Narrating Japanese Immigration to Brazil: From Modernist Stereotypes to Familial Tales

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Abstract

Although Japanese Brazilians have constituted a key immigrant group since their arrival in 1908, the community has been relatively underrepresented in Brazilian literature. Given the linguistic and often physical isolation of Japanese immigrants and their descendants in Brazil, their literary portraits have differed from representations of prominent European immigrant groups, which have historically been more fully realized. Japanese characters initially appeared as caricatures of urban types in works by Mário de Andrade and Oswald de Andrade in the 1920s and 1930s. Narratives by Japanese Brazilians, specifically Ryoki Inoue's *Saga* (2006) and Oscar Nakasato's *Nihonjin* (2011), correct for the oversights of earlier depictions by focusing on familial tales of migration and labor that foreground life on rural coffee fazendas. This article analyzes these nuanced portraits in contrast to the one-dimensional modernist accounts to underscore the critical place of diasporic voices in a reimagined Brazilian literary canon.

Keywords: Japanese Brazilians; modernism; coffee fazendas; immigration

In the late nineteenth century, Japanese emigration to Brazil promised to solve labor problems plaguing both countries. The Japanese Meiji regime viewed state-sponsored emigration as facilitating modernization by reducing the supposed surplus of farmers and easing demands for land, food, and other resources.[1] After the abolition of slavery in 1888, Brazilian landowners needed more cheap workers to produce the labor-intensive crop of coffee. The Brazilian government thus looked toward East Asia for potential solutions. These factors, coupled with policies that limited Japanese emigration to the United States in 1907 and prohibited Brazilian governmental subsidies for migration from Italy, France, and Spain in 1902, led to the 1908 arrival of the *Kasato-Maru* ship in Brazil with 781 Japanese migrants.[2] Between 1908 and 1941, almost 200,000 Japanese emigrated to Brazil, most arriving between 1924 and 1935, after the United States Immigration Act of 1924 banned Japanese immigration (Lesser, *Immigration* 159). A decade later, Japanese arrivals in Brazil declined after an amendment in Brazil's 1934 Constitution restricted future immigration to a fixed annual quota of two percent of the total number of immigrants from each nation over the past fifty years. The criteria favored European immigrants and severely limited Japanese immigration (Lesser, *Negotiating* 116-28). Despite these restrictions, the Japanese presence has persisted in Brazil, with about one and a half million people today identifying as Nikkei or of Japanese descent.

Nikkei's representation in Brazilian literature engages with discourses that circulated during the peak of Japanese immigration in the early twentieth century. The rhetoric before Japanese emigration to Brazilian coffee fazendas rested on promises that would prove difficult to satisfy. An October 20, 1894, piece in the *Correio Paulistano* by Japanese diplomat Sho Nemoto exemplified the hopes that shaped later immigration agreements. Nemoto's report, based on his travels to São Paulo, aimed to assuage potential migrants' concerns by emphasizing how São Paulo's fertile soil, plentiful water, and expansive business opportunities would offer options for economic stability without needing to leave the agricultural sector (1). He praised Antonio Prado's "perfeitamente montada" fazenda Santa Veridiana (1), yet subsequent Japanese laborers would not find the coffee fazendas so hospitable, with over fifty percent leaving after less than a year (Lesser, *Immigration* 157). Likewise, Brazilian elites, who envisioned Japanese immigrants as diligent, quiet, and clean and, therefore, preferable to other laborers, would soon be disappointed as Japanese workers failed to meet their expectations (Lesser, *Negotiating* 88). These frustrations often appear in literary representations of Japanese immigrants and their descendants in Brazil with modernist works airing the grievances of Brazilian elites and contemporary Japanese Brazilian texts offering insight into migrant struggles.

Even though the Japanese have been a key immigrant group in Brazil since 1908, they have comparatively limited visibility in Brazilian literature. While some migrants left the fazendas to become a more integral part of urban life, others created Japanese-only farms that recreated features of daily life in Japan, such as the school system and a Japanese-language press (Lesser, *Immigration* 157). These farms continued to isolate many Japanese immigrants linguistically, culturally, and physically from the rest of Brazilian society. As a result, their literary representations followed a trajectory distinct from the more prominent immigrant groups of Portuguese, Italians, and Germans, who already existed as fleshed-out characters in early twentieth-century novels like Júlia Lopes de Almeida's *A falência* (1901) and Antônio de Alcântara Machado's *Brás, Bexiga e Barra Funda* (1927).[3] During the peak of Japanese immigration in the 1920s and 1930s, Japanese characters appeared as caricatures in works by Mário de Andrade (1893-1945) and Oswald de Andrade (1890-1954). These depictions responded to anxieties about Japanese immigration with racialized stereotypes that ignored the lived experiences of migrants conscripted to work on rural fazendas. Narratives by Japanese Brazilians, specifically Ryoki Inoue's *Saga: A história de quatro gerações de uma família japonesa* (2006) and Oscar Nakasato's *Nihonjin* (2011), correct this oversight by focusing on familial tales of migration and labor.

By analyzing these multi-layered representations in contrast to earlier one-dimensional portraits, I underscore the critical place of Japanese Brazilian voices in a more inclusive and

comprehensive Brazilian literary canon. Comparing the representations of Japanese immigrants and their descendants in modernist texts and contemporary works reveals the limitations of modernism's aesthetic project of reimagining Brazil and the relative embrace of diversity in the first decades of the twenty-first century. Given its temporal focus, my study overlooks the artistic developments of the mid to late twentieth century, when Japanese immigrants and their descendants were more prominent in film than in literature. Most notably, Tizuka Yamasaki's 1980 debut feature *Gaijin: Os caminhos da liberdade* portrayed the hardships of Japanese laborers on Brazilian coffee fazendas for a broader public.[4] This cinematic achievement by a Japanese Brazilian director served as an antecedent to the literary texts of Inoue and Nakasato, among others, by drawing on familial tales and historical records to craft artistic works that serve as a bridge between the countries, languages, and peoples of Japan and Brazil. As Brazil has revised its approaches to nationality after transitioning to democracy in the 1980s, narratives by and about historically marginalized communities, including the Nikkei, have gained more traction and, in the process, contested earlier stereotypes.

Modernist Caricatures of Japanese Immigrants

As Japanese immigrants first reached Brazil in the early twentieth century, São Paulo was modernizing and becoming an increasingly global metropolis due to the influx of capital from the coffee industry. Brazilian modernists responded to this changing urban landscape with aesthetic and linguistic innovations, as well as efforts to include immigrants in artistic renderings of Brazil with Anita Malfatti's 1915 painting *O japonês* an early example.[5] Literary portraits of Japanese immigrants by Mário de Andrade in *Amar, verbo intransitivo* (1927) and Oswald de Andrade in *Marco Zero I* (1942) *e Marzo Zero II* (1944) acknowledge their heightened presence in São Paulo state in the 1920s and 1930s and capture the contradictory attitudes toward them as desirable workers yet perceived political threats. My analysis of how Brazilian writers depicted Japanese immigrants shortly after their arrival complements existing studies by Reiko Tachibana and Edward Mack that focus on how Japanese writers represented Japanese emigration to Brazil, whether in esteemed stories with global circulation like Ishikawa Tatsuzō's "The Emigrants" (1932) or lesser-known pieces published in Brazil like Sonobe Takeo's "An Age of Speculative Farming" (1932).[6] Whereas Japanese-language texts conveyed experiences of emigration from Japan to Brazil to readers of the Japanese diaspora, the *paulista* modernists framed the Japanese and other immigrants as ethnic others that, despite existing within the space of Brazil, did not fully belong to the nation and within its constructs of Brazilian identity. Rafael Cardoso aptly reminds us, "the movement's claims to indigenousness and authenticity are

disingenuous at best, and should certainly not be taken at face value" (13). Relatedly, visual representations of Black and Indigenous bodies verged on the cartoonish in Tarsila do Amaral's disproportioned figures in *A Negra* (1923) and *Antropofagia* (1929).[7] Unsurprisingly, Japanese immigrants tended to receive a similarly flattened treatment in Brazilian writings of the period.

Japanese characters were not always present in the literary milieu of immigrants, as evidenced in Mário de Andrade's unfinished novel *Café*. Published posthumously in 2015 with two of the five proposed sections drafted from the 1920s to 1940s, *Café* depicts Northeastern Brazilians alongside immigrants from Italy, Germany, Syria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia in São Paulo.[8] The novel does not include Japanese among the laborers on the fazendas or in the city, even though their immigration had begun in 1908. His 1922 poem "Tu" similarly omits the Japanese from his listing of key immigrant groups that renders the urban landscape as the "costureirinha de São Paulo, / ítalo-franco-luso-brasílico-saxónica" (102). This stitching of São Paulo privileges Western European influences and Brazilian roots. However, as other works indicate, Mário de Andrade was aware of the presence of Japanese people in Brazil. "Poema abúlico," published in *Klaxon* in December 1922, features the lyric voice as an "explorador em busca de aventuras urbanas" who encounters a range of people, including a "chauffeur japonês atarracado como um boxista." This description of diligent work in a service position reinforces stereotypical views of Japanese as docile laborers.

Mário de Andrade examined interactions between immigrants in more depth in his first novel *Amar, verbo intransitivo* (1927), via Elza, the German governess, and Tanaka, the Japanese servant. They work for the Sousa Costa family, who live in the elite São Paulo neighborhood of Higienópolis. Elza, the more central immigrant character, was hired because of her knowledge of languages, literatures, music, and culture to teach the family's four children: Carlos, age 16, Maria Luísa, age 12, Laurita, age 7, and Aldinha, age 5. Senhor Sousa Costa envisioned Elza's main task as initiating his eldest son in the ways of love, which emerges as the novel's major plot. The German governess and the Japanese servant occupy a shared space as immigrants, yet their representations correspond to their relative positions in Brazilian social hierarchies. The narration identifies Elza by her name or as the governess or Fräulein from her first appearance. In contrast, Tanaka, a more minor character, remains nameless as "o criado japonês" or "o japonês" until late in the novel. His place as a dutiful servant in a bourgeois house in São Paulo in the 1920s points to the historical realities of Japanese immigration in Brazil. The Japanese accounted for only two percent of all immigrants to Brazil in 1923 yet eleven percent five years later (Lesser, *Immigration* 159). In the novel, Tanaka seems almost invisible or, at times, stupid, which contrasts with Elza's poise and intelligence. This dichotomy exists from the opening scene

where, upon Elza's arrival, "o criado japonês botara as malas bem no meio do vazio. Estúpidas assim" (Andrade, *Amar* 9). Elza perceives herself as superior to Tanaka, other immigrant groups, and even the family currently employing her because she considers Germans to be "de raça superior, como ela, Fräulein. Os negros são de raça inferior. Os índios também. Os portugueses também. Mas esta última verdade Fräulein não fala aos alunos" (33). Her thoughts convey without questioning the hierarchical categorizations that defined scientific racism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[9]

Rather than confirm Elza's superiority, the narrative offers a subtle critique of these racialized hierarchies by establishing a parallel between the German governess and the Japanese servant with an allusion to the doe and the tiger of Castro Alves's poem "A Queimada." The narrator posits that both immigrants "são tigres pois, no sentido que mais convier a cada um, a governata e o criado japonês dos Sousa Costas" (91). These "tigers" exist in opposition: "O japonês arrepiou logo o pelame elétrico e grunhiu zangadíssimo. Mais uma estrangeira na casa que ele pretendia conquistar, ele só… O tigre alemão, se reconhecendo muito superior tanto na hierarquia solarenga como na instrução ocidental lhe secundou ao grunhido com o muxoxo desdenhoso O tigre japonês curvou a cabeça, muito servilmente" (93). The longer-serving Tanaka views Elza as an intruder, whereas Elza disdains the Japanese man as her inferior. In depicting minor slights and acts of retaliation, the narrator frames the immigrants as fighting over their position in the Sousa Costa household: "Na mesa, muitas vezes o nipônico deixava de servir o tedesco ou esbarrava nele com peso e malvadez. Mas o tigre alemão se vingava, e o senhor ou a senhora Sousa Costa ali, ordenava ao inimigo tal serviço, o tigre japonês obedecia servilmente. Era na alma que rosnava tiririca. E assim os dois tigres se odiavam" (93). Repeating "servilmente" to describe Tanaka's actions reinforces stereotypes of the Japanese as docile, which contrasts with the portrait of a shrewd Elza. Their different levels of education and societal positions become more apparent in this brief exchange:

> -Muito serviço, Tanaka?
>
> -Nem tanto, senhora, êêê . . . na terra era pior.
>
> -Você é de Tóquio?
>
> -Êê . . . senhora, não. (94)

While the German governess speaks in standard Brazilian Portuguese, the Japanese servant pauses to arrive at the necessary words. He refers to Elza as "senhora" in an expression of respect. Though Elza does not extend the same courtesy to Tanaka, she addresses him by his name and begins to recognize his subjectivity. They realize their commonalities as immigrants in Brazil by talking about their memories, hopes, and grievances. The narrator stresses these similarities by returning to the metaphor:

"os dois tigres acabarão por desaparecer assimilados" before pondering "mesmo o japonês? Homem, não sei" (96). This aside resembles debates related to labor and migration policy in Brazil at the time over Japanese abilities to assimilate.

The narrator destabilizes the rigidity of racialized categories by emphasizing the commonalities of Elza and Tanaka, noting that "todos os exilados afinal têm direito a recordações e esperanças. E enviado pro Brasil . . . tigres também se assanham, ainda por cima vieram adquirir essa coisa tristonha e desagradável que de portugueses herdamos: a saudade" (96-7). The novel situates these Japanese and German characters in a collective sense of *saudade* as expressed via memories of the past and longing for the future. While this depiction allows for closer approximation of interiority, it does not result in developing Tanaka as a well-rounded character. As Roberto Akira Goto rightly contends, "o 'tigre' Tanaka é ainda, e sobretudo, um representante do império nipônico, sua individualidade é subsumida em sua condição de japonês – em sua, digamos, 'japonidade'" (159). The narrative reinforces this vision of Tanaka as synonymous with Japan by identifying him more frequently by his nationality than by his name. The existence of his name, however, grants him greater subjectivity than the family's other employees who are identified solely as the chambermaid, the cook, and the driver.

Whereas Mário de Andrade's portraits of Japanese workers nominally pointed toward their individuality, Oswald de Andrade reduced Japanese immigrants to flattened stereotypes in his multi-volume work *Marco Zero*. Oswald began working on the novels in 1933, completing the first volume *A revolução melancólica* in 1942 and the second one *Chão* in 1944. During these years, the status of Japanese migrants in Brazil changed as the 1934 Constitution's immigration quotas significantly restricted the arrival of Japanese and other nationalities with a shorter history of immigration to Brazil. After the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, Brazil adhered to the Allied side of World War II and ended diplomatic relations with Japan in March 1942 (Lesser, *Immigration* 167). Oswald's negative depictions of Japanese exist within this historical context. In this period, Oswald belonged to the Brazilian Communist Party, and *Marco Zero* replicated the party's concerns with the role of immigrants in the shifting geographies of capital in São Paulo. As historian Jeffrey Lesser explains, in the early 1930s, "debates about Japanese immigration thus became more public as issues of imperialism, assimilation, and nationalism were conflated.… This produced a climate where 'exotic' immigrants were lumped together, as Oswald de Andrade did in his semiautobiographical *Marco Zero I – A revolução melancólica*" (*Negotiating* 112). By portraying Japanese as caricatures instead of developed characters, *Marco Zero* doubts whether Japanese immigrants could ever be Brazilian in a refute of *Amar,*

verbo intransitivo's suggestion that the German and the Japanese "tigers" would assimilate within Brazilian society.

The two volumes of *Marco Zero* trace the economic and political transformations of São Paulo during the 1920s and 1930s. Echoing the Communist Party's outlook, the novel blamed the more recent influx of immigrants from Japan and other "exotic" countries like Syria, Turkey, and Hungary for the hardships of the Brazilian working class. Oswald de Andrade envisioned this literary project as "o romance [que] participa da pintura, do cinema e do debate público. Mais que da música que é silêncio, é recolhimento. 'Marco Zero' tende ao afresco social. É uma tentativa de romance mural" (*Marco Zero I* 280). Recognizing the key role of the visual in politics and public life, Oswald aimed for his novel to approximate artistic forms like murals and film. Rather than strive for detailed social realism, he rendered Japanese immigrants as stereotypical caricatures who were markedly other because of their linguistic struggles with Brazilian Portuguese, limited social interactions, and presumed imperialist intentions. *Marco Zero I: A revolução melancólica* features a dozen Japanese immigrants, most notably Muraoka, a landowner and businessman in Bartira, and Kana, Alberto de Melo's pilot and driver, who both return in *Marco Zero II: Chão*. The remaining Japanese receive only brief mentions, including the drunk foreman Fusiko; students Kioto Nassura, Sakueto Sakuragi, and Massao Moraoka; and the Immigration Company engineer Dr. Sakura. Others have even less characterization as their professions or places of residence, and not their names, identify them, such as the Buddhist priest, the Japanese woman who tells Padre Beato that "perecisa tê doze ... doze filho ... governo japuneis manda . . . munto perecisa" (109), the habitants of Registo-Gô, and Padúa Lopes's servant. In examining these Japanese roles, Goto astutely claims that "classificá-los como personagens, no sentido mais estrito do termo, talvez seja um pouco abusivo" (154). He contends that "imigrantes japoneses formam um personagem coletivo, resultante da fusão – e da desconsideração – das características individuais num grande clichê" (154). References to nationality, like the pejorative "o amarelo" (Andrade, *Marco Zero I* 8) or the more descriptive "o chofer japonês" (251), substitute individual names in crafting this collective caricature.

These fictional Japanese figures are subject to projected fears of Brazilian and European immigrant characters. The difficulties with Brazilian Portuguese among Japanese immigrants contribute to worries over whether they can assimilate. In the Bartira school, the Japanese children's struggle to pronounce "brasileiro," which they render as "basirero," becomes a source of humor for their teacher and classmates (40). The teacher, Eufrásia Beato, laments, "'Vocês, japoneses, têm mania de trocar o 'l' pelo 'r'. Veja isto aqui no seu caderno, Kioto…' A classe, antes de tomar conhecimento,

ria com exagero. 'Era uma vez um itariano que vendia fulutra'" (52). This exchange diminishes the complexities of language acquisition to a "mania" of replacing one letter with another. The teacher publicly differentiates Kioto and other Japanese students from their peers. This classroom exchange and the novel as a whole foreground anti-Japanese sentiments without acknowledging the existence of pro-Japanese viewpoints in Brazil. The novel frames Japanese immigration as an invasion of São Paulo's coast linked to Japan's imperial ambitions. By not portraying Japanese immigrant experiences on coffee fazendas or as servants with nuance, Oswald reduces them to representatives of structural problems.

A conversation between Padre Beato and Dr. Sakura exemplifies this simplified view of Japanese immigration as a process benefitting imperial Japan and hindering Brazil. In response to the priest's question of why Japan sends so many immigrants to Brazil, Dr. Sakura explains:

> lá sofere munto, non? Operário, camponês, artejão, cada vez piore . . . Munto pobereza. Governo non pode dá saída de produção em mercado interno . . . Gente rica emperesta pra governo, ganha juro. Outro paíse melhor situação pobreza. Depois perecisa imigrá pra Burasil. Todas nação proíbe entrada de produto japoneis. Disque é *dumping*, mas não é porque pobreza perecisa de comê, vende maise borato. Armamento também governo munto gasta. Mais de vinte por cento de renda nacional. (109)

As an educated employee of the immigration company, Dr. Sakura navigates Brazilian Portuguese with greater ease than other Japanese immigrants, but the novel nonetheless marks his speech as stilted and grammatically incorrect. Recognizing that Japan's progress is unevenly distributed, Sakura views increased immigration to Brazil as one solution to the worsening poverty and hunger facing Japanese workers as the regime invests more in military infrastructure. His linking of immigration to Japanese militarization feeds into Brazilian fears about Japan's imperial ambitions. Other non-Japanese characters express their concerns by suggesting that "'os japonese quere enguli o mundo inteirinho um dia vai vê'" (24) and "os japoneses organizavam-se em *meetings* amarelos que transformavam em municípios no dia seguinte" (45). One of these feared municipalities is Registo-Gô, the "capital amarela da América do Sul" where learning "língua de basirero" is not necessary (*Marco Zero II* 182). Other characters inflame these worriees, exclaiming, "Veja que perigo estamos correndo! Além disso trata-se de uma ocupação estratégica, pois não se explica a causa pela qual eles vão para terras ruins que nada produzem" (183). The use of the militaristic "strategic occupation" implies the tie of Japanese immigrants in Brazil to Japan's imperialist expansion. While Brazilian characters consider

Registo-Gô a threat to national security, they fail to understand the Japanese decision to establish farms on seemingly unproductive land. Rather than depict the historical motivations of the Japanese to escape the coffee fazendas to serve as their own bosses on less fertile land where rice and silk would flourish, *Marco Zero* limits its portraits of the Japanese to generalizations and simplistic caricatures that stoked xenophobic fears.

Even Japanese immigrants that receive more attention in the novels, like Muraoka and Kana, serve to represent the supposed ill-intentions of the Japanese government and its people. Muraoka "sorria satisfeito" without contesting an overheard claim that Japan wants to conquer the world, implying his contentment with Japan's expansionist tendencies (*Marco Zero I* 24). Later, in *Marco Zero II: Chão*, Muraoka no longer represents a threat but rather a distinct mode of being Japanese in Brazil: "Verdade que Muraoka era um japonês diferente dos outros. Tinha mandado a filha estudar no Ginásio Mackensie. Depois Saru ia para a Faculdade de Filosofia. Falava tudo errado. 'Mackenji ... Facuridade de Firosofia . . .' Não havia nada como a nota. Japonês cheio da nota ficava diferente" (*Marco Zero II* 181). Muraoka appears more integrated than other immigrants because money grants him and his family access to elite spaces, yet his accented Portuguese prevents complete assimilation. Similarly, Kana is subjected to projected insecurities and assumptions about Japanese immigration. Despite Alberto de Melo defending his Japanese driver and claiming, "Nunca tive criado melhor … Os japoneses são ótimos … Não troco Kana por ninguém" (129), other characters voice distrust of the Japanese. Captain Bruno Cordeiro laments that "desconfio muito dessa gente," as the Baron of the Cerrado proclaims that the Japanese "são ótimos colonos! Trabalham todos os dias até domingos" (129). The novel depicts Kana not as a fleshed-out character, but rather as a token figure in immigration debates. Alberto de Melo views Kana as proof that all Japanese could be great domestic servants, whereas the baron claims they are better fieldworkers. The captain posits even more sweeping generalizations that "o japonês pretende dominar o mundo e mais nada. Já estão formando a Grande Ásia. Depois de engolir a China, eles têm a esperança de derrubar a Rússia e enfrentar afinal os Estados Unidos. O Brasil já está dentro da rede de espionagem amarela" (130).[10] The narrative shifts from considering Japanese imperialism a future threat to situating it as an existing danger. In this fictionalized Brazil of the 1930s, Kana's work as a dutiful servant to Alberto de Melo is secondary to his status as a Japanese immigrant.

Marco Zero responds to and comments on political and economic realities in Brazil by referencing the declining price of coffee; the revolutions of the 1920s and 1930s; and the debates surrounding the 1934 Constitution. Oswald de Andrade echoed the Communist Party's views that the

Japanese posed a threat to the Brazilian worker and thus portrayed the immigrant group in a correspondingly negative light. While Mário de Andrade employed less overtly pejorative and racist language, his Japanese immigrant characters, like the servant Tanaka, remained one dimensional. These depictions betray the ambivalence of Brazilians during this period as they navigated questions of race and nation. Although the narrator of *Amar, verbo intransitivo* posits future assimilation for migrants from Japan, these literary works situate their Japanese characters in a space between a welcoming reception and a hostile rejection. Goto aptly synthesizes these dichotomies: "Convidados a sair de seu país, para engrossar a mão de obra das fazendas de café, os nipônicos acabaram sendo vistos como espiões-invasores; considerados diferentes, exóticos, suas diferenças não foram entretanto aceitas nem assimiladas" (163). Reduced to caricatures and composite figures, these modernist renderings of Japanese in Brazil fail to convey the hardships of immigrant life depicted with nuance in more contemporary works by Japanese Brazilians.

Japanese Brazilian Voices: Family Sagas and Generational Changes

In contrast to the stereotypical representations of Japanese immigrants in Brazilian literature in the decades after their initial arrival, more recent narratives by Japanese Brazilians underscore the complexities of the lives of immigrants and their descendants. As Ignacio López-Calvo documents, literary and filmic constructs of Japanese Brazilian identity have become more common in Brazilian culture since the 1980s. These works tend to narrate the intergenerational trajectory of the Japanese in Brazil, from Japanese peasants who participated in government-sponsored immigration as contract employees for coffee fazendas to their descendants who establish themselves on other farms or in cities. Whereas texts from the 1920s and 1930s were responses to the initial arrival of Japanese in Brazil, contemporary Japanese Brazilian writers such as Ryoki Inoue and Oscar Nakasato approach the experience of Japanese Brazilians with a greater degree of distance and historical awareness. The resulting narratives imbue both Japanese and Brazilian characters with nuance as the writers navigate the space between their ancestral past and their current home. As López-Calvo rightly contends, these "works reflect a lived experience that has drawn new, transnational, and unstable maps beyond the Brazilian and Japanese national borders, while concomitantly building symbolic bridges between the two countries, as well as a third space" (15). Inoue's *Saga: A história de quatro gerações de uma família japonesa no Brasil* and Nakasato's *Nihonjin* attest to how Japanese immigrants and their descendants craft negotiated identities and symbolic bridges throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. The novels' titles reveal an interest in the shifts of Japanese Brazilian identity, with *Saga*

referencing a Japanese family's multi-generational history and *Nihonjin* employing the Japanese term for a Japanese person.

The coffee fazenda is privileged in both narratives as the foundational setting of Japanese experiences in Brazil. *Saga* portrays the story of one family over four generations as they establish roots in Brazil on the coffee plantation and beyond. The opening section, "Gaijin," the Japanese term for outsider or foreigner, depicts the experiences of other foreigners like Hungarian Katharina Banyai, known as "a Polaca," and Italian Giuseppe Fratelli as they established themselves in Brazil (Inoue 21). The subsequent sections, "Issei," "Nissei," "Sansei," and "Yansei," focus on the experiences of, as their respective titles indicate, the first, second, third, and fourth generations of Japanese immigrants in Brazil. In the novel's first sections, Fazenda Santa Isaura exemplifies how labor practices and economic fortunes shifted for coffee plantations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The fazenda's owner Joaquim Antônio Rodrigues de Albuquerque and his brother-in-law Pedro Andrade lamented how coffee had become less productive as enslaved labor was abolished and attempts to bring Italian workers had failed (19). Pedro began considering Japanese immigrants a possible, yet expensive, solution to the fazenda's woes. A neighbor, Sebastião Medeiros do Prado, mitigated Pedro's fears about the expense because "'esses japoneses, além de trabalhar de ameia, fazem todos os outros serviços da fazenda'" (67). Medeiros reiterated stereotypical visions of Japanese immigrants as "quietos, submissos, pacíficos e extremamente bem-educados e respeitadores. E, sobretudo são trabalhadores incansáveis" (68). The Japanese were experienced farmers, but Medeiros still had to teach them everything about coffee production. Despite this learning curve, Medeiros assured Pedro that he would not regret bringing the Japanese to work his land.

Saga aims to represent these Brazilian perceptions of Japanese immigrants and their attitudes toward emigration to Brazil. The second section, "Issei," opens with the former samurai Ryuiti Fukugawa and his friend Yoshiri Kasai ruminating over economic difficulties in Japan and considering the possibility of emigrating to Brazil. Yoshiri explains, "'Teremos de entrar lá como lavradores, mas nada nos obrigará a continuar nessa atividade. Poderemos fazer qualquer outra coisa, até mesmo dar aulas de *kenjutsu*. Além do mais, estaremos mantendo vivas nossas tradições'" (71-72). By living among other Japanese in Brazil, they could preserve cultural practices and language threatened by modernization in Japan. Although Ryuiti viewed the prospect of life in Brazil with more skepticism, he decided to embark on the *Kasato-Maru* in April 1908 with his family and the Kasai family. As part of this inaugural Japanese boat trip to Brazil, Ryuiti, Yoshiri and their families must discover firsthand the hardships of life in Brazil. The novel outlines their arduous journey: the application to emigrate,

the long boat trip to Santos, the processing at São Paulo's immigration center, and the transfer to coffee plantations as contract laborers.

On the Fazenda Santa Genoveva near Campinas, owner Francisco Bastos Araújo expected diligent work from Ryuiti, Yoshiri, and the other Japanese immigrants, even though he had refused to invest in their living quarters. The narrative emphasizes that "os japoneses trabalhavam sem parar: quando não lidavam com a terra, faziam melhorias em suas casas, construíam móveis, ajeitavam a horta ... Com certeza, jamais ficariam parados" (84). Their constant labor exceeded the owner's demands as they improved their domestic spaces to craft a sense of home. Nevertheless, living on the fazenda reduced them to laborers without agency. In an illustrative scene, after the illness and death of Yoshiri's daughter, "enterraram a pequena Naomi, murmuraram mais uma oração e … voltaram para o trabalho" (87). The immigrants began to search for opportunities where they would not be beholden to a boss who required them to work while mourning. After recognizing that, "Os japoneses são subidamente estóicos, mas também são seres humanos" (88), the narrative examines how Ryuiti and Yoshiri attempted to exert more control over their future. By visiting Fazenda Santa Isaura to evaluate the conditions before signing a contract, they negotiated a more convivial agreement for both sides. Instead of using the customary slash-and-burn technique, the Japanese characters prepared the land for coffee by planting diverse crops of sweet potato, manioc, pumpkin, melon, beans, corn, rice, soy, and cotton, which improved soil conditions.

After Santa Isaura's owner Joaquim Antônio died and Luigi Mariani purchased the fazenda, Ryuiti and Yoshiri decided to build a Japanese-only farm near Cotia, about thirty miles from São Paulo. On their Fazenda dos Bucuris, which "era, realmente, maravilhosa," it was difficult to produce coffee so they decided to specialize in potatoes (117). When it proved impossible to convince Spanish and Italian vendors to sell their potatoes at the São Paulo market, the Japanese farmers established the Cooperativa Agrícola de Cotia to cultivate, transport, and sell their produce. As the cooperative became more known, Fazenda dos Bacuris emerged as a destination:

> muitas famílias de imigrantes japoneses começaram a aparecer pedindo para trabalhar como meeiros ou mesmo como empregados. Esse afluxo de mão-de-obra ajudou, e muito, no progresso da fazenda e na relação de todas aquelas pessoas que, de forma absolutamente natural, acabaram por constituir uma sociedade tipicamente nipônica, reacendendo hábitos e costumes que já estavam correndo o risco de se tornar coisas secundárias, uma vez que a coisa primária era produzir, ganhar dinheiro. (123)

The arrival of other Japanese immigrants made it easier to preserve Japanese traditions and to grow a sustainable and profitable farm. With its owners and laborers predominately Japanese, Fazenda dos Bacuris was akin to other *colônias* throughout Brazil and a realization of the dream that Yoshiri had shared with Ryuiti before they left Japan. They had created Fazendo dos Bacuris as a community that preserved the Japanese language, martial arts, and other traditions. Their second-generation children would learn to speak Portuguese and "circular entre os dois grupos, estabelecendo uma espécie de ponte" (126). Like these characters, Inoue crafts a bridge between Brazil and Japan as a Japanese Brazilian novelist who sprinkles his Portuguese prose with Japanese terms marked in italics and explained in footnotes. The novel recognizes the importance of the Japanese-only farm to the development of this family and Japanese Brazilians more generally before focusing on third and fourth generations as they become increasingly integrated within an urban Brazil.

Published five years after *Saga*, *Nihonjin* similarly depicts multiple generations of a Japanese family in Brazil. Nakasato's novel has garnered more critical attention by receiving the inaugural Benvirá Prize in 2011 and the prestigious Jabuti Prize in 2012, contributing to its visibility in global literary circles and academic studies.[11] The narrative centers on the tale of Hideo Inabata, who emigrated with his wife Kimie and his friend Jintaro as a "false" family unit to meet the minimum of three adults required to work on coffee plantations. Hideo's six children with his second wife Shizue and his grandchildren appear later in the novel, with each chapter a vignette into different family moments. Their trajectory corresponds with critical events in the Japanese Brazilian experience as Hideo's son Haruo becomes involved with the secret society Shindō Renmei (League of Subjects of the Imperial Way), and his grandson plans to migrate to Japan as a *dekassegui* factory worker. With this grandson as the novel's first-person narrator, *Nihonjin* conveys greater subjectivity than *Saga* with its third-person narrator presenting a fictional tale as if it were a historical account. In an interview with Cecily Raynor, Nakasato explains, "I wanted a narrator who would naturally have a certain proximity to the protagonist, but not too much. Thus, his position as grandson would allow him to play this role well, while remaining a bit outside of the story" (200). From the opening line, "Sei pouco de Kimie" (Nakasato 9), the narrator establishes his proximity yet distance from the central story.

Another element that differentiates *Nihonjin* from *Saga* is Nakasato's inclusion of Japanese words in the novel without translations or italics because he "wanted readers to make contact with Japanese culture and language" (Raynor, "Reflections" 200). The absence of translations, glosses, or paratextual explanations requires readers to confront less familiar Japanese terms but does not impede their comprehension of the plot. López-Calvo reads this untranslated codeswitching as "another

political act that inscribes alterity as well as cultural difference and (internal) colonial difference in the text" (110). The novel exists in a "third space" between Japan and Brazil shared with other Japanese Brazilian narratives. For López-Calvo, Nakasato's novel differentiates itself from this emerging body of Japanese Brazilian literature by creating female characters who attempt to subvert patriarchal authority, including Kimie and Hideo's daughter Sumie who leaves her family (115). By constructing complex male and female characters with individual agency and subjectivity, Nakasato starkly contrasts the modernist tendency to flatten Japanese immigrants into stereotypical caricatures or composite figures.

Nihonjin begins with the narrator imagining Kimie's life based on Hideo's comments comparing her to his second wife, the narrator's grandmother. The narrator explains how "eu a encontrei, primeiro, no navio, na longa viagem do porto de Kobe, no Japão, ao porto de Santos, no Brasil" (Nakasato 11), foregrounding his personal relationship with the story while also pointing to its fabricated elements. Imagining Kimie on a boat links the novel to the historical trajectory of ships carrying Japanese emigrants to Brazil. The novel expands beyond Hideo's memories to portray other emigrants' thoughts. Some men hoped to return to Japan after working in Brazil for five years, whereas others doubted they would ever return to their homeland since:

> O Brasil ficava do outro lado do mundo, um lugar inimaginável, por mais que lhes dissessem que era uma ótima terra para se ganhar dinheiro. Um país desconhecido, com homens estranhos, que podiam ser violentos, que poderiam querer impor normas difíceis ou até impossíveis de serem cumpridas por japoneses. Um país subdesenvolvido, onde podia haver epidemias. Não lhes haviam dito se haveria médico quando alguém ficasse doente, se haveria um navio que traria de volta aquele que não de adaptasse ao trabalho na lavoura de café. (13)

The idea of the distant and unknown land of Brazil provoked fears among the Japanese during their journey. Although these worries traffic in assumptions, they function in the novel as personal emotional responses to the uncertainties of life in Brazil.

When Hideo, Kimie, and other immigrants arrived in Brazil, Brazilians greeted them in a manner that reiterated stereotypical views by noting that "eles, os japoneses, eram bem-vindos, que eram todos muito educados, muito organizados, e seria bom se todos os imigrantes fossem assim" (18). *Nihonjin* moves beyond these idealizations to offer a more complex vision of Japanese experiences on the coffee fazendas. The narrative comments on the incongruity between the name Fazenda Ouro Verde, which "era a promessa que lhes haviam feito no Japão, metonímia de uma terra

sem fim, onde faltavam braços para arrancar de suas entranhas a riqueza que oferecia," and the difficulties encountered once there (19). To create a more evocative image of Japanese life on coffee fazendas, the novel depicts living and working conditions, such as the absence of furniture in their rooms, the mechanics of harvesting coffee beans, and the sun's heat. Focusing on Kimie's life on the fazenda as a woman tied to Hideo and Jintaro, who completed their "family" unit and would later become her lover, grounds the narrative in a specific and subjective experience that suggests the key role of alternative kinship. Because Kimie's "mãos tinham a pele muito fina, mas os outros trabalhos também eram pesados para ela" (33), Hideo and Jintaro attempted to protect her from arduous tasks like separating coffee beans from the plant. As a result, they would not receive as much money since "o pagamento no fim da colheita dependia da produtividade da família" (33). Overall, the Japanese did not see profits from the lucrative coffee crops because of unfair wages and high costs of goods at the fazenda store. They changed their eating habits to adjust to this economic reality, substituting expensive rice with free sweet potatoes and rarely using costly soy sauce.

The difficulties on Fazenda Ouro Verde and the lack of financial rewards led Hideo to question the economics of the system. While he learned much about coffee production during his years on the fazenda, he came to realize that "sim, as fazendas de café enriqueciam, mas somente os proprietários" (46). He established a parallel between immigrants' continuous work for minimal profit with the forced labor of slavery, a connection made more explicit by marking hours on the fazenda with the bell that previously called enslaved workers to the fields. Since "não viera ao Brasil para ser escravo," Hideo decided, after Jintaro had returned to Japan and Kimie had died, to establish himself and his second wife, Shizue, on a small, rented farm (47). By leaving the fazenda, Hideo followed a trajectory substantiated in the historical record and shared with other fictional Japanese immigrants Ryuiti and Yoshiri in *Saga*. For Hideo, life on the new farm was still challenging, but at least there was a nicer house and, more importantly, no supervisor to skim the profits. The narrative underscores the relative continuity of experiences as "a família trabalhou com empenho no sítio, empolgada com as novas condições, todos cheios de esperanças. Mas os anos passaram e o dinheiro que sobrava nunca era suficiente para o retorno ao Japão" (55). Realizing that their desired temporary stay would become a permanent one, the family began to settle into life on the farm, even though Brazil, "para Hideo, depois de tantos anos, ainda era novo e inaceitável" (55). As a first-generation immigrant, Hideo continued to see Brazil as a foreign land where he struggled to belong. Using the Japanese word for a Japanese person, he argued that "'nihonjin precisa se manter sempre junto de nihonjin'" (61) to avoid experiences of alienation, like when other children at school made fun of Haruo's name. Hideo aimed

to instill a sense of Japanese pride in his children, which Haruo shared with his teacher: "'papai nos ensinou que nós não somos brasileiros. A gente é nihonjin'" (63). The teacher complicated this idea by reminding Haruo that people born in Brazil are Brazilians, pointing to the tensions in identity that the children of immigrants must confront. The novel situates Haruo and his siblings as belonging to Japan and Brazil, thus bridging the two cultures that Japanese Brazilian writers like Nakasato also occupy. With their multi-generational tales, *Nihonjin* and *Saga* narrate with specificity the complexities and contradictions of Japanese immigrants and their descendants in Brazil to render them as more than one-note caricatures.

Conclusion

Even though the Japanese first arrived in Brazil over a century ago, Brazilian literature has, until recent decades, failed to represent Japanese immigrants and their descendants with nuance and complexity. Oscar Nakasato posits that "the presence of Japanese-Brazilian protagonists as well as authors has been minor because of the adaptation process … The insertion of Japanese immigrants has been slower, of course, than that of Italians, Germans and the Spanish, simply because of differences in their culture of origin. This is also true in the case of language" (Raynor, "Reflections" 201). Nakasato rightly assesses that the representation of the Japanese in Brazilian literature has followed a distinct trajectory from prominent European immigrant groups, who have enjoyed more fully realized depictions since the early twentieth century. As a Japanese Brazilian writing in Portuguese, Nakasato strives to increase awareness of the language, culture, and history of Japanese immigrants and their descendants in Brazil through characterizations and stories that complicate the one-dimensional renderings typical in modernist works. While cultural and geographic isolation has historically accounted for the relative marginalization of Japanese Brazilian voices in Brazilian letters, Nakasato suggests that "this tendency is changing. It's just that the change is quite slow" (201). His award-winning novel has increased interest in Japanese Brazilian stories among readers and critics.

López-Calvo's 2019 study best exemplifies this scholarly attention to the comparative flourishing of literature and film in Portuguese about Japanese Brazilian experiences and identities since 1980. He astutely observes that these works, which include the narratives by Nakasato and Inoue, are:

> mobilized to challenge a genealogy of orientalist or nativist racializations that is pervasive in the mainstream Brazilian imaginary and national memory. Among its

> many phases and stereotypes, one can find the idea of Asian unassimilability, the Yellow Peril, the Japanese as a fifth column, the unpatriotic or traitorous Nikkeijin, the submissive Japanese woman, the model minority, and the Nikkeijin as a foreigner, a metonym for Japan, unfair economic competition, or racial enemy. (López-Calvo 244)

These unfounded fears and racialized caricatures appear in the Brazilian literary works I discussed in this article's first section. Mário de Andrade constructed Tanaka as an outsider and a racial enemy of the German governess Elza in *Amar, verbo intransitive*. Tanaka's diligence and subservience as a worker reinforce stereotypes about Japanese immigrants that circulated in Brazil at the time. Despite Tanaka's marked otherness, the narrative considers his ability to eventually assimilate. In contrast, Oswald de Andrade's *Marco Zero I* and *II* portray Japanese figures in a more nativist and orientalist light, either as model minorities whose wealth cannot assure their integration or as unassimilable traitors who represent the "Yellow Peril" of Japanese imperialist expansion. The Japanese immigrants in these modernist narratives lack individual agency and subjectivity; they exist instead as projections of writers' uncertainties and fears about Japanese immigration in Brazil during the 1920s and 1930s.

At the peak of Japanese arrivals to Brazil, modernist writers' visions of these immigrants foregrounded racialized concerns about national identity without acknowledging the difficulties of their lived experiences. In the decades following World War II, Japanese migrants and their descendants tended to appear in Brazilian culture, especially films and advertisements, as iterations of the earlier stereotypes of diligent workers and model minorities. It is with the publication of narratives written in Portuguese by Japanese Brazilians in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries that more nuanced literary representations of Japanese immigration in Brazil have emerged. Inoue's *Saga* and Nakasato's *Nihonjin* craft fictional narratives that correspond to the key moments in the history of Japanese families in Brazil: their arrival in Santos and transfer to coffee fazendas as conscripted laborers, the negotiations of transcultural identities among their children and grandchildren, and the greater assimilation in Brazil or return to Japan of their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. In these multigenerational tales, the coffee fazenda functions as an essential setting for not only the history of Japanese immigrants and their descendants in Brazil but also the construction of Japanese Brazilians as a literary representation and cultural identity. Writings by Inoue, Nakasato, and other Japanese Brazilians who listened to their grandparents' memories of hardships on the fazendas enrich their understanding of the Japanese experience in Brazil. More importantly, these narratives expand conceptions of Brazilian literature by featuring voices and experiences historically excluded from or

flattened within representations of the nation. The novels' nuanced portraits of Japanese Brazilians remind readers that identity, whether at a personal or collective level, is not a constant but rather a construct that changes with time.

Notes

1. See Smith for more on how Meiji discourses affected agricultural policy and ideas of Japan's countryside in subsequent periods. Sorensen examines how Meiji-era land reforms promoted modernization with urbanization as rural populations remained the same (57-59).
2. For more on Japanese and Chinese emigration to Brazil, see chapter five of Lesser's *Immigration*. Lee examines the role of the Chinese in Brazilian history and culture.
3. See Finger for more on German-Brazilian literary and cultural forms. Other key groups immigrating to Brazil in the twentieth century include Eastern European Jews and Arabs from Syria and Lebanon. See Vieira for a study of the literary representations of Jewish Brazilians. See Hassan for more on the literature of the Arab diaspora in Brazil.
4. See Lesser's *A Discontented Diaspora* for more on Nikkei visibility in São Paulo via film, advertisements, and urban life in the 1960s and 1970s. A noteworthy literary example from this period is Rachel de Queiroz's 1963 *crônica* "Nacionalidade," which features a *nissei* boy who is called *japonês* as he insists he is Brazilian. Many of the comedies, art films, and erotic films fetishized Japanese Brazilian men as hard workers and women as beauties. *Gaijin* is rare among mainstream films for focusing on an ethnic minority with sympathy, yet it conflated ethnic integration with political activism and received mixed reviews among Nikkei (69).
5. See Gouveia and Rosenberg for more on Brazilian modernism's aesthetics, geopolitics, and socioeconomics. See Lesser's *A Discontented Diaspora* for more on Malfatti's portrait (5-6).
6. Tachibana analyzes Ishikawa's *Sōbō* (1935) and its sequels, whereas Mack offers a comprehensive study of Japanese-language literary activity in Brazil from 1908 to 1941. See Rivas for an account of how Japanese print culture in Brazil, specifically the *tanka* collected in the 1981 anthology *Colonia Man'yôshû*, helps to craft communal memory.
7. Cardoso offers an insightful reading of race and primitivism in Tarsila's paintings and, more generally, the *Antropofagia* movement (172-208), and of artistic efforts in the Vargas years to craft an "ideal" Brazilian racial type (223-237).
8. Mário de Andrade began drafting a three-act opera titled *Café* in 1933, arriving at a final version in a series of poems in 1942, which were published in the 1955 *Poesias completas*. See Toni and Moraes for more on the opera's trajectory.
9. See Schwarcz for more on scientific racism in discussions of race and nation in Brazil. See chapters four and five of Lesser's *Negotiating National Identity* for more on Japanese immigration and assimilation in Brazil.
10. This fictional discourse recalls José de Lima Figueiredo's 1941 observations about Japanese expansionist tendencies in the Far East during the Sino-Japanese War and after.
11. *Nihonjin* has been translated into Japanese, published by Nikkei Bungaku in 2015 and by Suiseisha in 2022, and into Mexican Spanish, published by Textofilia Ediciones in 2021. The Brazilian studio Pinguim has adapted *Nihonjin* into a feature-length animated film (Jones n.p.). Scholars Raynor and López-Calvo compare *Nihonjin* to, respectively, a Japanese Canadian novel and other Portuguese-language Japanese Brazilian literary works since the 1980s.
12. See Morais for more on Shindō Renmei and how its violence in the 1940s affected Japanese Brazilian identity. See Nishida for more on the *dekassegui* phenomenon of Japanese Brazilians migrating to and working in Japan.

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