

The social relations of domination in a migration context

The case of Brazilian people in Japan from 2000

Background

The migration process of Brazilian people to Japan started in the 1990s after the revision of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (ICRRA). The ICRRA provided a legal framework for the migration of Brazilian descendants of Japanese. The category of family relatives who could obtain residence visas was expanded, and through this, many Japanese-Brazilians and their spouses were able to enter in the archipelago and find unskilled work in the manufacturing sector. Brazilians today constitute the third group after Chinese and Koreans in Japan’s migrant population.

The theoretical frame used in my PhD research aims at addressing the social relations of domination in a migration context. It is inspired by Anglo-Saxon studies of *intersectionality* (Crenshaw) and from the *consubstantialité des rapports sociaux de domination* (Kergoat) in French theory. My research focuses on the collective action of Brazilian migrants in Japan, and examines how the social relations of class, gender, race and generation are connected in the processes of mobilization. The collective action of Brazilian people in Japan takes place in three social fields: education, trade unions and community organizations.

Methods

The research is based on a qualitative analysis of the records of Brazilian schools, of trade unions’ sections for migrant workers and local groups of migrant workers, and of community organizations supporting Brazilian cultural and language activities. About fifty non-directive interviews were made in Portuguese and in Japanese with informants who are engaged in each area mostly from the 2000s. Because non-directive interviews do not always guarantee a complete understanding of all the connections between the social relations of domination, I also did some participative observations on each area using an ethnographic method. In particular, I was leading an observation as a volunteer in a Brazilian community school in 2009, and following the activities of two Japanese trade unions which set up a section for migrant workers.

Results

My research is organized around three case studies which are bound up with three steps of my fieldwork. Each case study provides an example of how the social relations of domination organize the social reality of the migrant community. The first case examines how the class and gendered strategies of migrant parents have to deal with the ethnic representations of Brazilian schooling. The second case analyzes the class and race construction of migrant workers and the gendered organization of the unionized migrants. The last case addresses the transmission of cultural resources in the community organizations which allows me to inquire the social relation of generation.

Case 1: Brazilian schooling supplies and education strategies of migrant parents

Since the early 2000s, the number of Brazilian schools in Japan has exploded. According to the Association of Brazilian Schools in Japan (AEBJ) – created in 2001 – there were 5 institutions in 1995, 45 in 2001 and 110 in 2008. In 2007, some 10.536 children and teenagers were registered in the Brazilian schools.

The education strategies of migrant parents depend on the gap between the gender inequalities in the division of housework and the growing gender equality of opportunity on the labour market. At first, the Brazilian schools had to tackle a double problem with the school attendance: “a daycare demand” and “an education demand”. The care demand is a delegation of home care and is a result of a class and gender strategy because the rate of Brazilian women who are working full-time in factories is high (60 % in 2005). The education demand furthermore binds to the families’ option to return to Brazil. The education strategies of migrant parents are shaped by social relations of class, gender and race.

From 2005, however, new social representations which build on a multicultural view of education for foreigners were emerging. It is in reaction to the view of the Japanese ministry of Education who considers the irregular school attendance of foreigners as no more than a problem of Japanese language learning. The new representations which come from the academic, expert and education fields, furthermore contribute to change the supply of Brazilian schooling. The Brazilian schools developed an option of multicultural education which aims at not limiting its activities to the daycare. Whereas the school attendance profile was changed, the professionalization binds up with multicultural skilling through a teaching qualification course implemented by the Brazilian Ministry of Education from 2009. That represents a way for the Brazilian staff to reaffirm their social status of teacher (*professor*) dealing with the threat that migrant parents reduce them to the role of nanny (*baba*).

Conclusion

The research points out the discursive construction of the social relations of domination which are crossing the three case studies. The comparative perspective that the theoretical frame implies, binds to methodological conditions. The opportunities to observe some variations in the social relations of domination depend on the variety of the observation fields. Education and labour issues based on the case of Brazilian migrant in Japan are never addressed together because of an academic division of the work. In addition, the three case studies may be considered as some examples of the fulfillment of the social relations of domination.

Kinds of problem registered by phone call from October 2006 to March 2009 in the SABJA (Service of Assistance for Brazilians in Japan)

Kinds of problem	Occurrences	%
Documents	191	5,9
Immigration issues	130	4,0
Labour issues	709	21,9
Health insurance	132	4,0
Physical and mental health	481	14,8
Family issues	256	7,9
Education issues	121	3,7
Legal issues	288	8,8
Tax	35	1,1
Consumer protection	43	1,3
SABJA Projects	263	8,1
Religion	48	1,5
Domestic violence	28	0,9
Translation	93	2,9
Teenagers issues	33	1,0
Others	410	12,6
Total	3261	100,0

Source: Mori, Yoshiko/SABJA. 2009. *Desafios da comunidade brasileira no Japão*. Tokyo, SABJA, p. 6.

Case 2: Migrant workers and Japanese trade unions

The second case addresses the unionization of migrant workers. Because this is rare for Brazilian workers, particularly in the case of female migrant workers, the study points out the logics of individual engagement of unionized migrants and the social meaning and pressures which are associated with this kind of engagement in Japan. In most of the cases the decision to engage or not fits into the scheme of social relations of domination which are organized in the labour market for migrants. The case study furthermore aims at examining the effects of unionization in terms of social relations of domination. Although the dominant representation of migrant workers is based on a class and race construction, most of the groups of unionized migrants actually are gendered organizations. On the one hand, there is a gendered way to divide the organizational tasks which corresponds to a division between *attention getting* and *attention giving*. For instance, the unionized leadership is often taking on a masculine role. On the other hand, the records of the groups of unionized migrants highlight a process of selection after the first engagement. It is very hard for female unionized workers who are single mothers or who don’t have a husband, a boyfriend or a brother in the group to remain unionized.

Case 3: Community organizations and transmission of cultural resources

The third case, which I am currently doing my research on, aims at taking account of the generation issue in the social relations of domination through the transmission of cultural resources in the community organizations. By community organization I mean a non-profit and local structure. As well as an activist speech, most of the Brazilian community organizations are based on an ethnic talk which is an official story. The story sometimes reconstructs the past and the logics of gender and racial relations – for example, a Brazilian Nikkei had to marry a Brazilian Nikkei. It is thus hiding the conflict forms which could cross the organizations. The first observations were focused on the body and language practices of Brazilian young people and on its political meaning. Given that their parents have founded most of the organizations, we pay attention to the variations in the transmission process of cultural resources, particularly in relation to the current influence of the Brazilian ideology of melting-pot (*miscigenação*) and its updating in the Japanese context. As a social relation of power, the *generation* binds up with the transmission as a form of the socialization processes’ production and reproduction. Some differences of class and race divide the practices of Brazilian teenagers who are attending ethnic schools and those who are attending Japanese public schools.