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Back to the Present: The ‘Temporal Tandem’ of Migration and Conversion among Pentecostal Nikkei Brazilians in Japan

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ABSTRACT *This article contributes to the emerging area of research in the anthropology of Christianity that focuses on mobility and temporality. It does so by elaborating on the concept of ‘temporal tandem’, which is defined as a process of joint temporalization by which seemingly disparate projects of migration and conversion become interlocked. Pentecostal converts among Brazilians of Japanese descent (Nikkeis) in Japan will serve as a case study to delineate this concept. Temporality figures as a central theme in their stories of migration to the supposed ancestral homeland as well as in their narratives of conversion in Japan. I will illustrate the ways in which conversion addresses common concerns regarding time among the migrant converts, such as ‘putting aside living for the future’. The article concludes with an observation that Nikkeis often experience Pentecostal conversion as a ‘return to the present’, where life is no longer perceived to be suspended.*

KEYWORDS *Christianity, transnational migration, temporality, Japan, Brazil*

Opening: Life of a Migrant Convert

In colloquial English, migration tends to elicit metaphors of spatial movement (e.g. flow, influx, passage), whereas conversion typically conjures up images of psychological transformation and temporal renewal (e.g. born-again, revival). But when migrants convert, how can we interpret the two phenomena in relation to each other? Marcelo is one of such migrant converts whom I met during my fieldwork at the Missão Apoio Pentecostal church in

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Toyota, Japan, where the majority of congregants are Brazilian.[1] He was a cheerful, talkative, and humorous man. One day, I visited his home not far away from Toyota station. As soon as we sat down, he started relating in earnest the stories of his life. He is a *sansei*, or a third-generation Nikkei (i.e. Brazilian of Japanese descent). He is from a rural part of the state of São Paulo where many Japanese descendants live. He vaguely remembers his Japanese grandmother, who passed away when he was seven. When I asked him what his experience was like when he first arrived in Japan, he responded with the following story:

> So I came in 1990 by myself and arrived in Narita. This guy from my temporary staffing agency[2] was waiting for me at the airport, and he put me in a van and started driving to the company's dorm. I was looking out from the windows, and said, 'What is this?' He was like, 'What do you mean?' I said, 'Where are all the modern buildings with bright colourful neon signs? Where are all the cars and people in good clothes?' [laughs] Because, you see, all I saw from the van was just vegetable fields and rice paddies and, worse yet, I smelt an odour of (…) some kind of livestock. I was like, 'What's going on? Japan is supposed to be a country of the First World (*páis do Primeiro Mundo*).' Big cities, high technology … You know. Then the guy laughed and said I had to go to Tokyo to see those things. It was a huge shock. In Brazil, we believe that the whole Japan is like that, like Tokyo.

Later in our conversation, we moved to the topic of his faith:

> Here in Japan, we work so much. In my case, it was normal to have three, even four hours of extra working hours. Sometimes I'd work from seven in the morning until ten at night. So life turns into a routine of just going back and forth between work and home – factory, home, factory, home … We want to work a lot because we want the money, you know, many want to go back to Brazil. But we have to work as well, sometimes you can't really say no to your boss. So I spent many years just going about my life like that. And you never have time. You don't have time to stop and really think, really feel. I had this emptiness in my heart, you know, but I never really paid attention.

He then described how he initially found the repeated invitation from his Brazilian evangelical[3] colleagues for church gatherings annoying because he used to think '*crentes* (born-again believers) are all fanatics'. Then one day, his wife was diagnosed with breast cancer:

> That was … hard. Very. I became desperate. I went to a church gathering at my friend's home, I and my wife. Fortunately her surgery went well and she got better.

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> Then she said she didn't want to go any more, but I kept on going. Soon I started going to church, too. Something filled the emptiness in my heart. Then I went to Encounter with God (a three-day prayer camp) … Oh! That was great. I felt that I really had the time just for myself and God, to really think about my life, my purpose, His plan for me, you know. So after that, I decided to convert. I found Jesus, finally.

Although the excerpts describe two different phenomena, migration and conversion, they share one common thread: time. Speaking about his arrival in Japan, Marcelo reveals images of Japan widely shared in Brazil: metropolitan, advanced, forward, modern, and First World. His 'huge shock' is more temporal than cultural for it was not his customs that were challenged but the sense of time he had long projected onto Japan. In a sense, he had a 'time shock'.

Then, as he narrates the story of his conversion, 'having no time' becomes a central theme. He felt suffocated because he was always busy, occupied, and cramped. Chased by work and chores without a break, he was merely going through the motions. The catharsis of his conversion narrative comes when he had the deep experience of having 'the time just for myself and God'. The transformation, then, primarily involves his sense of time. Before conversion, he could not dwell in the moment; after conversion, he can now have time for himself by dwelling on God. Before, he was always out of time; now he has it in the presence of God.

While Marcelo's story may appear idiosyncratic at first glance, that is not the case with Brazilian born-again Christians in Japan. Both migration and conversion are commonly mapped onto temporal scales in ways that show how inextricable the two phenomena are for such converts. In fact, the demographic survey I administered at Missão Apoio Toyota shows that the majority – roughly 70% – of the congregants converted in Japan after initial migration.[4] In witnessing a concomitant occurrence of migration and conversion, how can we synthesize its spatial, temporal, and psychological implications for anthropological theory? Nikkeis in Japan provide a particularly fertile socio-historical context in which this question can be explored. Having migrated to the country their Japanese ancestors left behind, they grapple with images of the past, the present, and the future in complex ways.

Mobility, Christianity, and Temporality

The 'ethnic lens' dominant in the migration and mobility studies literature[5] commonly downplays religion in its analysis of migrant incorporation and

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belonging (Glick-Schiller *et al.* 2006). In the past decade or so, however, an increasing number of scholars have been turning to religion as a major force that shapes 'an alternative cartography of belonging' (Levitt 2003: 17) among those who experience transnational mobility (Leonard *et al.* 2006; Levitt 2007; Alba *et al.* 2008; Csordas 2009; Bender *et al.* 2013). I argue that this invaluable development can further benefit from anthropological theories of time, specifically those elaborated in the anthropology of Christianity. This is because both migration and conversion, far from being solely spatial or psychological, are temporal projects that generatively inform human experience. As Nancy Munn observes, '[i]n a lived world, spatial and temporal dimensions cannot be disentangled, and the two commingle in various ways' (1992: 94).

I therefore take time and temporality as the primary analytical vehicle to articulate how migration and conversion become interrelated in the experiences of migrant converts. Frances Pine recently argued that migration is 'a project of hope and is geared toward the future, toward building a new house, investing in more land or other property, providing dowries for daughters, and generally building the prestige and the future of the house' (2014: 100). Such a nuanced analytical attention to the relationship between mobility and temporality is on the rise (Mar 2005; Besnier 2011; Gabaccia 2015). It has, however, been relatively absent from the study of the form of migration most pertinent to the case at hand, which is return migration (Potter *et al.* 2005; Christou 2006; Olsson & King 2008; Conway & Potter 2009; Tsuda 2009). Potter and Phillips (2009), for instance, highlight the 'in-between' positionality of second-generation returnees from the UK to Barbados. They depict young returnees as caught up in 'mid-air' between two contradicting cultural norms regarding racial relations and gender dynamics. Granted, many return migrants do assert the ambiguity of their situation in spatial terms. Yet, the spatial approach alone cannot duly illuminate the temporal dimension that saturates the experience of migration. I do not mean to indicate here that the scholarship on return has not paid any attention to temporality; it certainly has (Constable 1999; Markowitz & Stefansson 2004; Xiang *et al.* 2013). Time, however, remains undertheorized compared to other fields, such as the study of Christianity.

Temporal themes such as continuity and rupture have been among 'the key topics that have marked work in the anthropology of Christianity from its inception' (Robbins 2014: 167; see also Robbins 2007; Bialecki *et al.* 2008; Lampe 2010; Jenkins 2012). This is in some part due to the essential importance of conversion in Christian cultures, especially among its charismatic branches such as Pentecostalism. While conversion is usually not a cathartic event but

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a painstaking process, it is still accentuated as the beginning of a future-oriented project discontinuous from the past among many Christian groups (Stromberg 1993; Meyer 1998; Robbins 2004a; Guyer 2007; Besnier 2011; Bielo 2012).

In this article, I will elaborate on how migration and conversion hinge upon a set of heterogeneous temporalities and yet become interlocked through a process I call 'temporal tandem' – which is inspired by van Dijk's work on time, religion, and diaspora (2001). He focuses on the different modalities of time and modes of subjectivity construction manifest in Pentecostal practices in two contexts: one in the migrants' home country of Ghana and the other in the host Dutch society. In Ghana, leaders at prayer camps emphasize the 'breaking' with kinship ties and tradition as well as the move towards individuality by focusing on participants' past sins and the long-term future. In diaspora, in contrast, scrutinizing the past for potential sins becomes taboo so as not to expose the vulnerability of some migrants with painful memories (e.g. illegal status, prostitution, etc.). Instead, leaders now speak about the present and the future. In this foreign context, fostering of 'dividuality' through social relations at church becomes the key to success.

Relevant here is the relationship between conversion and migration:

> Hence, prayer camps introduce the person to transnational and transcultural relations as an emergent stranger; as somebody detached from the bonds with the family, (. . .) and therefore unconstrained in the attempts to 'make it to the West', to 'get the papers' and to become prosperous. (. . .) The prayer camps' discourse promotes a sense of strangerhood that starts at home and serves as a preparation and incubation to what they might expect when they travel to the West (van Dijk 2001: 228).

I expand van Dijk's insight beyond the experience of 'strangerhood'. In transnational mobility, conversion and migration often become mutually reinforcing as seemingly disparate temporal modalities commingle to shape migrants' subjectivities in generative ways. In this sense, migrant converts experience what can be termed the 'temporal tandem', which refers to the fundamental interworking of spatial movement and spiritual development through temporality. By formulating the concept of 'temporal tandem', I respond to the growing need to include transnational migrants in the anthropological study of Christianity (Robbins 2010: 173).

This article is based on 14 months of fieldwork in the Aichi Prefecture of Japan between 2012 and 2014 (2 months in 2012, 12 months in 2013–2014). The primary research site was Toyota City, which is home to the headquarters of

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Toyota Motor Corporation. The presence of this multinational corporation gives rise to a significant demand for flexible labour force in and around the city. Brazilians, like other foreign workers, tend to work in factories that are shunned by many Japanese as '3 K' – *kitsui* (demeaning), *kiken* (dangerous), and *kitanai* (dirty). Typically hired through temporary staffing agencies, they may work for the same factory for years as 'temporary' workers without job security or full benefits. One of the largest Brazilian enclaves in Japan, a partially subsidized housing project called Homi Danchi, is also located in Toyota (Linger 2001). During my fieldwork, there were approximately 3500 Brazilians in Homi Danchi, living with roughly an equal number of Japanese residents (Onishi 2008; Toyota City 2013). I lived in the housing complex, participating in various activities that involved Brazilians and Japanese alike.

A church of one of the most active Brazilian Pentecostal denominations in Japan is about 15 minutes away from Homi Danchi by car. Missão Apoio was founded in Japan in 1993 by two Brazilian migrants, one of whom had worked as a minister for Assembleia de Deus (the Assemblies of God) in Brazil for 13 years prior to his migration (Yamada 2014). If we were to count the places of worship (and not the number of members, which is more elusive), Missão Apoio is the second largest Brazil-derived Protestant denomination in Japan after Assembleia de Deus (23%) and on par with Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, 10%) (Shoji 2014: 40).

Given the limited space, I will focus on the experiences of migration and conversion among older migrants who first arrived in their late adolescence or early adulthood, who comprise the majority of Brazilians in Japan. Consequently, a detailed discussion of other important aspects of Brazilian Pentecostalism in Japan – such as gender, generation gaps, and proselytization of the Japanese majority – is beyond the scope of this article.

Nikkeis, The 'Modern' Minority in Brazil

Between 1908 and the 1970s, Japanese nationals migrated to Brazil in multiple waves (Lesser 1999). This movement contributed to the rise of a Nikkei community in Brazil, today numbering 1.4 million – the largest Japanese descent population outside of Japan (Sasaki 2008). In the discussion of Nikkei identities, of paramount importance are the popular images of the Japanese nation in Brazil. Japan, a rare non-Western economic power since the late nineteenth century, often impressed Brazilian elites who were striving to modernize their nation but had yet to succeed. Social discourses in Brazil (advertisements,

accounts by elites, etc.) have often emphasized Japan's positive attributes such as its First-World status, modernity, high technology, and discipline. Within this real and imagined geography of progress, the Japanese diaspora within Brazil's own territory – specifically Nikkeis in São Paulo – took on a powerful symbolic meaning. They were 'Brazilians of future' (Lesser 2007: xxvi). Nikkeis were thus a 'modern' minority, a symbol of promise for the country's progress. Their actual upward mobility and economic success in Brazil fuelled this public imagination. At the same time, Nikkeis in Brazil were also a marginalized minority because of their stereotyped irrationality, 'hyper-traditional' character, and presumed inability to assimilate (Adachi 2004). On either side of this good Japanese/bad Japanese dichotomy, the Brazilian majority presupposed a primordial bond between Nikkeis and Japan.

It is clear that presumed blood ties alone did not make the Japanese nation 'home' for the Japanese diasporic population in Brazil. Rather, Japan was turned into the home for Nikkeis because they did not belong to 'the present' in Brazil. They instead represented both the future (i.e. hyper-modernity) and the past (i.e. hyper-tradition) of Brazil, and Japan was their home 'away' – both spatially and temporally. The discursive formation of Nikkei identities in Brazil, especially as a 'hyper-modern' minority, prepared a stage for the profound shock of 'homecoming' in the 1990s and 2000s. It is in this context that Marcelo arrived in Narita to experience a 'time shock'. What greeted him was definitely not a futuristic metropolis he and many others had imagined.

Return No More

In 1990, the Japanese government introduced a new type of visa for 'long-term residents'. Often dubbed as *Nikkei-jin* (Japanese descendant) visa, it is available to foreigners of Japanese descent up to the third generation. Given this opportunity and the dire state of Brazilian economy at the time, many second- and third-generation Nikkeis started migrating to Japan. There are roughly 178,000 Brazilian nationals who live in Japan today. They form the fourth largest group of foreign residents after the Chinese, Korean, and Filipino (Ministry of Justice 2014). The system permits each Nikkei visa holder to bring his or her dependents regardless of their ethnicities, which has led to the observed diversity of Brazilians in Japan today.

Some observers have characterized this movement as a straightforward 'ethnic' return. Takeyuki Tsuda, for instance, wrote, '(. . .) the nikkeijin, as descendants of those who initially fled to Brazil because they could not survive in Japan, have now *returned* to Japan because they could not survive economically

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in Brazil either' (2003: 111 italics added). Few actual migrants, however, saw their migration to Japan as a return (Linger 2003; Sasaki 2013). With no exception, all of my Nikkei Brazilian interlocutors narrated the beginning of their life in Japan as an arrival by saying '*cheguei* (I arrived)' or '*vim* (I came)'. Marcelo's story of his arrival in Narita also attests the inadequacy of the term 'return'. His first impression of Japan betrayed not the pristine and nostalgic images he had held towards the land of his ancestors but the modern and forward pictures of the First-World nation where he thought he would belong. His 'huge shock' was therefore not prompted by failed 'return' to the ancestral homeland; instead, he was shaken by the realization of a failure to arrive at the future that Japan and his ethnicity had embodied.

The experiences of Nikkei Brazilians in Japan illuminate the plasticity of return. Return, including return migration, is not a natural event but an achievement of convincing self-transformation. A physical trip to the location where one's ancestors grew up often does not automatically constitute a return in one's mind. Rather, return requires a process of selective and yet genuine self-making, which can build the old bond to 'homeland' anew (Markowitz & Stefansson 2004). For the majority of Nikkei Brazilians, return was neither achieved nor even intended. Meanwhile, their identities went through another transformation.

Twice a Minority

Migration to Japan entailed a significant change in social context, which in turn triggered a drastic shift in migrants' ethnic self-images. Now perceived as unskilled, temporary, and migrant labourers, which in most cases they actually are, Nikkei Brazilians' social status suffered great humiliation (cf. Robbins 2004a). Nathan, a 36-year-old Nikkei Brazilian man, describes 'the principal difference' between Brazil and Japan in the following way:

> In Brazil, Japanese-Brazilians are treated mostly in relation to the Japanese nation – because we look alike, you know. It's a great pride of the Japanese race. (…) Not all are successful, but the majority of descendants there are very educated and hard-working. So they ended up creating a culture and an aura around descendants (…).
>
> This is not the case here in Japan. Those people who were none of these things all came here! [bursts out in laughter with his Brazilian friend] Here it is the opposite. Who is polite, educated, civilized and industrious here? It's the opposite! We commit petty crimes, get into fights all the time, and are lazy. People who are violent, and steal. This is the principal difference that I see. (…) Here, suddenly

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> your culture is lower. The ideals, society, life, and future that shaped you and trained you, they all fail.

Nathan's words echo a predominant sense of 'class downgrade' that permeates the migrant communities. Some talk about it bitterly with a frown, others calmly with a shrug, and those like Nathan with a resilient laughter. He is in no way the only one who sees their social status in Japan as suffering and humiliating, compared with the positive qualities they (used to) embody in Brazil. Luana, a 49-year-old Nikkei who has been living in Japan for 23 years, similarly observed, 'In Brazil, we are such positive people – intelligent, polite, diligent. They say, "Want to get into USP (University of São Paulo)? Kill a Japanese and you have a spot!" [laughs] Here, it's nothing like that.'

The level of formal education among migrant converts at Missão Apoio Toyota is actually not as high as the stereotypical image of 'professional' Nikkeis in Brazil. My survey data show that roughly 90% of respondents had the equivalent of a high school diploma or less. Only 10% reported to have progressed to college or beyond.[6] Despite such a large discrepancy between the stereotypes and the survey data, most migrants still felt that migration had spoiled the protective 'aura' of ethnic prestige.

While many simply lament or shrug off this demeaning transition, some Brazilian migrants make conscious effort to rebuild their social reputation in Japan. Fumio Shimamura is one of such people, who appeared on the December 2013 issue of *Alternativa*, a free magazine in Portuguese read widely among Brazilians in Japan. In an article entitled 'I Want to Help Brazilians Have a Decent Life', Shimamura expressed his sense of public duty as the only Brazilian public accountant certified to practise in Japan: 'I hope that one day the reputation of Nikkei Brazilians will be equal to that which the Japanese(-Brazilians)[7] had in Brazil' (Ezaki 2013). Ironically, Shimamura's aspiration still hinges upon the tacit consensus that the social status of Nikkei Brazilians in Japan is in no way comparable to that of Nikkeis in Brazil.

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Return as a Place of Hope: Future in Brazil

In Portuguese, the migration of Nikkei Brazilians to Japan is often called '*movimento dekassegui* (movement of temporary workers)'. True to the term, many migrants arrived in Japan with the intention of returning to Brazil in a few years after saving as much money as possible (Kawamura 1999). Comfort was often postponed in the name of procuring a better middle-class future for their return to Brazil. What they initially tolerated as temporary discomfort,

however, quickly turned into a perpetual state, as 'several years' became 5, 10, and even 20. Some migrants have returned to Brazil to achieve the goals they set out for, never returning to Japan again. But those who continue to live in Japan are oftentimes still under the spell of perpetual temporariness. Some migrants who became critical of this psychological tendency call it an 'illusion of return (*ilusão de voltar*)'. André, who successfully landed a job as an interpreter with his hard-learned Japanese, told me, 'They'd better stop it. It's an illusion. They say they will return next year, but they never do. Some have lived here for ten years and don't know a single word of Japanese'.

Illusion of return is an ingenious way to characterize how migrants deal with the perpetual temporariness of life. It captures the power return exerts in their minds not as a realistic and concrete action to be carried out but as a fantastic and faraway plan to be fantasized about. Artur, for example, talked about return in the following way:

> I am from Rio, you know Rio? Lots of beaches, beautiful. See that? [He turns on his iPhone to show photos of beautiful turquoise-blue ocean] My house is just a few kilometres away from this place. [His 13-year-old son peeks in, smiles, and says he wants to live there] I know, son. What? No, he was born and raised here in Toyota. I will return, you know, it's just that it's a beautiful place with no jobs. So I will save money and return.

For many migrants, return becomes not an act one actually plans for but a place in mind where future desires can be safely stored. In a similar vein, Brettel observes the ideological importance of '*emigrar para voltar* (emigrate to return)' in the history of Portuguese migration. She argues that such an mindset proves psychologically protective for migrants even when physical return does not materialize for the following reason:

> ... this maintenance of an intention to return alongside the postponement of actual return is a way of dealing with the insecure environment abroad, where the position of the migrant is very much at the mercy of fluctuations in the international economic system (2003: 71).

Return, in this sense, is a place of hope (cf. Schneider 2000; Miyazaki 2004). In the case of many Brazilian migrants in Japan, the future now lies in Brazil.

Transpacific Gypsies

Even after a decade, two decades, and in many cases acquiring permanent resident visas in Japan, many Brazilian migrants still talk about returning to Brazil 'soon'. They would then admit that they had been living in Japan for

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over a decade or that this was their third time to be working in Japan, usually smiling with a hint of embarrassment. Since the migrant population peaked at 313,000 in 2008 (Higuchi 2010), fewer and fewer new migrants have been entering this transpacific migratory circuit. I met a number of families during my fieldwork who had just arrived from Brazil, but only a handful were 'new faces' or those who had never lived in Japan before.

Many migrants are critical of repeated migration that has become rather common among Brazilians in Japan. For instance, Helio – a 23-year-old Nikkei Brazilian man – once asked me: 'So, have you found anything interesting about us yet?' It was after a Sunday evening mass in Portuguese at a Catholic church in a neighbouring city of Toyota and he knew that I was a researcher. 'Well, let me think … ' 'Have you noticed', Helio interrupted me, 'that too many of us go back and forth between Brazil and Japan, never becoming firm in our decision to stay in either country? It is a problem.' He shook his head. 'This is not good.' At that moment, the father arrived and he excused himself to go into the confessional.

Researchers of transnationalism have long theorized the ways in which the lives of migrants and those who are related to them are not contained within the borders of nation-states. Vertovec, for instance, uses the term 'bifocality' devised by Rouse (1992) to capture the state of transnational life that is simultaneously 'here' and 'there' (Vertovec 2007: 153; see also Levitt & Glick-Schiller 2007; for other discussions of 'bifocal', see Besnier 2011: 12). While bifocal mode of being can be celebrated as something liberating, most Brazilians in Japan view their state in a more critical light. Repeated migration is commonplace yet often frowned upon because it signifies the inability to establish a stable middle-class life in either country. In other words, the number of crossings between the two nations equals the number of failures to arrive at a better future, which was the purpose of migration in the first place. One elderly Nikkei Brazilian man in his fifties summed up this frustration succinctly in the following way:

> Nikkeis, it looks like they have a country but they virtually don't. When in Brazil, they are Japanese. When in Japan, they are Brazilian. So we do but it's like we don't have any country. We move around too much, too, never settling down, never knowing how to establish ourselves. We are like gypsies (*ciganos*) [laughs].

'We Are in Japan but We Don't Live Here'

While migrants wait uncertainly to return to a better future, the life in Japan becomes suspended for many. The prevalence of this sense of suspension

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became clearer to me every time someone said, often fleetingly, 'I don't live here. I came here to work (*Não estou aqui para morar, vim para trabalhar sô*).' The felt divide between *morar* and *trabalhar* was brought home in an unexpected way in the responses to the demographic survey at the church. Among some 35 items, there was the following question: 'When did you first come to Japan in order to work and/or live here? [___ years ago, or in the year ___].' It asked when the respondent came to Japan, excluding brief trips and visits. As I went through the responses, however, I realized that many people crossed out 'live' and circled 'work' – instead of or in addition to answering the year of their first arrival. I had included the phrase 'or to live' with younger Brazilians in mind, who were too little to work when they were first brought to Japan. But the juxtaposition of 'work' and 'live' invited an unexpected input from older migrants. The majority of the people who circled 'work' – about 10% of all respondents[8] – were men who arrived in Japan in their early adulthood. That they were compelled to cross out 'live', even when that was not the question, shows how divisive the line between life and work can be in the minds of some migrants.

Nathan, who has lived in Toyota for over 20 years, elaborated eloquently on what I call the suspension of life:

> People went back to Brazil, (. . .) things went wrong there and they ended up returning here. For one family, looking at each individual family, this has happened at least once. Sometimes twice. Even three times. You come, go, come, go, and then come . . . At a certain moment, one realizes, 'Oh my God, I am losing years of my life – because I am depriving myself of living, planning a future that doesn't happen. Is it worth putting aside living (*deixar de viver*)?'

When I inquired about what exactly he meant by '*deixar de viver*', he responded, 'There exists a difference between living (*viver*) and surviving (*sobreviver*).' He continued:

> So when a person lives poorly [i.e. survives], it cannot be considered that he has lived. He simply hasn't lived. That doesn't exist, that's like a negative number because it was bad. A good experience is positive. (. . .) For me, living is much more than you being there just doing what others want from you. (. . .)
>
> Or, [*deixar de viver* means] that this person doesn't buy anything because he needs to save money to live the future. A person doesn't go to any place because this would be a waste of money, and he cannot do this if he wants to save money to live the future one day. A person cannot dress well. Because this would waste the money that – he is thinking – should be spent in the future.

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(Author) And does this future oftentimes exist in Brazil?

(Nathan) That's what they plan for themselves.

Other than 'to put aside living', *deixar de viver* more literally means 'stop living' or 'quit living'. Nathan's narrative fleshes out how life can actually stop in the lived experiences of migrants as they wait and prepare uncertainly for the future – the future which, Nathan observes, often 'does not happen'.

In this context of perpetual temporariness that permeates the migrants' lives, many come to feel suspended between two futures: one in Japan and the other in Brazil. Upon initial migration, migrants saw how Japan turned out to be anything but the hyper-modern First-World nation that Nikkei ethnicity had symbolized in Brazil. Thus, the migrants did not arrive at the future in Japan where many thought they would belong. Since then, the future for many migrants in turn has rested in Brazil, and many talk about returning there. Unlike the intention of return, however, the materialization of actual return – especially the return to the ideal future – is rare. Thus, both the future and the present often come to gain qualities of phantasm in migrants' lived experiences. While both tenses remain real as mental categories and scaffoldings for fantasy, they enact little experiential immediacy. This, in turn, leads to the ubiquitous symptom of temporal suffocation – 'I don't have time. I work so much. But this is necessary for me to return one day.' The claim that the present does not possess innate experiential immediacy may strike some readers as odd. As James and Mills point out, however, '[t]he present is of course a convention, a sort of symbolic fiction, in itself' (2006: 2). I take fiction to be a synonym for malleable reality – not for fake construct – while acknowledging the need to be cautious with extreme experiential relativism (Gell 1992).

The question then is if and how migrants in this context start reconfiguring their temporal realities in ways that do not lead to temporal limbo; and the short answer is, they do. For example, an increasing number of Brazilians have been making a conscious decision to 'stay (*permanecer*)' and 'live (*morar*)' in Japan. They move towards their new vision of future by paying mortgages, making sustained efforts to learn Japanese, and by consciously sending their offspring to Japanese schools instead of Brazilian ones. I must add, however, that those who can set up long-term future-oriented plans still form an absolute minority among Brazilian migrants at large. The major obstacles are job insecurity, language barriers, and unfamiliarity with Japanese cultural conventions. Although many form casual friendships with their Japanese colleagues at

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work, such interactions typically do not enhance the sense of embeddedness in Japanese society. This is because those Japanese employees who find themselves in the vicinity of migrant workers likewise occupy precarious and marginal positions in the Japanese labour system (for neoliberalism in Japan, see Allison 2013).

It is quite feasible, therefore, that those migrants who find it difficult to envision the future – or to experience the present – in mainstream Japanese society may end up looking elsewhere. This is where the discussion of Pentecostalism becomes relevant and I now turn to the anthropology of Christianity.

Modern Again in Japan?

Anthropologists of Christianity have commonly analysed conversion in relation to the theme of modernity – or at least with implications for forward temporal movement. Peter van der Veer, for example, characterized the worldwide growth of Christianity as 'conversion to modernity' (1995). Along a similar line, Meyer (1999) observed that Pentecostal converts among the Peki Ewe in Ghana embrace Christianity as the promising path to modernity, although conversion comes with an emotional and social price. They must cut themselves off from generations-old obligations to serve their ancestral and lineage gods. Ewe spirits continue to possess converts, and the church translates them as demons that must be exorcised in collective services. Meyer summarizes, 'Pentecostalism provides a bridge over which it is possible to move back and forth [between Christianity and Ewe religion] and thereby to thematise modernity's ambivalence' (Meyer 1999: 215). More recently, van de Kamp (2012) analysed the 'love therapy (*terapia do amor*)' of Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in Mozambique as a practice aimed at cultivating modern personhood. The therapy has attracted many young women for it offers new ways to embody emotional intimacy and relational commitment. Following the global trend in many parts of the world, the younger generations tend to view love as a token of modern individuality (Hirsch & Wardlow 2006; Padilla *et al.* 2008). In this context, love becomes a way to cultivate a modern and moral identity connected with the transnational network of Pentecostalism. Love therapy thus provides young upwardly mobile women with space, ideas, and practices to give meaning to their economic independence; it also helps them to disentangle themselves from their kin and 'tradition'.

Thus, the global growth of Pentecostalism may have been conducive to the spread of modern identity in various parts of the world (Freston 2001b; Mariz 2009; Klaver & van de Kamp 2011; McGovern 2012; Rocha & Vásquez 2013;

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Scherz 2013). Modern sensibility can be characterized as 'a sense that the passage of time should expectably be marked by progress and improvement vis-à-vis the past', which appears 'so ubiquitous today' (Knauft 2002: 7). Is the interdependence of conversion and modernity also manifest among Nikkei converts in Japan, who used to represent hyper-modernity in Brazil? My fieldwork data indeed suggest such implications. For instance, a number of churchgoers told me that marriage is one area of Japanese culture that must be 'renovated'. One pastor told me:

> I heard that married couples here treat each other like air after years of marriage and they think it's normal. They even have a word for it – *kamen hūhu* (masked marriage). It's horrible. Marriage is an alliance of love that unites two individuals forever. Japanese couples don't even show love to each other! But younger generations are changing it now, and that's great.

Here, he differentiates between loveless traditional Japanese marriage and loving modern Christian relationship. Likewise, many Brazilian converts make critical comments about what they see as 'the Japanese tradition', thereby implying that their ideas and practices are more modern, if not morally superior. In this vein, conversion to Pentecostalism can be read as a collective endeavour to restore and rebuild in Japan the modern social status they once had in Brazil. Such an interpretation also resonates well with Robbins' argument about the link between social humiliation and religious conversion (2004a). In other words, the failure of progress as upward mobility – material or social – through their initial project of migration is being compensated for by spiritual advancement to 'modern' religious sensibility through conversion. However, my fieldwork data point to yet another temporality at work in addition to the one towards modernity. That is, conversion as a return to the present.

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No Time to Live

To elucidate this point, I return to the conversion narrative of Marcelo, which was introduced in the beginning. The first thing Marcelo said when prompted to recount how he converted was, 'Here in Japan, we work so much'. He then described how power dynamics in the factory, heavy workloads, and migrants' focus on economic gain contribute to the exhausting repetitiveness of life – a temporal modality comparable to what Thompson once characterized as 'clock-time', or synchronic time instrumental to the

work-discipline of capitalism (Thompson 1967). This monotony of life fuelled the sense of what Marcelo calls 'emptiness in heart', which lasted for years since he did not have time to 'pay attention' to it. His depiction of his pre-conversion life overlaps greatly with Nathan's observation about 'stop living (*deixar de viver*)'. That is, they 'put aside living' so they could live the better future purportedly awaiting them in Brazil. Mind-numbing routine and suspension of life constituted the basic tone of Marcelo's reality before conversion.

Marcelo initially resisted his Pentecostal colleagues' invitations for church gatherings and his own desire to go as he used to believe that 'all *crentes* (born-again believers) are fanatics'. He then recounted his wife's cancer as the final push that enabled him to overcome initial reluctance. It is important to note here that the suffering from the illness is not the driving theme of his narrative; nor does the subsequent healing of the disease mark the climax of the story. In fact, he matter of factly admits that his wife simply stopped going to church gatherings soon after her recovery. The experience of the illness, then, is a one-time trigger rather than a long-running undercurrent of the story.

What runs through Marcelo's narrative from the beginning to the end is the numbing monotony of life, which causes him a vague sense of crisis: That he was not stopping to reflect on his life, that life is slipping away like sand between his fingers, and that by merely going through the motions every day, he was risking going through his whole life without experiencing anything. This theme of 'no time to live' also provides the moment of catharsis, which happens during the prayer camp called Encounter with God. He stated, 'I felt that I really had the time just for myself and God, to really think about my life, my purpose, His plan for me, you know.' For Marcelo, his conversion was not propelled by some traumatic suffering such as illness, discrimination, or poverty, although he recounted all of them to some degree in the interview. Rather, what made him susceptible to an 'encounter with God' is the feeling of suffocation that time was not allowing him to truly live.

Marcelo's feeling of 'no time to live' is far from an isolated idiosyncratic experience but a widespread sentiment among Brazilian workers in Japan. Virtually all working Brazilians – male and female, old and young – told me that they never had time. In the beginning of my fieldwork, this used to baffle me. Why would they convert to Pentecostalism when this means that what little time they had left would now be spent on numerous church activities? Why do so many come to the church at 9:30 pm after a long day of work on a Tuesday night to study the Bible, when this likely means a lack of sleep for their already tired bodies? Why do so many show up to Friday night gathering

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around 9 pm, when the long-awaited weekend of free time has just started? Why would they actively decide to participate in something that takes away even more of their already scarce time?

Some regular activities of the church are rather time-consuming and physically tiring, such as late-night prayer gathering called vigil (*vigília*). Every Friday, congregants would gather at the foot of a small mountain around midnight. Typically about two dozen people would come to climb up to the top of the mountain where there is a small clearing overlooking the city of Toyota. Prayer at this dark, quiet, and isolated place is meant to encourage an even more intimate relationship with God. It is close to 3 am when they start to descend the mountain, to where they parked their cars.

Not being used to such late-night activities, I was quite exhausted the first several times when I rode with my friends to the mountain and participated in vigil. One night on our way home to Homi Danchi, I finally asked my friend who happened to give me a ride that night what motivated her to come to vigil every Friday. Lucia promptly answered, 'Well, here in Japan, we work so much. And I have kids too so I am literally running around all the time. When I come here or go to church activities like Encounter with God, it's just really nice, because I have the time for myself. It's like I can finally breathe.'

When migrant converts speak of having time for oneself with God, they are clearly not referring to clock-time, which saturates their experience of unskilled wage labour. Since the majority tolerate the work-discipline imposed by clock-time 'to save money and return to Brazil', seeking time outside of work means the pursuit of time that is not spent on preparation for the future. In other words, they are looking for the time in which one can live the present without postponing or sacrificing it.

Return to the Present

Simon Coleman, in his article on charismatic Christians in Sweden (2011), describes the coexistence and interrelation of two distinct temporalities. On one hand, church members 'invoke' history by acknowledging the repetitive and mimetic nature of their actions. But they also 'make' history by framing their experiences as new events discontinuous from the past and directed towards ultimate salvation. The emphasis on 'right now', he observes, simultaneously engages both perceptions of history and thereby creates a charismatic temporality that dovetails the past and the future, the personal and the collective, and continuity and rupture. It is such a charismatic temporality that

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sustains 'chronic conversion' (Coleman 2011: 443) couched in the succession of renewals in the present. Coleman also points out how charismatic actions in the present are also effective in enacting future time (Coleman 2011). Therefore, the return to the present does not necessarily entail the negligence of the future but a change in temporal locus of action.

The charismatic temporality of 'right now, right here' exerts tremendous appeal to such migrants as Nikkei Brazilians in Japan, who have been suspended between two futures. Tired of the perpetual suspension of life that the planned return to Brazil has imposed upon them, many welcome the charismatic temporality like a fresh breeze of air. Instead of returning to the future, they find a way to return to the present.

A session from a Bible study course designed by Missão Apoio drives this point home. One night, Sara asked me if I wanted to come to a Bible study group. I accepted her offer and, in the following week, we met at a coffee shop in a neighbouring city of Toyota where she lived. As soon as I arrived, I quickly realized it was going to be just Sara and I although I had been under the impression that it was a group study. She clarified that it was actually a one-on-one Bible study session that her church was developing for those interested in or new to the faith. After some back-and-forth about my ambiguous position as a researcher, I decided to accept the opportunity, thanked her for her time, and sat down. After all, it was true that I was 'interested in the Bible and curious to learn', as she put it. I quickly found out that the course was designed in part to proselytize Japanese individuals because the handout Sara gave me was in (sometimes unidiomatic) Japanese while the one she kept in her hand was in Portuguese (she neither spoke nor read Japanese).[9]

Faithful to the handout, she started our first session by telling a story from the gospel of Mark (Mark 10: 46–52): Bartimaeus, a blind beggar in the city of Jericho, hears Jesus Christ and shouts out to him, begging for mercy. When Jesus asks him what he desires, he asks to be cured of blindness, which Jesus grants instantaneously, saying that his faith has healed him. Bartimaeus thereafter follows Jesus along the road. Then Sara moved on to explain the important points of this story, mostly following the bullet points on the prepared material. When it came to the part which discussed 'what obstacles Bartimaeus had to overcome to get what he desired', however, she put down the sheet and started telling how she related to the story:

> You see how Bartimaeus overcame his complacency (*comodismo*) and conquered his own pride (*orgulho*)? This is really, really difficult. It's hard to get out of the habit of

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> being satisfied with the routine. It's even harder, for some people, to let go of one's pride, surrender, and just cry out for help. We Brazilians typically came to Japan to work and earn money. Very quickly, we fall into this spiral of meaningless routine. Home, factory, home, factory, home, factory, party with friends, sleep, home, factory .... You know, it's really hard to have a sense of purpose in this kind of lifestyle. I hated it. I only liked the weekend when I could party with friends, but even that was empty somehow when I look back now. But once you accept Jesus, life cannot be a routine any more. Every day is new with Jesus. He fortifies us, and we are renewed like an eagle. But you cannot make this change happen on your own. You need God for real change.

Taken together with other data discussed in the article, I believe it is more than a mere coincidence that the story of Bartimaeus marked the beginning of the 10-week Bible course. In many ways, the biblical character embodies the sense of renewal in the present that many migrants crave after years of suspended life in Japan.

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Conclusion: Temporal Tandem

Many countries around the globe have seen the growth of charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity (Freston 2001a; Vásquez & Marquardt 2003; Robbins 2004b; Bialecki *et al.* 2008; Brown 2011; Hefner 2013). The charismatic expansion has not left migrant groups untouched, and researchers to date have offered a number of interpretations of its role among migrants: promotion of ethnic space and collective solidarity (Margolis 2009; 2013; Williams *et al.* 2009), formation of new migrant identities and social networks (van Dijk 2002), facilitation of migrants' transnational mobility (Austin-Broos 2001; Mafra *et al.* 2013), viable reaction against social marginalization (Toulis 1997; Brodwin 2003), and mediation of trans-ethnic minority networks (Glick-Schiller *et al.* 2006). Needless to say, none of these is mutually exclusive and Missão Apoio fulfils all of these roles to some degree.

The case study of Nikkei Brazilian migrants, however, moves us to acknowledge the process of temporalization at the intersection of migration and conversion. According to Nancy Munn, the concept of temporalization refers to a view of time 'as a symbolic process continually being produced in everyday practices. People are "in" a sociocultural time of multiple dimensions (sequencing, timing, past-present-future relation, etc.) that they are forming in their "projects"' (1992: 116). In this article, I have focused on two of such projects common among Nikkei migrant converts: return to the future and return to the present. The

former entails forward-looking projection of a better future, 'illusion' of return as a way to sustain hope, and a sense of perpetual temporariness. Although extracted from a specific case study in Japan, these may well be common symptoms among labour migrants across borders who inhabit the margins of flexible neoliberal economy in late capitalism (Pine 2014). The latter, in contrast, hinges upon the charismatic temporality of 'right now, right here'. It is accessed and fostered not only through explicit discursive messages such as sermons but also by embodied practices such as expressive prayer. As Tanya Luhrmann's detailed account of evangelical prayer practices demonstrates (2012), immersive prayer often calls forth and trains absorption: 'the capacity to focus in on the mind's object (...) and to allow that focus to increase while diminishing our attention to the myriad of everyday distractions that accompany the management of normal life' (Luhrmann 2012: 200). Like Luhrmann's interlocutors, my friends at Missão Apoio also frequently related episodes of absorption in prayer, during which one's sense of time becomes more elastic. Some, for instance, reported that they are often surprised to find out how much time has passed when they come out of prayer. Given that those with such experience typically feel rejuvenated, the temporalization of the charismatic present through Pentecostal practices may have some therapeutic effect – especially for those who have not inhabited the experientially immediate 'now' for many years.

Most importantly, the two projects of migration and conversion are interrelated and interdependent – the kind of relationship that may be termed a temporal tandem. By temporal tandem, I mean a joint production or reconfiguration of time – or temporalization – that simultaneously draws on and drives seemingly disparate and yet closely related projects. In the case of Nikkei migrant converts in Japan, the working of temporal tandem is apparent in how the prolonged suspension of life anticipates the charismatic temporality of 'right now'. Indeed, it is through temporalization that migration and conversion become firmly interlocked to generatively shape the lived worlds of migrant converts. I must also add that temporal tandem works in multidirectional ways. For instance, many migrants, once converted, start to frame migration as a mission driven by higher purpose, for they are to evangelize a modern and yet 'pagan' nation such as Japan. In this view, Japan once again becomes the potential future of the migrants, but this time, the future of the worldwide Christian frontier. Other migrants return to Brazil expressing less anxiety and fear of failing to actualize in Brazil the rosy middle-class future. Charismatic rhetoric typically flattens out geographical, temporal, and cultural

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differences that we often associate with national borders (cf. Coleman 2000: 224). To Pentecostal migrants, life should be the same – equally difficult and equally rewarding – whether in Japan or Brazil, as long as they are in the presence of God. It is one time – one temporality – that must reign over both countries, which is an endless and continuous succession of renewals in the present. Thus, the charismatic temporality now generatively informs migratory issues and helps migrant converts to give affirming meanings to their still precarious lives.

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Notes

1. All the names that appear in the article are pseudonyms, with the exception of Missão Apoio. The denomination has been studied by several scholars, who have published using its real name (e.g. Quero & Shoji 2014). Since Brazilian migrants in Japan live in multi-lingual settings, the data were collected in Portuguese, Japanese, and in a creole-like mixture of both. All the interview excerpts that appear in this article were recorded in Portuguese, which includes some Japanese words that have entered the daily lexicon of Brazilian migrants.
2. Most Brazilian migrants paid staffing agencies (*empreiteira*) for arranging their trip and visa to Japan, the cost of which they were obligated to pay back.
3. In Brazil, *evangélico* (evangelical) and *crente* (believer) are two popular terms to refer to born-again Christians. The discursive boundary of 'evangelical' does not necessarily overlap with that in the USA.
4. 68.3% (127 out of 186 valid responses). I focus on those who converted in Japan in this article.
5. Mobility is an increasingly common term to refer to various forms of migration because the former theoretically subsumes the latter (Glick Schiller & Salazar 2013). While I am aware of this trend, I continue to use the term migration as well, in order to reflect the normal language used by my interlocutors.

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6. 17 out of 160 respondents who answered this item.
7. *Os japoneses* refer to both Japanese nationals in Japan and Japanese descendants in Brazil in colloquial Portuguese; the two are often considered interchangeable (Lesser 2007: 45).
8. 10.7% (20 out of 186 valid responses).
9. Missão Apoio's endeavour to actively proselytize the Japanese started only recently. At the time of my fieldwork, Missão Apoio Toyota had only one converted Japanese member among roughly 450 Brazilian adherents.

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