiences at school, she initially emphasized the importance of attending a Japanese school for her son's future, explaining that she had come to realize they would not be returning to Brazil within two years.

"Since we live in Japan, she kept saying that it's better to learn many things for the future. But since I was going to Japanese schools all the time, she also said that I shouldn't forget how to speak Portuguese, so we should speak Portuguese at home....But since I lacked confidence in myself, I felt there wasn't much I could do. Still, I told him that if he ever found something he really wanted to do, I would give him my full support." (Interview, Elisa).

This passage reveals how Elisa actively negotiated between her aspirations for her son and the practical realities of migration. On the other hand, she consciously preserved Portuguese at home, ensuring that he maintained a connection to Brazil. In Gu's framework, this illustrates a space strategy that unfolded institutional and linguistic spaces rather than geographic ones. By aligning her son with a Japanese educational institution while safeguarding Brazilian cultural continuity within the household, Elisa reconfigured the family's everyday spaces of belonging. Her decision reflects how parental memory, aspirations, and constraints intersected to create a space where Caio could navigate both Japanese and Brazilian identities simultaneously.

Everyday Practices of Belonging

The previous section illustrated how parental shifts and strategies reshaped the generational contract, opening new cultural and linguistic spaces for negotiation. Yet, as I delved into their narrative, it was found that children themselves also engaged in these negotiations, not only through silence or role reversal, but through everyday practices that embodied belonging. To situate my participant's narrative, I draw on Manheim's theory of generations and Bengtson and Robert's (1991) model of intergenerational solidarity. Manheim reminds us that generations are not only defined by obligations to the past but by the cohort, which links an individual's location in an historical social structure with their views or conceptions of the social world (Pilcher, 1998 as cited in Andrew, 2002:76). Bengtson and Robert meanwhile, conceptualize solidarity in families through multiple dimensions, including

affectual solidarity, which is management of emotions to maintain closeness across generations (Bengtson & Robert, 1991:857-858). While Gu's framework emphasizes the children's repayment of parental sacrifices often takes the form of emotional labor, such as silence or self-discipline, however these two concepts help to illustrate how everyday negotiation of Aoi, Reina and Caio was as a shared intergenerational orientation but also as affective practices of solidarity within families.

Towards the end of our conversation with Aoi, he reflected how even the most ordinary gestures such as greetings became markers of cultural hybridity.

"Among Nikkei people, for example, hugging is a normal form of greeting. In Brazil, greetings also include a kiss on the cheek, that's just the way it is. Those everyday practices really highlighted the cultural differences for me. I also feel there are some differences between Nikkei in Japan and Nikkei in Brazil. Nikkei are still Nikkei, but those in Japan are closer to Japanese people, while at the same time incorporating elements of both cultures." (Interview, Aoi).

In this quote, it can be seen that Aoi interprets even the smallest gestures as expressions of generation-specific hybridity, not simply as inherited customs. While his parents stressed "proper" behavior, his own generation enacted belonging through gestures that signaled both Brazilian warmth and Japanese restraint such as seriousness (*Majime*). Mannheim would describe this as an instance of how individuals situated within the same historical moment develop shared orientations that reflect their generational position (Andrew, 2002:76). His further insistence on the word "hybrid":

"I don't see it in a negative way, there are positives too. That's why I prefer the word "hybrid" since it carries a positive image, and reflects being someone who embodies two cultures" (Interview, Aoi).

This illustrates how Aoi transforms everyday gestures into practices of belonging. Hybridity becomes a generational resource, expressing both his cohort's shared historical condition and his commitment to maintain harmony across family and community. Where Aoi identified hybridity through greetings, Reina's story brings us closer to the affective work of language in family interactions. She recalled the embarrassment she once felt when her parents spoke Portuguese in front of her friends.

“You know, when my parents spoke in front of my friends, I could feel that it drew attention. Because of that, I gradually stopped speaking Portuguese in public myself. But fortunately, in my case, I still really loved my parents. Even if I sometimes felt embarrassed, I thought to myself that I must never let them feel that. Also, they raised me with a strong sense of self-worth, so little by little I came to think that standing out in front of others wasn’t necessarily a bad thing. Eventually, it even shifted into a kind of pride like, Hey, I can speak Portuguese, isn’t that cool? So I think it turned into something that made me feel confident.”(Interview,Reina)

Here, affectual element of solidarity is at work. At first, Reina’s emotional labor appears by managing feelings to avoid hurting her parents. This emotional labor reflects what Bengtson and Roberts describe as affectual solidarity, the management of feelings to sustain family ties(Bengtson&Roberts, 1991:857-858). Over time, this emotional work becomes a site of transformation by which her feelings of discomfort give way to pride, showing how solidarity evolves through changing social experiences. Rather than emphasizing a static generational position, Manheim’s framework of generational consciousness helps to illuminate this process as one of interpretive renewal, as he believes that members of generation actively reinterpret their inherited experiences and cultural narratives in response to social and historical contexts(Manheim,1952 as cited in Andrew, 2002:76). In Reina’s case, the shared history of being a migrant family and cultural negotiation provide the background, but her emotions with the family give this history personal and generational meaning.

By the end of our conversation, she described her own “rakugo performance” as an expression of gratitude to her parents and a deliberate use of her “in-between” cultural backgrounds as strength saying she feels 60-70% Japanese while also embodying Brazilian openness. Over the life course, the emotional labor that once served to maintain family harmony becomes an embodied expression of belonging where affective solidarity and generational orientation intersect. Reina’s story thus reveals how feelings within the family are not only private but generative of a broader sense of generational identity.

Finally, Caio’s story adds another dimension which is the intertwining of linguistic challenges with pride in Bilingualism. Reflecting on his educational path, he recalled:

“Looking back, there was someone I used to attend the Brazilian school with. I found them online recently, and when we talked, I realized they couldn’t speak Japanese, even though they had lived in

Japan until around the age of 17. That made me think: living in Japan for that long and not being able to speak the language felt a bit off to me. So, for me, transferring from the Brazilian school to a Japanese school was a significant decision” (Interview, Caio).

Cairo’s reflection highlights the emotional dimensions of linguistic adaptation. His decision to transfer was not only a pragmatic step arranged by his mother but also an act that involved endurance, self-discipline and quiet perseverance. This emotional labor also reflects affectual solidarity that sustains family cohesions through unspoken acknowledgement of parental sacrifice. Rather than expressing difficulty openly, Caio internalized it, transforming linguistic struggle into a mode of repayment and belonging. Over time, this endurance evolved into pride.

“Being able to speak both Portuguese and Japanese is actually pretty rare, I think. From that feeling of wanting to take pride in it, I’ve come to think of myself as Brazilian”(Interview, Caio).

Here, pride emerges as the culmination of affective and generational processes. Manheim’s stance again helps interpret Caio’s bilingualism as more than individual achievement that embodies a collective orientation among Nikkei youth who navigate two linguistic worlds. His bilingual identity reflects not only his mother’s pragmatic hopes but also his generation’s attempt to assert distinction and agency within a context that often positions them as outsiders. Through bilingualism, Caio transforms the emotional labor of silence into symbolic capital, turning what might have been a source of alienation into belonging. His narrative shows how affective solidarity anchored in gratitude and familial duty intersects with generational orientation toward self-definition and resilience. Together, these processes reveal how linguistic practice becomes both emotional repayment and generational expression, situating Caio’s experience within the broader continuum of intergenerational negotiation.

Taken together, these narratives show that everyday practices, greetings, speech humor, rakugo, and bilingualism function as embodied forms of repayment and belonging. Much like Gu’s (2021) participants, who reaffirmed the generational contract through academy’s effort and emotional labor, Aoi, Reina and Caio reaffirmed theirs by reframing differences as resources, transforming silence into pride and crafting hybrid selves through daily practices. In this sense, their “doing identity” parallel with “doing class” highlights children’s agency both acknowledges parental sacrifices and redefines the terms of belonging within the family as a third space (Gu, 2021:522).

The family as a third space of generational negotiation

This chapter has examined how Japanese Brazilian children perform and navigate cultural identities through what Göransson’s conceptualizes generational contract as “first and foremost a moral contract, a relationship based on rights and duties,” but one that is continually subject to “ongoing processes of renegotiation and reinterpretation” (Göransson, 2013:65-67). Within the context of Japanese Brazilian families, this moral relationship takes on new affective and spatial forms. Through the lens of Bhabha’s concept of the third space, I argue here that the family emerges as a liminal arena where Brazilian practices and Japanese norms intersect, producing a hybrid moral field in which belonging and obligation are continuously redefined across generations, languages, and histories (Bhabha, 1994:2-4).

At the heart of these negotiations lies the moral labor of feeling. Across interviews, children’s silence and self-discipline emerged not as avoidance but as moral responses to parental sacrifice. Aoi’s reflection “watching how hard they worked kept that motivation alive in me” illustrates what Göransson calls the binding nature of obligation within the contract (Göransson, 2013:64). Likewise, Caio’s statement “I kept it all to myself, bottling it up alone” reveals how endurance and silence become moralized forms of emotional labor. Gu describes how children of migrants express indebtedness not through money but through “emotional labor” managing their feelings in order to repay parental sacrifices (Gu, 2021:522). However, this moral labor unfolds under strain. As Yamazaki and Bugarin notes “emotional rupture”, Brazilian migrant families often arise when long working hours and linguistic barriers erode communication, creating fragility even within affection (Yamazaki & Bulgarian, 2023:152). Paradoxically these gaps also become sites where the moral negotiation is renewed.

Parents likewise reinterpret their obligation within this hybrid space, a process that echoes Gu’s described space strategy (Gu, 2021:519). Haruka’s realization that “being strict wasn’t the right approach” and Masato’s humor “that’s because I’m an alien” illustrates Göransson’s point that obligations are reinterpreted in changing contexts (Göransson, 2013:67). These adaptations exemplify what Bhandari calls the liberatory potential of third space where interlocutors “negotiate and reconcile issues emanating from differences between juxtaposed cultures” (Xiaowei & Pilcher, 2009 as cited in Bhandari, 2022:175). Parental authority, once grounded in hierarchy becomes a flexible moral resource re-defined

through empathy, humor and cultural translation. In this sense, moral flexibility is translation work by which parents and children continually reinterpret what it means to care, obey or succeed, adjusting moral expectations to the realities of migration.

Zechner&Sihto describe this as the renegotiation of the contract's "responsibility, distributions and value base" (Zechner&Sihto, 2023:714-718). Each reallocation, Aoi mediating for his parents, Caio handling school correspondence, Reina navigating exams alone marks not a collapse of obligation, but transformation within a moral space of negotiation.

Finally, this moral translation is embodied in everyday practices. Aoi's hybrid greetings, Reina's shift from embarrassment to pride and Caio's bilingual confidence demonstrate how gestures and emotions carry moral weight. These small acts are more than reciprocal gestures, they express a shared generational orientation in Mannheim's sense that each generation located itself in a shared historical process (Andrew, 2002:85). Affection thus becomes a moral language. Within this ongoing moral dialogue, warmth, humor and restraint become everyday expressions of obligation. These acts also sustain what Bengtson and Roberts call affectual solidarity that maintains cohesion amid shifting roles (Bengtson&Robert, 1991:857-858). Seen through Bhabha's, such gestures embody the generative moment where "meanings and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity" but are produced in the act of reinterpretation (Bhabha, 1994:55). Thus, duty is rearticulated as affection, and the family's moral contract becomes a lived practice of "doing identity."

Through the intergenerational lens, the Japanese Brazilian family emerges as a living moral contract. Through Bhabha's broader framework, it has become a third space of "cultural translation" (Bhabha, 1994:83). Together, these frameworks illuminate how obligation, rupture, and creativity coexist in everyday life. The emotional labour that isolates generations simultaneously generates new forms of moral intimacy, while parental flexibility such as space strategy and children's endurance translate duty into empathy. In this moral space, what I call here "doing identity" becomes inseparable acts for Aoi, Caio and Reina. The family thus stood out not only between Brazil and Japan but also between past and present, hierarchy and equality, where belonging is continually remade through the moral work of affection, silence and negotiation.

Concluding Discussion

In this thesis, I asked how Japanese Brazilian children living in Japan negotiate and perform their cultural identities in everyday life. Drawing on grounded theory and semi-structured narrative interviews, I examined belonging is negotiated across three interrelated dimensions: experience of exclusion and recognition at school, the everyday performances of Japaneseness and Brazilians and intergenerational negotiations of identity within families. To enhance the clarity and coherence of my analysis, I have analyzed the data separately. However, I acknowledge that these analytical chapters are deeply intertwined processes that continuously inform one another.

Conceptually, this study situates hybridity within the overlapping frameworks of Bhabha's third space, which emphasizes that subjectivities emerge from the ambivalent space of difference and deferral rather than stable cultural origins (Bhandari, 2022:85-86). This ambivalence provides the conceptual thread linking all analytical chapters. In analysis chapter 1, the concept of sameness and otherness firstly emerged as crucial for understanding how school operates as the first in-between site where difference is produced and experienced. Language and social recognition operated as boundaries of inclusion and exclusion defining who counts as "Japanese". The strong institutional demand for cultural sameness often marginalized participants socially and academically. As Bhabha notes that third space is not a fixed middle ground but a site of translation where meaning is rearticulated "neither the or nor the other"(Bhabha, 1994:41) . In my study, these experiences of exclusion gave rise to subtle forms of resilience. Participants such as Aoi, Reina and Caio developed selective and adaptive strategies, silence, concealment and selective pride being perceived as "too Brazilian" or "lacking Japaneseness"(Watarai, 2014:667).

In analysis chapter 2, through the lens of Butler's performativity, these performative acts in the ambivalence between exclusion and adaptation were understood not as mere expression of identity, but reiteration of social norms through which participants sought recognition within the boundaries of Japaneseness. The silence and name changes that enabled Aoi to "pass" as Japanese, Caio's unconscious mimicry of social codes, and Reina's selective embodiment of Brazilian femininity all demonstrate how Bhabha's third space materialises through Butlerian repetition. As Bhabha reminds us that in-between space

“provides the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood...that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation in the act of defining the idea of society itself (Bhabha, 1994:2). In my analysis, these performative acts constitute precisely such strategies of selfhood: embodied negotiations through which participants both accommodate and contest the boundaries of Japaneseness. Therefore, the third space is performed, its ambivalence lived through gestures, silences, and everyday practices that reproduce social norms even as they subtly rearticulate what it means to belong.

Finally, Intergenerational contract and emotional labor also play a crucial role in understanding how belonging is negotiated within families. In analysis chapter 3, drawing on Göransson’s (2013) understanding of the generational contract, I showed that the moral expectations between parents and children often blurred traditional hierarchies, Aoi’s sense of responsibility for his family’s adaptation, Caio’s mediation of language and culture, and Reina’s transformation of embarrassment into pride all demonstrate how emotional labor becomes a key practice through which hybridity is sustained. These familial negotiations mirror the ambivalence observed in the previous chapters. The same dynamics of exclusion and performativity reappear within the intimate sphere but are reframed through affection, duty, and care. Just as participants performed belonging in schools and public spaces, they also performed it within the moral economy of the family, where silence, endurance, and emotional reciprocity became acts of negotiation. Together, these three dimensions form a complex web of mutually shaping forces in which language, social expectations and family dynamics intersect to produce identities that are as Hall reminds us “a process of becoming rather than being”(Hall, 1996:4). My participants, Aoi, Caio and Reina continue to negotiate and redefine their sense of self and belonging within the shifting cultural landscape of both Japan and Brazil.

Furthermore, my findings also revealed several silences and absences that are equally significant. What I found most vivid were acts of resilience, adaptation and pride, for instance participants reinterpreting exclusion through creativity such as the formation of hybrid identities and moral labor within the family. Yet, what I did not find were explicit expressions of deep emotional distress or open resistance to dominant Japanese norms, despite studies suggesting growing concern about the mental health among Japanese Brazilian youth in relation to their ethnic identity(Fukui,et al., 2022:2). None of the participants describe severe experiences of psychological suffering or Ijime and direct

challenges to societal structure were rare. This silence does not necessarily indicate the absence of pain or resistance, rather it points to the subtle, often quiet ways in which negotiation takes place through endurance, self discipline and re-significance of difference. The absence of overt conflict or trauma in their narrative also suggests that hybrid identities, while emotionally complex, may often be lived through ordinary acts of adjustment rather than visible confrontation. In this sense, what was not said during the interview, the unspoken tension, fatigue or hesitation as meaningful as what was articulated. Recognizing these absences helps avoid romanticizing hybridity and reminds us that belonging can be both resilient and fragile.

At the same time, these findings speak directly to the broader theoretical and methodological limitation of this study. While the third space offers a productive lens for understanding the space of negotiations and hybridity, it also risks idealizing agency by downplaying the structural inequalities such as racism of “Japaneseness”, legal status of nationality law based on bloodline and racialized hierarchy such as *hafu*. During fieldwork, I observed that individuals who did not physically resemble stereotypical notions of “Japanese face” often expressed less pressure to conform to Japanese expectations, revealing that the freedom to negotiate identity is unevenly distributed and mediated by visibility, privilege and institutional structures. Recognizing this complexity situates hybridity not only as a creative process but also as one shaped by intersection of class, race and religion (Jackson, 2004:685).

Furthermore, while the narratives revealed strong emotional and moral dimensions of identity work, participants' individual personalities such as their openness, reflexivity and coping strategies clearly shaped how they articulated belonging. For instance, Reina described herself as someone who “always tries to see things positively” an attitude that shaped how she framed her experiences of exclusion, while Aoi’s introspective self-discipline and Caio's pragmatic adaptability illustrates how personal temperament influences the process of cultural negotiation. This variation underscores that identity formation is not merely a social phenomenon but also an affective and psychological one, filtered through individual emotion and resilience.

This study contributes to the growing scholarship on Japanese Brazilian migration by foregrounding the lived experience of children of second-third generation of migrants. At

a broader level, I also similarly acknowledge the productive vagueness of the third space, its openness that resists fixed definition, which rather than being a limitation, allowed me to approach participant's narrative with flexibility. Complementary concepts helped to ground this abstract space, translating its ambiguity into concrete analytical insights. By exploring exclusion, performativity, and intergenerational relations as three complementary vantage points for understanding how belonging is enacted, this study moves beyond earlier works that have tended to isolate either adult migrant experiences (Tsuda, 1999; Roth, 2002) or familial transmission (Sekiguchi, 2007; Serrano & Shibuya, 2019).

Conclusively, future studies could expand this inquiry by engaging with larger and more diverse samples or by incorporating comparative perspectives across migrant groups in Japan, such as Filipino or Zainichi Koreans, to examine how different racialized and legal positions shape the boundaries of belonging. Furthermore, longitudinal or participatory research involving youth could illuminate how hybrid identities evolve over time and how education and migration policies in Japan condition these everyday negotiations. Such work would deepen the understanding of how hybridity operates not only as a form of cultural negotiation but also as a lived practice shaped by Japan's enduring structure of inequality such as its monoethnic ideals, language hierarchies, and citizenship boundaries.

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Appendix A: List of Interviews

Aoi-Interview conducted in Ibaraki, 31th March, 2025.

Reina-Interview conducted online, 25th April,2025

Caio-Interview conducted online, 1st April,2025

Elisa-Interview conducted in Kanagawa, 1st April,2025

Haruka-Interview conducted online, 31th,March,2025

Masato-Interview conducted in Kanagawa, 24th April,2025.