

## BRAZILIAN FAMILIES IN A TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXT: RECONSTITUTED FAMILIES

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In the present article we will analyze how transnational Brazilian families construct ideas about “family” and how those ideas influence their family life strategies. We will focus on the Brazilian families who are moving across transnational spaces and are connecting the geographically distant countries of Japan and Brazil. Although migrant children are dependents and are brought into the host country as minors with their parents, they are central figures and have a strong influence on the family’s strategies. Migrant children, now adapted to the new environment, refuse to engage with the parent’s plans to go back home or, in the case of children left-behind, protest the idea of accompanying their parents in their second time migration. Furthermore, the family’s decision is not free of tension or conflict. Cooperation and conflict issues are negotiated inside the family, with the economic autonomy and the family roles taken into consideration.\*\*

**Keywords:** Transnational spaces; Transnational families; Family life’s strategies

*No presente artigo pretende-se abordar as estratégias de vida de famílias brasileiras que circulam pelos espaços transnacionais que, ao realizarem esse movimento, se conectam a três países: Japão, Estados Unidos e Brasil. Neste contexto, analisaremos o significado da família enquanto ideal e imaginário e a sua influência na elaboração dessas estratégias. Ainda relacionado às estratégias familiares, chegamos à conclusão de que as crianças, vistas como dependentes e deslocadas de seus ambientes pelas decisões familiares, tornam-se figuras centrais na elaboração das estratégias. São as crianças que, adaptadas ao novo ambiente, resistem às decisões familiares de retorno; ou, em alguns casos, deixadas pelos pais no Brasil, recusam-se de acompanhá-los na segunda fase da migração. A oportunidade encontrada nesses espaços transnacionais torna possível aos membros familiares se distribuírem em espaços geográficos diferentes sem se desintegrarem.*

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\*\* The version in Portuguese is available at [http://www.csem.org.br/artigos\\_port\\_artigos08.html](http://www.csem.org.br/artigos_port_artigos08.html).

**Palavras-chave:** *Espaços transnacionais; Famílias transnacionais; Estratégias familiares*

## Introduction

The migration of Brazilians to Japan began in the end of the 1980s and grew suddenly in 1990 when the Japanese government carried into effect the revision of the Japanese Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act, which limited the participation of foreigner workers in unskilled jobs. Before this revision, unskilled jobs were occupied by undocumented Asian workers such as Pakistanis, Iranians and Chinese. The revision of the Immigration Law excluded the undocumented Asian workers and made these jobs available to Japanese-descendants. After the revision of the Law, Brazilians and other Latin American Japanese descendants were allowed to work legally on the assembly lines of the automobile and electronic components industry. Since then, the Brazilian population in Japan has grown, becoming the third-biggest foreign community, followed by Korean and Chinese communities.

According to the Japan Immigration Association statistics<sup>1</sup>, 312,979 Brazilian workers and their families are currently living in Japan. In the two decades that have passed since the migration started, around 25 percent of the Brazilian population has obtained permanent residence visas (*eijuken*). However, that new movement is restricted to a minor portion of the population. Data from the Judicial System and Research Department indicates that Brazilians continues to move between two spaces. In 2006, 56,414 Brazilians entered Japan in order to work. Among them, 44 percent were entering for the first time and 56 percent for the second time or more. This second group has been circulating between Brazil and Japan. The Brazilian families' circulatory movement has been described by researchers as immigration without intentions to immigrate (*Teijuka naki teiju*). Takamichi Kajita<sup>2</sup> points out that despite the long period of time Brazilian working families have been living in Japan, most have no intention to settle down there, but at the same time they do not know when they will return home. The unstable living conditions experienced by Brazilian families discourage them from becoming involved with the local community, which in turn helps adding to their drive to continue their circulatory movements.

<sup>1</sup> Judicial System and Research Department Annual Report of Statistics on Legal Immigrants.

<sup>2</sup> KAJITA, Takamichi. *Shin Kokusaishakai gaku*. Transnational, glocal sociology.

The Brazilian workers' migration is taking in the spaces where ethnic business, international phone services, ethnic newspaper and bank services have been established in both countries. In those spaces, families maintain a strong linkage with the members of their families who were left behind thanks to advanced communication technology. Still, those technologies cannot totally heal the emotional costs of living as a transnational. For example, an article published by *Istoé*<sup>3</sup> magazine explores the suffering of Brazilian family members left behind, and the family disintegration that occurs during the migration process. Despite the considerable emotional costs they face, many transnational Brazilian families have been successful.

How does a transnational family construct and maintain family ties? Debora Bryceson and Ulla Vuroela<sup>4</sup> point out that when they are separated from each other, family members need to construct their notion of family and its emotional and economic functions more intentionally. "Family traditions and individual needs are weighted against the sheer physical practicalities of transnational families' temporal and spatial logistic. In sum, transnational families are not simply blood ties nor are they fixed entities".

In the present article we will analyze how transnational Brazilian families construct ideas about "family" and how those ideas influence their family life strategies. We will focus on the Brazilian families who are moving across transnational spaces and are connecting the geographically distant countries of Japan and Brazil.

### **Theoretical framework: transnational families**

While some researchers have found the *push-pull* model useful to explain international migration, it has been criticized because of its limitations in understanding why people stay or do not move. Once the migration starts, it tends to continue, even when the economic situation changes in sending and receiving countries. The migration phenomenon is usually regarded as a single event in the migrant's life history, determined by the social and economic conditions of the migrant's homeland and the host country. Yet, once a migration movement starts, the combination of pre-existing social structures and new networks perpetuate the linkage between both the sending and the receiving societies.

<sup>3</sup> VITÓRIA, Gisele. *A ilusão do sol nascente*.

<sup>4</sup> BRYCESON, Deborah; VUROELA, Ulla *The transnational family*. New European frontiers and global networks.

Gunnar Malmberg<sup>5</sup> presented a new perspective on migration as a response to the social changes in the migrant's homeland. The changes taking place in the third world's social and economic conditions require adjustments as well as a new form of life strategies in both urban and rural areas. This includes a new social, technological and political organization. As a response to the new changes, international migration is only one of many kinds of spatial mobility. Others include internal rural-urban migration and temporary circulation in the home country. This article will focus on the life cycle of the transnational Brazilian families with Malmberg's perspective in mind.

### **Transnational family strategies**

How do transnational families elaborate their life strategies and which economic advantages can be obtained by the family whose members are dispersed geographically? Responding to those questions, firstly, we need to conceptualize the term "life strategies", which is not an easy task. In his critical review, Graham Crown<sup>6</sup> points out that the term strategy is not uniformly used due the fact that some researchers adopt the term as if it were a practical term. In general this term applies to some actions that are in some sense rational and take place in predictable social situations. In this way, the use of the term strategy implies conscious, rational decisions involving a long-term perspective.

There has been an important debate about the concept of strategy; debate that has revolved around the relationship between strategy and rationality. My intention in this paper is not to discuss the theory of family-strategy, but use it as a tool to explain in what manner families have responded to the social environment they live in and test how useful it is to identify some patters assumed by migrant families to achieve their goals.

Therefore, we will use the term "family strategy" when we talk about how family members organize their economic, physical and social maintenance. For example, in Hong Kong, where overseas education and credentials have great value, elite Hong Kong Chinese families, worrying about their children's formal academic qualifications, send them to Canada, Singapore or United States to pursue their education. In some cases, mothers live abroad with their children, when the fathers remain in Hong Kong or live in other parts of Asia to work. Those mothers reside abroad to not only support their children's education, but also to guarantee

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<sup>5</sup> MALMBERG, Gunnar. *Time and space in international migration*.

<sup>6</sup> CROW, Graham. *The use of the concept of 'strategy' in recent sociological literature*.

the family's economic opportunities by obtaining citizenship abroad. As Johanna Walters indicates, "Migration involving the tactical dispersal of family members around the world has enabled Hong Kong Chinese families to maximize the potential accumulation of different forms of capital at different geographical sites".<sup>7</sup>

Focusing our questions on the transnational families' strategies, the question which arises is how are family members, dispersed from one country to another, committed to a common purpose? Undoubtedly the family unit is crucial. For instance, Johanna Walters<sup>8</sup> says that the success achieved by transnational Chinese families is built on a patriarchal structure. The success of the family's strategy of capital accumulation relies upon long-established notions of familial loyalty, including a sense of filial piety to ensure that discipline is maintained across the globe.

On the other hand, Jason Pribilsky,<sup>9</sup> who conducted interviews with Ecuadorian couples living in two different countries, points out that the family success in their purposes hinged on a couple's ability to integrate their individual gender dramas and to imagine the family living as if all these dramas were unfolding on the same stage. Thus, husbands working in New York impact their women's gender roles and behavior, as well as the wives absence impact the husband gender attitudes.

Although Johanna Walters and Jason Pribilsky emphasize different aspects of the transnational family's successes, they are talking about one common denominator, i.e., the family as intentionally constructed concept.

## Methodology

In order to achieve our objective, we will make an attempt to analyze the Brazilian families' strategies through data collected using the life-histories method. The histories trace back to the time before their decision to migrate and move forward to their recent histories in Japan or Brazil. Data based on their life-histories were collected through field work and in-depth interviews conducted with seventeen Brazilian families during the period from 1999 to 2004 and 2007 (see table 1). To best ensure the validity of the data, different locations in three prefectures in Japan were chosen; Oizumi in Gunma Prefecture, Soja in Okayama Prefecture, and Tagajo in Miyagi Prefecture. The first of these is known as a

<sup>7</sup> WALTERS, Joanna L. *Transnational family strategies and education in the contemporary Chinese diaspora*, p. 363.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>9</sup> PRIBILSKY, Jason. "'Aprendemos a convivir': conjugal relations, co-parenting, and family life among Ecuadorian transnational migrant in New York City and the Ecuadorian Andes".

town with a concentrated population of Brazilians, and in the second and third cities the Brazilian community is small. Basically, we followed each family case over a five years period in Japan and in their home country. Respondents were interviewed in their home, work place and sometimes in public places (like coffee shops or restaurants) according to their choice and schedule. Each interview lasted between two to three hours and was conducted in Portuguese. All questions were open-ended. Interviewees were encouraged to talk freely about their work and life experiences before and after migrating to Japan. Empirical data was supplemented by official statistics, internet resources, and newspaper articles, as well as fieldwork in the Brazilian community.

Table 1 – Brazilian Families data

<b>Gunma Prefecture, Oizumi Town</b>	<b>Number of sons/ daughters</b>	<b>Householder occupation</b>	<b>Householder Japanese background (generation)</b>	<b>Family structure</b>
1. Nihei	5	Retired	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Nuclear family
2. Nishida	4	Co-operative enterprise manager	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Nuclear family
3. Kay	2	Clerical worker	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Nuclear family
4. Mizawa	3	Self-employed (bakery)	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Nuclear family
5. Ueda	2	Self-employed (grocery store)	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Nuclear family
<b>Okayama Prefecture, Soja City</b>				
6. Taniguchi	6	Self-employed (watchmaker)	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Nuclear family
7. Ogura	-	Self-employed (agriculture)	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Extended family
8. Nakamura	7	Self-employed (grocery store)	1 <sup>st</sup>	Nuclear family

<b>Gunma Prefecture, Oizumi Town</b>	<b>Number of sons/daughters</b>	<b>Householder occupation</b>	<b>Householder Japanese background (generation)</b>	<b>Family structure</b>
9. Tsuruoka	2	Self-employed (agriculture)	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Nuclear family
10. Kameoka	3	Self-employed (agriculture)	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Nuclear family
11. Minoura	3	Self-employed (agriculture)	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Nuclear family
12. Uchida	7	Self-employed (agriculture)	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Nuclear family
13. Miyake	3	Self-employed (taxi driver)	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Nuclear family
<b>Miyagi Prefecture, Tagajo City</b>				
14. Silva	3	Self-employed (lunchroom)	Non-descend	Nuclear family
15. Igaki	2	Self-employed (grocery store)	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Nuclear family
16. Hashiba	4	Self-employed (transportation business)	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Nuclear family
17. Taira	6	Self-employed (agriculture)	1 <sup>st</sup>	Nuclear family

We analyzed the phenomenon of the migration of Brazilian families at a meso-level, and having used the ‘life history method’ to collect the data, we were able to gather data about each families’ life span, and follow the process of how they plan their family strategies.

### **Brazilian family strategies contextualized in transnational spaces**

Before discussing the family as a unit when making a decision to migrate, we will take into account each family’s life cycle to explain how they decide who will be the first to migrate. To attain their goals, the family chooses strategically who is the right member or members to migrate.

Analyzing the relationship between the purpose for migrating, the life cycle of the migrant family and who migrates first, we make clear how

that the process of choosing happens. For our purposes, we classified the family life cycle in four periods, according to the son or daughter's age. The first period is when the couple does not have a child. The second, when the family is composed of the parents and child or children between zero to fourteen years old (that is, school age). The third is a family with parents and an adult son or daughter of working age, and finally the fourth type is a family with one or more adult sons or daughters who are financially independent.

Based on these classifications, we were able to see some patterns in the geographic mobility of the families. For instance, when the family does not have a child, the couple migrates together. The Ogura family is an example. As soon as they married, they came to Japan planning to save money to buy a house and to start a new business. Some years later they purchased their house, and now are working on another project.

### Case study 1 – The Ogura Family

The Ogura couple went to Japan for the first time in November 1991. After arriving in Japan, they were recruited to work at an auto factory in Okayama Prefecture. When I met them over the last few years, they were living and working at the same place, and since they came to Japan to work, they had achieved their goals of buying a house. When talking about their dreams, Miss Joana Ogura made the following comments.

Our family was always humble. After buying our house, we are trying to reach spiritual realization. We are not driven by making money (...). We need to work with something that gives us a personal achievement, makes us feel important. I want to build and manage a factory (...). If I accomplish my goals, I will feel fulfilled. That is what motivates me to work in Japan. [And how about going back home?]. I don't expect to go back too early. I will be here as long as there are jobs in Japan.<sup>10</sup>

In those cases in which the migrant family has children under 14 years old, the father has migrated alone in the first phase of migration. These are the cases of the families Ueda, Miyake, Hashiba and Kay. The fathers migrated in order to save money to buy a house, to buy land for farming, enough to manage their business in Brazil, or to invest in a new family business. For some families, a short-term migration project was sufficient to accomplish those goals. Although their purpose of purchasing durable goods was attained, the migratory movement did not finish. New objectives appear and the migration was restructured, and a new chain of

<sup>10</sup> Interview conducted with Miss Joana, Okayama, August 99.



migration began involving other family members. As we can see in the case of the Miyake family, they got to buy a house, and even though attained this goal, the movement towards Japan did not come to an end. We can say that the second phase of Miyake family's migration became possible when the oldest daughter was old enough to work. In the second phase of migration, the Miyake family migrated to Japan together, now with the purpose of saving money to invest in a family business.

Another case which deserves mention is that of the Hashiba family. The father was the first to migrate, but because of his health problems he could not attain the family goals in his first journey to Japan. He migrated alone once again, but the third time his wife came to join him, leaving behind their four children with relatives. In the following year, the parents brought them to Japan to live together. As their plans were not settled in the host society, the old son and daughters of working age began to cooperate with the family to save money, working at a food factory. Although the oldest daughter was going along with the family plans, she expresses resentment of her mother for leaving for Japan without the sons. In the following section, we describe the narrative demonstrating her sentiments

### **Case study 2 – The Hashiba Family**

Mari, the oldest daughter, talked to me and her mother about their experience living with an uncle. She says that when she felt upset by the absence of her mother, the uncle advised her. But she usually ignored him. She said to him.

My mother who is a mother abandoned who abandoned her children, why are you staying with us? [Ms Micjhiko, the mother, seemed surprised and said] I had to leave my sons because I have no choice, but I hired a maid service and other luxuries for them. They didn't have to do anything.<sup>11</sup>

What merged from our data were families planning short term migration, but in fact they stay in Japan over for a longer period of time. Those families whose members are all living together postpone their return and gradually move toward settlement. Although their prolonged period of residency in the receiving country is not short, the family plans are based on the assumption of returning to their homeland, Brazil. Consequently, they live in Japan as if they were “temporary citizens”. We can compare those families with the Japanese families who migrated to Brazil in the

<sup>11</sup> Interview conducted with the Hashiba family, Tagajo, July 99.

beginning of the twentieth century. In his research about them, Takashi Maeyama<sup>12</sup> points out that in the first period of migration those Japanese families saw themselves as “visitors” who would, as soon as possible leave the host country. However, most of them never returned home.

The next group is the family cases that have a son/ daughter of working age. The families included in this group are Silva, Taira, Igaki, Kameoka and Minoura families. In some of these cases, the whole family has traveled together, or in the case of farmer family, only some members of working age did. In both cases they migrated in order to attain the family goals, which involved saving money to buy a house, land or begin a business. In the former case, after they attained their family’s goals, the adult son/daughter begins a new migration movement, now to his/her purposes, meaning to buy a car, a house. For example, in the Silva family case, the family was self-employee, and ran a retail store where their son and daughter were working. Their business was not doing well, so they decided to migrate together with a plan to save money to buy a house. Three years later, they returned to Brazil after working at a food factory and, there, they bought a house with the saved money. As soon the family returned, their adult son came back to Japan to achieve his own goals. In Brazil, they did not find any work, and some months later, the parent and other sons came back to Japan a second time, each one with their own goal. The parent’s new plan was to invest their money in the business, for the oldest son it was to start a business in Japan, for the youngest son it was to buy a car, and for the daughter, it was to buy her own house.

In the latter case, it was the father and son of the farmer family who were chosen to migrate, and the members left behind maintained their agricultural production activities.

### **Case study 3 – The Kataoka Family**

In 1991, when the father in the Kataoka family planned to migrate to Japan, Marina, his oldest daughter, made the decision to go with him. In their home town, the Kataoka’s sons helped the mother to manage the farm. Marina was not working when she migrated and working abroad meant she had an opportunity to support her family and at the same time become self-sufficient.

In the case of the families in which adult son/daughter is independent, things are a little different from the other above mentioned cases; they plan their migration to Japan as a way to gain valuable experience abroad,

<sup>12</sup> MAEYANA, Takashi. “Senzo, tenno, imin- san pauroshu noson ni okeru nikkeijin (1908-1950)”.

or save a sum of money to purchase a house or to invest in a new business. In those cases in which the unmarried daughters move abroad, they are supported by their families. In the case of the Taniguchi family, the father had stated that before approving their two daughters' plans to travel to Japan, he talked to the Japanese hiring company to make sure that it would assume responsibility for their security. The person responsible for the recruiting guaranteed the two daughters' safety as long as they were working there.

#### **Case study 4 – The Taniguchi Family**

Akina Taniguchi was 23 years old when she left Parana State. She had been working at her father's clock store after studying mathematics, but was actually feeling lost since graduating. In 1991, when her sister suggested going to Japan together, Akina agreed. She said: "Going to Japan was a reprieve for me".<sup>13</sup>

Although daughters sometimes contribute to the family business as a source of labor force, it is unlikely in Brazil that they will inherit it. With this in mind, the migration to Japan of such women is clearly an attempt to acquire financial independence. While working at automobile or electronic factories in Japan, they do not have any opportunity to make use of their abilities or the knowledge acquired in their home country. Although daughters have a high academic background in Brazil, they work at electronics or auto factory in the beginning of their migration, which is a downward movement in their social standing. They try to stay in those jobs by convincing themselves that it is just temporary work and maintaining that they are not reluctant to do monotonous work. They are able to save quite an amount of money in a short time, and are not unwilling to work even if their migration is extended for longer. They seem to be convinced that they are only temporary blue-collar workers, and that their migration is just temporary.

#### **Reconstituted families**

Audrey Kobayashi & Valerie Prestont<sup>14</sup> point out the paradox of the transnational family's objective of maintaining a strong, cohesive and prosperous family by separating their members to different places. By analyzing the family life strategies at different life stages, it is possible to

<sup>13</sup> Interview conducted with Akina June, 2000.

<sup>14</sup> KOBAYASHI, Audrey; PRESONT, Valerie. *Transnationalization through the life course: Hong Kong immigrants in Canada.*

describe the family as a unit organized on cooperation, reciprocity, and consensus, but at the same time there are conflicts and tensions associated with the hierarchy of decision-making power. The family's strategies are based on family member's knowledge of the job and the educational opportunities available to them in home or host countries, and the strategies change according to the phase of the family life cycle. In this way, there is no paradox if the members maintain the family healthily functioning although there are emotional costs.

The Silva family is a good example of how their strategies and their idea about family have changed through the migratory process. In order for the Silva family to achieve economic success, the Silva children of working age contribute a portion of their salary to the family purposes. In order to minimize disagreements between sons who contribute and who do not, the parents have given a voice to those who do and have shown respect for their opinions. For example, when the eldest son was proceeding to junior high school, the working sons participate in the decisions of how to share educational costs. Thus, the son's collaboration and endeavor were an indispensable prerequisite for the Silva family to attain the goals it had set. Julia Silva, the mother, tells us how she dealt with the sibling relations in order to keep the family together.

I think it is unfair to invest in only one child's education. In order to help us to achieve our goals, my two other sons abandoned their education. Ana [her oldest daughter] give us half of her salary. Rodrigo [her oldest son] also collaborates, although at the end of the month he asks for the money. I need to give them voices and have a talk about how spend the money...Cesar [her youngest son] needs to obey his brother when they ask for a favor cause they help us to pay for his school supplies.<sup>15</sup>

After returning to Brazil, the Silva family bought a house with their savings. In Brazil, they did not find a job, and some months later, the family was going back to Japan for a second time, each one with their own goal, as described below.

[César, the youngest son] I'd like to go back to Miyagi and get a better paying job, a job with a good salary, maybe 200,000 yens (around 1,500 dollars). It would be good salary. I would come back to Brazil and buy a car. And again, would return to Japan, save enough money to buy a house and never return to Japan.

<sup>15</sup> Chat with Ms. Júlia Silva, Tagajo, November 98.

[Ana] I don't mind to do any type of work except 'obentoya' jobs [work at food processing plant]. The workplace would ideally be close to where Rodrigo works. Maybe I'd like to work in an electronic components industry. [Why?] Cause the salary is high.

[Miss Julia] Once the children settle down in Japan we'll go home. We plan to be there two or more years and then we'll go back to Brazil alone.<sup>16</sup>

### **Family strategies and school education**

How Brazilian family's strategies influence their children's school education? To what extent are they influenced by their children's school education? To explain the seen relationships, we analyzed the case of T. City's public schools, where our children attend a school. In the beginning of the academic year of 2003, forty Brazilian students were registered in the elementary and junior high school, and in October those numbers increased to forty two students. During the first semester, two students changed to a Brazilian private school and one is transferred from a Brazilian private school to a Japanese public school. In the second semester, the same student who was transferred from the Brazilian private school returned to Brazil, one junior high school student leaves the school without a diploma; five students are transferred from one Japanese public school to another and one student from Brazilian private school to Japanese public school. An elementary school student called Ronaldo describes how those changes happen.

#### **Case study 5 – Ronaldo**

Ronaldo went to Japan in 1999, when he was studying in the first grade of primary school in Brazil. He was enrolled in a Japanese public school just after his family arrived there, but he did not do well. Some months later, he changed to a Brazilian private school. Two years later, he changed again to a Japanese public school because the school tuition had increased. In 2003, he was enrolled in the fifth grade, but had difficulties in reading and understanding, yet his mother was confident about the son's academic achievement, because he had been assisting the family by doing translations and demonstrating his Japanese ability.

The frequent changes from one school to another or the family coming and going from Brazil to Japan makes providing a good education

<sup>16</sup> Interview conducted in Brazil, July 2000.

a difficult task to pursue. Frequent moving of the family influences not only the children's learning process but it also makes teaching those children a difficult task. Schoolteachers who are responsible for the Brazilian children feel disoriented with regard to the parents' life plans, and the family uncertainty about whether to remain or not in the host country tends to lower teachers' expectations of the children. A typical example is the Japanese schoolteachers' lack of motivation to teach those students when they are informed about the family plans to return to the homeland. The low expectations of Brazilian students can be seen in what a teacher said when interviewed: "Despite of our efforts, they will go back home". As Kenise M. Kilbride's<sup>17</sup> research has demonstrated, teachers' expectations of students influence the students' own performances and accomplishments. To put it another way, the teacher's low expectations have a negative influence on the students' performance. Brazilian students who are not motivated to do well academically or to participate positively in academic tasks are an evidence of this.

Family also influences the children's school performance. Research related to the parents' involvement in the children's learning indicates that parental school participation has a positive influence on the students' academic development. In the Brazilian families' cases, the parents have difficulty in participating in the children's studies. Their lack of Japanese language skills is inhibitive, and stops them from helping their children with their school tasks. In the Japanese education system, where mothers' participation in school activities is highly valued, the absence of Brazilian parents in those activities is seen by the teachers as a lack of interest in their children's education. However, this is not actually the case, since in most families, the parents are not conscious of the importance of their involvement in those activities in the school. Besides, the parents' nonflexible work schedule and the lack of Japanese language skill do not always allow them to pay sufficient attention to their children's studies.

We also verified the parents' skeptical attitude in relation to their children's school achievements. Many of them consider it impossible for their children to go on to a Japanese university. "If the university entrance examination is hard for Japanese students, it will be impossible for my sons", a migrant mother said, demonstrating her lack of faith in her sons' academic success. Many parents are satisfied if their children have a secondary school education.

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<sup>17</sup> KILBRIDE, Kenise M. *A review of the literature on the human, social and cultural capital of immigrant children and their families with implications for teacher education.*

Still, many Brazilian families are making an effort to educate their children in one education system; i.e., Japanese or Brazilian, although they are not sure yet if they are settling down in Japan or are going back to Brazil. Those choices bring new direction to the family plans. Even if Brazilian parents are not willing to stay longer in Japan, the strong relationships their children are building with their school and local community by being educated in a Japanese school means they do not want to move again.

Furthermore, the family's unclear and indefinite attitudes toward their life plans tend to be criticized by scholars, if not by Japanese schoolteachers, as sacrificing their children's future. However, as Edson Urano<sup>18</sup> indicates, the unstable and flexible Japanese labor market makes planning a difficult task, since the workers are dismissed or transferred from one workplace to another, according to the production schedule.

### Final considerations

Our data have pointed out that, for many of the families, migration was in principle a short-term project of one to two years. However, with the continued recession in Brazil offering dismal opportunities to return, many families decided to extend their stay in Japan. They are staying longer than they had planned to. Families whose members were reunited have settled down although originally they did not have any plans to do so. Families in which all the members migrate together have constituted new strategies and migration is repeated to reach their goals. In neither case they are moving to other kinds of occupations. Some families change their work place several times, but their jobs are always unskilled ones.

The families we investigated and who were engaged in self employment in Brazil could be considered middle-class. However, having migrated to Japan and worked as factory workers, they lose their middle class social background. Migrants believe their situation is temporary, and they do not think that their social status is going downward, so they do not think that they have lost something. They see migration as a good experience, and a useful one to save money. This viewpoint can be summed up by Mr. Mizawa's words: "People's life experience can be more important than education. Education is not enough for a better life".

With respect to the children's education, some migrant families do not see Japanese education as a way for their children to achieve professional success in Japanese society. Problems related to learning skills and the family

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<sup>18</sup> URANO, Edson. *Duas décadas do fenômeno de kassegui: reflexões sobre a necessidade de uma agenda social transnacional*.

plans to return to their homeland have decreased the children's motivation to study at Japanese schools. Therefore, those families' education is not seen as a strategy for occupational upwards mobility.

Although migrant children are dependents and are brought into the host country as minors with their parents, they are central figures and have a strong influence on the family's strategies. Migrant children, now adapted to the new environment, refuse to engage with the parents' plans to go back home, or in the case of the children left-behind, protest the idea of accompanying their parents in their second time migration. Furthermore, the family's decision is not free of tension or conflict. Cooperation and conflict issues are negotiated inside the family, with the economic autonomy and the family roles taken into consideration.

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