Kinship, Selfhood and Migration:
Articulations of Love, Loss and the Future in Japan

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INTRODUCTION

Studies of Brazilian Nikkeis (Japanese emigrants and their descendents) living and working in Japan tend to focus on the role of ethnic and national identity concerns in the making and shaping of everyday migrant experiences. Excluded from Japanese society these migrants, it is argued, find an individuated sense of belonging in the collective shelter of a displaced Brazilian community (Carvalho, 2003; Kawamura 1999; Linger, 2001; Roth, 2002; Sellek, 1997; Tsuda, 2003; Yamanaka, 1996; 2000).

Focusing on these 'individual' and 'collective' identity concerns (Jenkins 2003: 19), however, denies the extent to which such people's lives are shaped by their fluid location in an enduring and transient web of intimate social and kin ties (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 15). It is these relationships, in other words, that set the tone and rules of play for migrants to make sense of and articulate their displaced journeys through life, time and transnational spaces. These mutually defining ideals of life, love, obligation and social relations, in turn, play an important role in facilitating attachments and yearnings to given places (Green 2008).

There is a danger, however, in paying too much attention to these mutually defined forms and acts of identifications. In everyday life migrants (and other human beings) embody notions of selfhood that are capable of succumbing to and yet exceeding the ties, obligations and sense of relatedness imbued in social and kin ties. This article considers the ways in which people make sense of life at the experiential intersection of mutually defined notions of personhood and family ties and diverse, individual journeys that centre on personalised ideals and understandings of love, hope, fears and dreams. The self, on these terms, is caught between the 'mutuality' of particular ways of relating to people and the 'diversity' of feeling, imagining and being in the world in ways that are particular to each given individual. The self also lives at intersections of time; of past time in terms of memory, of present time through the 'here and now' and future time and imaginings of the future self. This article explores and accounts for these understandings of time in and through the lives of three single female migrants.

In being single female migrants Diana, Lidia and Kátia are able to value a sense of freedom and independence that is inspired by the experience of living alone in a small flat for the first time in their lives. Friendships evolve, meanwhile, through the 'imagined family' of one's *turma* (group or gang). Yet for these three human beings the here and now of everyday experience is intimately connected to their memories of loss (of lovers, husbands and parents), hopes of a 'family future' and individualistic dreams of a house by the sea. Hopes and dreams, in this sense, represent two different versions of an uncertain future and future sense of selfhood that are simultaneously associated with the unwelcome needs of aging parents in Brazil and the ongoing fear of feeling lost and alone in Japan. Through this analysis of everyday life, love and social relatedness (Carsten 2004) I shed light on what it means to be both a migrant and a human being. This may be a personalised migrant tale with a particular Brazilian flavour, but it is also a human tale which reflects a mutual need for people across the world to make sense of hopes, fears and dreams that are literally at the heart of their everyday lives.

SETTING THE SCENE

Japan

Introduced in 1990, the revised Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Law provided Brazilian (and other) nationals of Japanese descent with an opportunity to live and work in Japan (Yamanaka 2000: 133). Whilst these visas tend to have a 'no activity restriction' (Tsuda 2003: 93) most migrants work in factories. Following an initial wave of male migrants, there have been an increasing number of families, female migrants and younger migrants in their twenties present in Japan (Green 2010; Yamanaka 2000). Though such people can be found in many different parts of Japan, they are concentrated in regions and locales dominated by industry and manufacturing. In 1995, for example, more than half of the Nikkei population resided in just five prefectures – Aichi, Shizuoka, Kanagawa, Saitama and Gunma (Yamanaka 2000: 135). Aichi, for example, is home to the main plants of some of the world's leading car manufacturers. By 2009, more than 360, 000 Brazilians were living in Japan (Tabuchi 2009).

During the recent global financial crisis some migrants lost their jobs, with the Japanese government offering to pay unemployed foreign workers and their families the costs of flights back to Brazil (Tabuchi 2009). In reality, Brazilian migrants in Japan have been continually susceptible to the ebb and flow of economic downturns. During my fieldwork in 2001 and 2002, for example, there was a significant recession in Japan. Men in particular were laid off from work, reflecting their greater economic cost as generally higher wage earners in Japan. Some migrants had to pull their children out of fee-paying Brazilian schools (Higashi 2002). Migrants tend to rely on either local government or employers for accommodation. Being unemployed in Japan, in other words, can simultaneously affect one's living circumstances alongside the educational aspirations of children and their families more generally.

Some Brazilian migrants have showed tremendous resilience during economic downturns, often being prepared to move city or region in order to find another job. Such work may be available through the advertisement sections of Brazilian newspapers, or through Brazilians friends and contacts living both near and far in Japan. Many Brazilian migrants, especially those without children that attend Japanese schools, for example, may have little contact with mainstream Japanese society. In the case of Diana, Lidia and Kátia they lived their day to day life in an almost exclusive network of Brazilian friends, acquaintances and fellow workers. They may have some contact with Japanese people, through the daily routines of shopping for groceries, for example. Such contact, however, was usually of a very superficial and limiting nature.

Fieldwork

Japan is a harsh place to carry out research with migrants who may work endless hours and have little spare time to relax, let alone make friends with anthropologists. Living in close proximity to such people does not necessarily help. Daniel Linger lived on a housing estate with 1,600 invisible Brazilians. "Brazilians lived there," he notes, "but they were phantoms. On weekdays, and even Saturdays, everybody was working. On Sundays people shopped, or went on an excursion, or slept, or lounged around their apartment" (2001: 97). He resorted to what he describes as an, "unprecedented field technique, born of desperation" (2001: 97) and placed notices around the housing estate informing people of his desire to meet and conduct research with Brazilian migrants. Some people responded. Linger got to write his monograph.

Like Linger I used a notice board, at least to meet some people. The notice board was on the internet. I placed my details on the friendship pages of a website popular with Brazilians in Japan, at *www.braznet.org*. Lidia got in touch with me through *braznet*, though it took us almost a year to finally meet. She lived in the city of Ogaki, which was about 45 minutes away on a train and subway from my 'hometown' of Nagoya. A small city, Ogaki was home at the time to some 3000 Brazilians. On my first visit to Ogaki, I got to meet three of them; Lidia and her two friends, Diana and Kátia. It was a Sunday in February 2002. Diana was working that day, so we shared little more than handshakes. That initial meeting, however, represented the first of many visits to and overnight stays in Ogaki. I would eventually make friends with other people living in the city, but for several months I spent most of my time in the company of Lidia, Diana and Kátia and their friends.

Spending several months with the *same* select number of informants reinforced and enhanced my understanding of the links that exist between theory, method and ethnography. Faced with the challenge of engaging with busy, overworked migrants, many researchers in the Nikkei field have relied on the use of semi-structure and/or open-ended interviews (Carvalho 2003; Kawamura 1999; Linger 2001; Tsuda 2003). Typically, a researcher spends 2 or 3 hours with an informant and in many cases does not meet them again. The use of the snowballing method ensures that many interviews are carried out with complete strangers (i.e. Carvalho 2003; Tsuda 2003). The boundary between probing Self and probed Other remains intact, as the former imposes a research agenda on the latter that in migration studies tends to focus on questions of identity. Like a photograph the gatekeeping encounter of the interview is a ritual framed in a moment in time with the informant's thoughts and recollections bounded by the interviewer's categorical assumptions about how and where, on a narrative level, the informant should sit. What may be a distant, or abstract concept or category, in the unbounded social reality of the interviewee becomes an experiential aspect of their lives in the context of the interview (Jenkins 1994: 214). With a typical sample of a 100 interviews completed the researcher is ready to write about the identity concerns of his or her field.

These questions may be important. They may not. What is certainly the case is that they do not necessarily matter to people all the time, or on an everyday basis. I argue, in turn, that researchers can only ascertain or establish what really matters to people by being involved with informants on an ongoing, daily or at least frequent basis. In my case, it was through being involved in the everyday lives of my informants I was able to build close, intimate relations with them and gain a real sense of the issues and thoughts at the centre of their daily lives. Through this I came to understand how people's hopes, fears and dreams were of greater everyday significance to them than questions relating to ethnic or national identity. Diana's evolving sense of who she was as a human being, a female of 40-years-old and a person embedded in a web of past, present and future relations dominated her daily life in ways that overshadowed the ontological necessity to interrogate her categorical status as a Nikkei or displaced Brazilian. This article, therefore, represents an ethnographic glimpse into the 'everydayness' of migrant experience.

INDEPENDENCE AND IMAGINED FAMILY

When I first met Lidia she was 35. Diana was 40. Kátia was much younger at 24 yet had a sense of maturity about her that suggested she was older. They had all lived in Japan for a significant amount of time, on and off. Lidia first came to Japan, alone, in 1990. She left in 1992. She returned with her boyfriend in 1997 and had remained ever since. Diana came to Japan in 1996 with her newly-wed husband. Less a visit to Brazil in 2000, she had spent the last six years of her life in Ogaki. Kátia had been coming backwards and forwards from Brazil since 1995, when she was just 17. These three friends were now all effectively alone in Japan, at least in terms of having no recognisable blood or

kin ties there, or even lovers or husbands. Relationships and marriages had ended in Japan and they were left to make sense of their life, their hopes and dreams on their own individuated terms.

In important ways, Lidia, Diana and Kátia valued their single life and independence in Japan. Kátia shared a flat with another Brazilian girl, though spent most of her time either working or spending time with Lidia, Diana and their friends. Lidia and Diana lived in their own small flats, provided by the Japanese broker they both worked for. Many Brazilians working in Japan officially work for employment brokers who in turn send them to mostly work in factories (Roth 2002). Lidia and Diana were 'vertical' neighbours, in that Lidia lived right above Diana's flat. After a long day at work Lidia appreciated returning to her flat, with its small kitchen and living room that became her bedroom once the *futon* was unrolled at bed time. Diana also loved having her own space, a place to call home. For the first time in her life she was living alone. Before she had married Edgar she had always lived with her parents and two brothers in São Paulo.

This sense of enjoying life in Japan was nevertheless inspired by the presence of intimate social ties. In Brazil notions of selfhood are, in a normative sense, defined by one's location in a web of kin and social ties (Green 2008, 2011). Brazilian persons, in other words, are viewed as open and fluid sites of relationships, substances and obligations (Busby, 1997: 273). Family, in particular, serves to define people as both human beings *and* Brazilians (DaMatta 1991: 192; Green 2008). As Diana suggested to me one day, family was the most important aspect of her life. She was a typical Brazilian, she would say, because she loved her parents, her brothers, sister-in-law and her adorable nieces. The walls of her living room in Japan offered insights into Diana's understanding of what defined her on these terms. Photographs of important family members were sprayed across the walls of her flat - collective ones of her older brother, her sister-in-law and their two nieces. There were much larger images of the two nieces that she truly adored. Photographs of her younger, aspiring actor and musician brother, her parents and snapshots of 'the whole family' together were also on prominent display for visitors, or rather close friends.

Diana, Lidia and Kátia helped form a larger friendship group known as a *turma* (group or gang). *Turmas* are forms of social networks that arise through the informal efforts and experiences of given individuals (Amit and Rapport 2002: 23). Such forms of affiliation, in other words, work on and through a different logic to one couched in the relational logic and metaphor of a collective identity. *Turmas* represent a form of collective identification that are, "conceptualised first and foremost by reference to what is held in common by members rather than in terms of oppositional categories between insiders and outsiders … what matters most, therefore, is what 'we' have shared, not the boundary dividing 'us' from 'them' (Amit and Rapport 2002: 59-60). *Turmas* usually consist of a small grouping of people, with perhaps six to twelve participants. In this case Diana was a key protagonist of the *turma*. Many social activities took place at her flat. Diana's pride and happiness in having a place to call home for the first time in her life was often facilitated by her self-appointed role as host to the *turma.* Most participants in Diana's *turma* were female, some married or with lovers in their life and others single.

The friendships imbued in one's *turma* provide important sources of personal security and well-being. Take the case of Andréia. In the summer of 2002 Andréia was heading back to Brazil with her six-year-old daughter Sabrina. Reluctantly, she needed to return to Brazil for an indefinite period to oversee the ongoing development of her small ice-making business in Manaus, in the north of Brazil. Andréia didn't want to go back to Brazil. She would miss her husband, who planned to stay and work in Japan. At the same time she didn't want to leave her *turma* behind, which included Lidia, Kátia and her especially good friend Diana. The sense of impending loss or *saudades* (yearning, homesickness) was solemnly and yet jokingly shared at a leaving party that took place in Diana's flat. At the party Andréia was given a farewell present in the form of a bracelet. Each adult member of

the *turma* had contributed an equal amount to the purchase of the leaving present, thus reflecting the extent to which *turmas* are valued as non-hierarchical social networks.

Turmas are also often viewed and imagined on various levels as family. If given individuals are living alone in Japan, for example, it is common for people to think of *turmas* as a 'replacement' or substitute family (Weston 1991: 116). In the absence of his wife and children, for example, my friend Hiromi would often spend his Sundays fishing and drinking with his all-male *turma.* With a barbeque in full flow, these occasions helped Hiromi deal with the *saudades* he felt for his wife and two children. In the absence of such loved ones, he argued, his friends were not so much *like* family to him. They *were* family. This categorical mutation represented an uncomplicated and natural transformation for Hiromi. It happened automatically, he said. In his way of thinking, he was alone and now he wasn't. Relationships within *turmas* may be valued more than those inspired by an idiom of blood. Andréia, for example, trusted most members of her *turma* more than her own family, at least family members back in Brazil. Indeed one of the main reasons she was returning to Brazil was because she was worried that her two brothers, who were overseeing and managing her business, were stealing money from the business accounts. In contrast, she said on more than one occasion that she trusted Diana with her daughter's life. Diana, she similarly argued, was like the sister she never had.

THE ENDURING VALUE OF FAMILY TIES?

In Kate Weston's (1998) study of gay kinship ideologies many of her informants viewed their 'chosen families' as the source of enduring bonds, of providing ties and friendships that would last a lifetime. The value of such bonds was often placed in comparison, "to the uncertainties attendant upon relationships with lovers and "blood" or adoptive kin" (Weston 1998: 68). People like Diana and Kátia, however, recognised that *turmas* and friendships did *not* last forever in Japan. The longer one remains in Japan the more this is realised. Goodbye or *despedida* parties become a regular event. Friends leave Japan, or move to another town. Through choice or compulsion people leave their jobs and look for employment elsewhere in Japan. Some return to Brazil. Friendships may end through arguments or even sexual jealousy. The friendship between Diana and her good friend Neide, for example, ended after they argued over their mutual affection for a male friend. *Turmas*, then, may be idealised through an egalitarian ethos of gift-giving but in everyday practice they are susceptible to the same levels and threat of conflict as any kin or social network.

Diana may have recognised that friendships in Japan did not last forever. It did not follow, however, that she placed comparative, heightened value on relationships back in Brazil. Despite loving and missing her family she did not miss living with her mother, for example. They had an extremely conflictive relationship. Loving family and living with family represented two different realities for Diana. Who needs to be near them anyway, she would sometimes say. They are always there at the end of the phone. On similar terms, Kátia did not want to return to Brazil. She was happy to send money home to her mother so that she could may for her living expenses and medical bills. Like Diana, she had less inclination to live with her mother, which in Kátia's eyes equated with a full-time caring role.

The *longer* Diana and Kátia lived in Japan the more they got used to emotionally distancing themselves from the ties and obligations of their parents. For Diana this sense of change in her life was filtered through and reinforced by the memory of a visit to Brazil some two years before we met. In 2000 Diana left her husband Edgar behind in Ogaki and went to stay at the family home in São Paulo. The trip was a mixed experience for her. She had a great time with her younger brother and nieces. At the same time, however, she became aware of an evolving relationship between self,

body and living space in Japan (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995: 3; Carsten 2004). In Japan Diana was used to living amongst residents who tended to be quiet and respectful of their neighbours. The only noise she tended to hear was the beating of a *futon* or mattress on a nearby balcony. She often cherished this peace. When she got back to Brazil her family spoke and laughed at a decibel level she was now unaccustomed to. She had to ask her father to speak more softly. She couldn't get used to sleeping on a bed again. In Japan she slept on a *futon* or mattress on the floor. The toilet wasn't just any toilet. It was a *Brazilian* toilet. Diana had to stop herself from putting paper down it in the way she did in her own flat in Ogaki. She subsequently returned, somewhat relieved, to Japan. Edgar was there to met her at the airport.

Diana, Kátia and Lidia may have felt alone at times in Japan, in the solitude of their apartments and bedrooms late at night. The memory of visits to Brazil or telephone conversations, however, reminded them of the positive aspects of this independent life. It was the often pressing nature of these relationships and obligations that allowed them to value their lives and lifestyle in Japan. In 2002 the memory of that trip to Brazil seemed to provide ontological nourishment and security to Diana's declaration that she had a *casa* and a body to call her own. Diana, in this sense, had established a new self-contained world for herself with a Japanese toilet, a Japanese bed, and Japanese neighbours, built then on a bodily engagement and comparison with a national Other of her parents and their very Brazilian house.

The last time Kátia and I met was in a coffee shop in Nagoya. She came to say goodbye and brought me a little gift. Just the night before her mother was asking when she would return to Brazil. Her mother was lonely, Kátia said, and wanted her support 'in the flesh,' not simply through remittances. Kátia looked worried by this. She was clearly feeling for her mother, yet simultaneously thinking about the implications of this request in terms of her own life. Going back to Brazil would also mean living off a greatly reduced income. In Brazil, she said, you don't live, you survive. Her mother's medication alone cost more than an average wage back in Brazil, she said. Kátia didn't want to go back to Brazil and survive and act as a full-time carer for her mother. She was also afraid of how she would re-adapt and get used to life in Brazil again. She recalled the shock of her last visit, where she arrived at the airport to find people 'almost naked' she said, in comparison to the well-dressed or simply dressed people she was now used to seeing in the streets of Japan.

Lidia was concerned about returning to Brazil but not quite in the same way as Diana or Kátia. One night, over some very delicious *empadas* (small Brazilian pies) and cold tins of Asahi beer, she explained her dilemma as follows:

> I don't see Brazil as a *lugar seguro* (safe, secure place) for me to live. When you go out on the streets you need to always be on your guard with people. In traffic the motorists are crazy. They have no respect for other cars, which they almost crash into. There are lots of poor children and homeless people on the *ruas* who quite often become delinquents. On the other hand there's my family, my parents and siblings and one day I will have to return and live there for good. One way or the other I will just have to get used to it.

Lidia was specifically talking here about the streets of São Paulo, home to dangerous levels of urban violence and crime (Caldeira 2000; Green 2008). These social problems exist in many parts of urban Brazil today. In January 2002, the magazine *Veja* published a special report on what it described as 'Bleeding Brazil.' Several articles in the edition highlighted the seriousness of Brazil's deep and porous social wounds. Between 1980 and 2000 the total number of murders had risen from approximately 10,000 to 40,000 deaths (Duarte 2002). The kidnapping of middle-class children and adults had now become commonplace (Azavedo 2002). Many Brazilians living in Japan have their

own tales of loss, robbery and murder. The threat and fear of violence, therefore, add its own particular shadow to Lidia's desire to one day return to the social world and landscapes of her parents, other family members, poor children, homeless delinquents and crazy motorists.

THE LOSS OF A FAMILY FUTURE

Lidia, Diana and Kátia loved their family back in Brazil, but Diana and Kátia in particular had little desire to actually live with their mothers again. Lidia may have seemed more resolute about returning 'one day' to live with her parents, but her statement all too easily fitted with the plans of other migrants in Japan and their own myth of returns (Yamanaka 2000). *Speaking* of returning one day was a much easier thing to do than engage with the reality of giving up her life, lifestyle and flat in Japan and returning to a place of low income opportunities and violent crime. In important ways, these three human beings had 'moved on' from the ties and responsibilities of their parents. Their parents, in this sense, represented what I term a 'family past.' These ties were important, but through time they no longer represented a central focus of Lidia, Diana and Kátia's lives. Crucially, these ties no longer played a *central* role in defining who these three Brazilian migrants were as human beings.

As Diana suggested above, *family was the most important aspect of her life*. What 'family' meant to Diana on these terms, however, was never fixed or stable. Family, in this sense, could relate to her beloved and lovable nieces. Diana was reminded of the love she felt for her father the moment a small parcel arrived at her flat. Her father would often send her little parcels containing her favourite Brazilian chocolate, sweets and other little and literal tastes from 'back home.'

Yet the notion of family could also relate and refer to the loss and yearning she sometimes felt for her ex-husband Edgar. Diana's eyes welled at times at the thought and memory of the times she had spent with Edgar. She missed him and yet remained angry at the way in which he had remarried without informing her. Especially when she was tired and/or had been drinking, she sometimes wished that she was still living the migrant dream with Edgar and saving the money to buy a house and build their own 'family future' back in Brazil. In Brazil the notion of a home or a *casa* is intimately and historically associated with the ties of family. For the emerging middle-classes of the late 19th and early 20th century, for example, the possibility of marriage became synonymous with the proverb, "*Quem casa, quer casa*" – he who marries needs a house" (Borges 1992: 73).

Lidia was also in search of a love and a family to call her own. In 2001 she had split from her boyfriend Paulo, who still lived in Ogaki. She had been with Paulo for four years and was still getting used to life without him. Like Diana, she was still trying to come to terms with the end of the relationship. Romance was nevertheless on the horizon in the form of Japanese Brazilian she had met via the ICQ messenger service on the internet. Jorge, or Violent Jorge as Lidia decided to call him (as he was so seemingly placid), lived some distance away in Kanagawa. This did not stop or deter Lidia from speaking continually to Jorge on the telephone. Even at this early stage of the relationship he had become an important source of emotional support.

Kátia still struggled with the memory of a 'dream relationship' ending in 1999. As I noted above she had returned to Japan in 1998. She wanted to help her parents meet the construction costs of the new home that they were building. She also returned because she was in love with Rodrigo. Kátia dreamed of returning to Brazil with Rodrigo and living with him in her parent's new home. The family home, in this sense, represented the site and source of the most important relationships in Kátia's life. At that time, Rodrigo and her parents were of more or less equal importance to her. In 1999 Kátia's father died. She and Rodrigo split in the same year. The dream home was never built;

the final work on the house was never completed. Kátia's mother subsequently moved into a small, rented flat in Londrinas. The dream home, like her father and Rodrigo, was now gone.

For Diana, Lidia and Kátia the pain, occasional tears and loneliness caused by these losses were a continual reminder of what was really missing in their present lives. What these three human beings really wanted in their life was a family to call their own. They wanted a lover, a partner, a husband to share in the constant monotony of moving from *futon* to factory everyday. They wanted to see a life in front of them that was shared and full of shared dreams. Diana and Kátia, for example, wanted to travel one day in the future. They wanted to go to Europe in particular. As I learnt through discussing my own solo travel experiences, it was an alien concept for them to make or think of making such a trip alone. As people defined by their positioning in a web of and I would add *hoped for* web of relations, they struggled to make sense of photographs containing nothing but landscapes, beaches and monuments. As I was continually reminded from Diana's wall photographs, like places, should be full of people. For Diana and Kátia their future trip to Europe, they suggested, would take place with their new boyfriend, whoever or wherever he may be. Kátia hoped, in jest, that he would be the actor, Orlando Bloom.

THE LOSS OF SELF AND THE FUTURE IN JAPAN

What was striking about the lives of Diana, Lidia and Kátia in 2002 was that without these relationships in place, without a 'family future' to think about, they had little sense of what the future held for them. Diana, for example, spoke of feeling lost. This sense of feeling lost was based around the idea that she didn't have a future. Diana suggested one day that if she thought too much about the future she would go crazy. She felt that even though she was now 40 years of age and *should* know what she was doing and where she was going in life, she simply had no clue. To a significant extent her concerns were shaped by her relationship with the world of work, and of working in given places. In Japan many employment brokers do not readily accept workers over the age of 35. If Diana were to think of going back to Brazil one day she would also find it difficult to find employment or a viable career at her age, not least after being outside of the Brazilian job market for so long (Tsuda 1999: 712).

This issue of work and future career options was of less potential relevance to 24-year-old Kátia but she also spoke of feeling lost. This sense of feeling lost was also linked to her perception of the future. She explained these feelings as follows, *"if you had met me when I was younger you would have known a much more mature person. I used to always think about the future. Now I feel lost. I feel like a child again."* Kátia went on to explain that she lived very much in the present, taking each day as it comes. She no longer had a future, she explained. Kátia once had plans to go to university. Now, she said, that dream had disappeared.

At the time, I recall feeling quite perplexed as to why Kátia felt so despondent about the future. She was, after all, *only* 24. She could still go to university if that's what she wanted to do. Perhaps, I initially thought, it was simply frowned upon for a 'mature student' to go to university in Brazil. Yet it is quite common for Brazilians living in Japan to go back and study or complete their studies at a later age. My friend Miriam was 25 in 2002. Later that year she went back to Brazil to finish her final year of study. I recall how excited she was with her plans to go back in November of that year. She planned to leave in November so that she could spend Christmas and New Year with her grandparents. University would then begin in early 2003 and at the end of the year her parents would head back to Brazil in order to attend her graduation ceremony. It is notable that Miriam's life centred on these and other intimate family ties. These people were not part of a 'family past.' They were very much part of her present life and circumstances. She lived, for example, with her parents

and brother in Ogaki. Miriam's future plans, in turn, were structured around these relationships. The (re) entry and exit points of her studies were punctuated by the presence of her grandparents and parents, respectively.

Miriam's case illustrates the extent to which understandings of the future are shaped and defined by the social relationships at the heart of one's composition as a multiple person. Futures, like persons, are thus, "frequently constructed as the plural and composite site of the relationships that produced them" (Strathern 1990: 13). Caught between a 'family past' and the hope of a 'family future,' my three friends were unable to mark out a similar future built around intimate social ties. Denied access to a future involving the rites of passage of graduation, marriage and life in her dream home ensured that Kátia felt like a child once more. Diana *could* return to Brazil, perhaps invest in a house and build on her previous skills and experiences as a secretary in Curitiba. It would be almost unthinkable, however, for a single Brazilian female in particular to buy and live in a house in Brazil, at least, alone. Houses, like bodies, should be full of the intimate substance of *calor humano* or human warmth. As a nationally-sanctioned substance of being and personhood, human warmth serves to define the multiple and shared qualities of (Brazilian) human beings (Linger 2001).

In moving forward in life in terms of their relationships with their parents, Diana, Kátia and Lidia are paradoxically trapped in the present and the ambivalent social worlds of their single lives in Japan. With no plans for the future, these three human beings remain incarcerated in the liminal space of their own in/dividual bodies. In being incarcerated in their own bodies such people are unable to leave or think about leaving Japan. Tomorrow and thus the potential to move and be in another place, doesn't exist. Lidia may plan to 'one day' return home to her parents, but the real key to this potential move back to Brazil lies in the outcome of her flourishing telephone-based relationship with Violent Jorge.

This sense of what may be termed as 'relational limbo' was especially felt by Diana, who was unable to plan a future trip to Brazil. She had no problems *going* to Brazil, she told me, at least for a visit. She knew she would leave her loud family behind again after a series of barbeques and time spent with her younger brother and nieces. Her greatest fear, however, was returning to Japan. When she last visited her family, Edgar was there to meet her off the plane in Nagoya. As she explained it to me, coming back to Japan would be like returning to an empty home. Intent on extending Carsten's analysis of self, body and house for me (2004), Diana projected the walls of her flat onto the Japanese nation. Through an imaginary return to a Japanese airport Diana was able to clarify the meaning of her self-contained existence in Japan in a more poignant and painful light. The solitude and emptiness she sometimes felt, it seems, could feel as vast and as barren as a foreign country. At least that's how it felt when she imagined herself re-entering the solitary environment of a nation, flat and independent existence that held little value for her if there was no one there to meet her at the airport. The airport, in this sense, seemed to reflect the emptiness of her heart, and at times her life.

In being incarcerated in body and place Diana and Lidia in particular felt compelled to live and dream of a future that, like tomorrow, could not possibly exist. Realistic and practical future plans were transformed into impossible and super-individualistic fantasies that nevertheless remain influenced by a very Brazilian ideal of living in a *casa*. Both Diana and Lidia dreamed of living in a house by the sea. In Lidia's case it did not have to be next to the beach, she said. It simply had to have a view, from a given window, of an undoubtedly beautiful ocean. Of course this dream wasn't real. Not even the most independent of Brazilians would *choose* to live in a *casa* alone. Their friend Carla similarly wanted to go and live in a big house in the United States. Carla had no intention of actually going there in the flesh. She simply dreamt of being in a world alluded to on TV where the palm trees of Miami merged with the glamour and sunshine of Beverley Hills. Like Diana, Lidia and Kátia, Carla was

living the ambivalent single life in Japan, betwixt and between the 'family past' of parents back in Brazil and the hope of a 'family future.'

ENDNOTE

For Diana, Lidia and Kátia the valuing of family and attachment to family ties serve to define who they are as human beings and Brazilian nationals. The meaning of family for these three migrants, however, is full of contradictions and ambivalence. The longer they stay in Japan the more they feel caught between a family past and a non-existent family future. They may find some sense of support through the 'replacement families' of their *turmas* but the value of these friendships do not hide the fact that these three human beings want a family and a family home to call their own. These understandings of family pasts and future, in turn, shape and circumscribe one's sense of attachment to particular places. Without a *casa* to call one's own, Brazil *becomes* little more than a frustrating relationship with a sick and imposing mother. Incarcerated in body and place, Diana, Lidia and Kátia are unable to see or plan for a future that, like multiple persons, *should* be structured around meaningful social and kin ties. Diana's imaginary journey to Brazil and back offers a poignant example of the ways in which meaningful relationships play a central role in simultaneously defining notions of selfhood and the very experiences of movement and migration that are literally at and *in* the heart of many people's lives today.

As I suggested in the beginning, this ethnography has a particularly Brazilian flavour. Diana, Lidia and Kátia's lives are mutually shaped and defined in important ways by notions of kinship and personhood that hold *national* resonance in Brazil. Yet Diana, Lidia and Kátia's personal and individualised journeys through life, time and transnational social spaces offer diverse insights into the very human experience of engaging with hopes, fears and dreams. These emotions may be variously articulated, constructed and embodied but in their various forms they belong to the very essence of humanity and what it means to be a human being. Diana's poignant, changing and contradictory understandings of the world around her highlight the ongoing importance and necessity for anthropologists to engage with their informants on an ongoing, everyday basis. Through this engagement, I suggest, we are able to transcend the 'and' between 'I' and 'they' (Dumont 1992) and learn about issues and concerns that are at the heart of people's lives and the lives they share with others. By engaging with such people on an intimate, universal and heartfelt basis we are able to transcend research agendas shaped by ethnic, national and professional categories and categorisations and instead treat both Self and Other as human beings.

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