

Article

Perceptions of a Japanese Company Outside Japan

A Case Study of Belonging and Antagonism in a Multicultural Workplace in Brazil

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This article presents a qualitative analysis from interviews with six local employees of a Japanese company in Brazil. The aim was the description of conflicts caused by differences between employees' perception about Japanese national and cultural identity, gender roles and age. The fieldwork was conducted on a Japanese car manufacturer with worldwide presence and almost 60 years of production experience in Brazil.

One of the greatest priorities of modern humanity is labor and the environment of large companies is a laboratory where social issues are reflected very intensively. When people are confined together in small spaces for long periods of time, hidden discriminations are revealed. Clarification of where each person stands on complex issues is socially demanded. Actors of different ages, social classes, nationalities and genders influence these scenarios and are influenced by them. The individuals create ties with antagonistic social groups at the same time they try to manipulate the perception of the oppositions to work on their favor. This article provides insight on possible sources of conflict in multicultural workplaces through the open presentation of employees' thoughts on a variety of contexts.

Keywords: Japanese Culture and Identity, Japanese Multinational Enterprises, Multicultural Workplaces, Gender Studies, Aging

Introduction

This article presents a qualitative analysis from interviews with six local employees of a Japanese company in Brazil. The aim is the investigation of conflicts caused by differences between employees in the work environment, mainly regarding perception of Japanese national and cultural identity – strongly tied to the Japanese language -, gender roles and age. Although there are substantial differences between corporate culture and the culture of the country where a company is created, it is important to introduce some background information about Brazil and Japan, considering that the practices and values of workplaces are not entities isolated from society as a whole¹. The meanings of each aspect of the organizational routine are impacted by the history of the organization; the participants on this dynamics change the organizational structure and are changed by it as their daily work interferes with rules, hierarchies, production and reproduction of values, etc. Externally, the large changes in society limit the possible dialogues within organizations; the reinterpretation of the trade unions role and globalization of the economy are just some of the many factors that change the balance of power involved. The relevance of the issue is evidenced by the cultural exchanges between the two countries, emulated by the migration movements throughout the history. Not only the largest population of *nikkeijins* - the Japanese people who emigrated from Japan and their descendants - is in Brazil², but the Brazilian community in Japan is one of the largest; the third, just behind the Chinese and Korean³. This exchange is also reflected by

¹ Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p. 90.

² For this and other statistical data concerning Japanese migration to Brazil, consult: IBGE, *Resistência & integração: 100 anos de imigração japonesa no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: IBGE, 2008).

³ For this and other statistical data concerning migration to Japan, consult: MIC, *Japan statistical yearbook 2013*

the large number of Japanese multinationals affiliates in Brazil and companies founded by Japanese people in Brazilian soil. The particular social dynamics within these workplaces is a widely recognized and interesting phenomenon.

The examination of the matter in question can neither be dissociated from a brief debate on the concept of globalization. Harumi Befu challenges the notion that globalization is typically a Western phenomenon and advocates a multipolar globalization, analyzing Japanese presence in Asia, Europe and the Americas⁴. The axis through which the contemporary Japanese globalization takes place would be the already mentioned establishment of affiliates of Japanese MNEs (Multinational Enterprises). The Japanese who migrate to countries for the implementation of these affiliates would not have, usually, intention to stay and make plans to return to the country of origin within 5 years. This group of employees usually would occupy the highest positions of local decision making and constantly refer to the Head Office in Japan, reinforcing the affiliate's subordinate position. Their relationship with the *issei*⁵ and their descendants born outside Japan would be complex and intertwined. The permanent and non-permanent categories are not static; according to Befu, migrants change their plans depending to the circumstances⁶. For instance, in the early twentieth century, many of the *issei* who traveled to Brazil hoped to return to Japan after a short period abroad, but the context of the Second World War made them change their mind⁷. Both groups employ to the fullest their cultural capital, where the knowledge of the Japanese language is considered the most valuable resource.

Already in the beginning of the 1990's, the linguist Akemi Yamashita published an article for the journal *Nihongo Kyouiku*⁸ addressing the Japanese presence in companies located in Brazil. The questionnaires used in the occasion were distributed to 100 of the 300 companies in the city of São Paulo associated to the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and 68 responded. The response forms were anonymous, thus the link between companies and their respective answers is not traceable. Among the findings of Yamashita⁹, it is interesting to note that there were no wage differences between local employees who spoke Japanese and those who did not speak. In the opinion of the managers consulted, the professional performance of the two groups was similar and, more than the fluency in language, "Japanese discipline and honesty" were valued. Those who mastered the language, however, were preferred when training opportunities in Japan were offered, what would lead to competitive advantages in the long term career path. The data indicated that 79% of the staff in operational level was composed by Brazilians without Japanese ancestry, 18% by recently migrated Japanese and only 3% by members of the Japanese community in Brazil. On the other hand, management positions were occupied mostly (56%) by members of the local *nikkei* community, followed by Japanese (24%) and non-descendants (6%). It is relevant to include also that the use of the English language and translators was not common on daily activities in 1986, according to the conducted survey. At the time, Miyao¹⁰ analyzed the data and concluded that the fundamental role of those with fluency of Japanese was to intermediate the dialogues between Japanese managers and other employees at the operational level who were not fluent in the Japanese language. He warned about a "worrying trend" that this fluency was declining among the Japanese descendants.

The research took place in the affiliate of a Japanese MNE which has factories in Brazil for almost 60 years. There are more than 5000 employees in the Brazilian factories and offices working for this widely known car manufacturer. No female employees occupy positions as directors, the highest position in the hierarchy, and

(Tokyo Statistics Bureau, 2012).

⁴ Harumi Befu, "The global context of Japan outside Japan", in *Globalizing Japan: Ethnography of the Japanese presence in Asia, Europe, and America*, ed. Harumi Befu and Sylvie Guichard-Auguis (New York: Routledge, 2001), 4.

⁵ The term *Issei* refers to the first generation of migrants. Their children are called *Nisei*; their grandchildren, *Sansei*; and so forth.

⁶ Befu, 8.

⁷ Adriana Oliveira, "Japoneses no Brasil ou brasileiros no Japão: a trajetória de uma identidade em um contexto migratório" (master's thesis, University of Campinas, 1997).

⁸ Akemi Yamashita, "Burajiru no kigyō ni okeru nihongo no hyōka", *Nihongo Kyouiku* 73, (1991).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Susumu Miyao, "Nihongo nouryoku wa nikkei kigyō ni totte hitsuyō ka: Nihongo fukyū senta- no chōsa kara", in *Burajiru no nikkei shakai ronshū: Bo-daresu ni naru nikkeijin* (São Paulo: Toppan Press, 2002).

only 15% of them are department chiefs, the lowest management position. Also less than 1% of the members of the production line are women. The majority of them are concentrated in desk jobs, composing around 25% of the employees in these sectors. Around half of the employees at the operational level have less than 30 years of age, both in offices and in the production line. Interns and apprentices are the youngest; directors, the eldest. A fifth of the department chiefs have more than 50 years of age and the rest are older than 30 years. This data is available on the company website, but as long as the anonymity of the company supports the protection of the identity of the interviewees, the company name will not be presented.

The particular type of environment of the company under study - sometimes in consonance, other times in open confrontation with the social agents' characteristics - leads to a limited range of strategies to compete and survive against potential competitors. Using concepts from Bourdieu, it can be stated that the practices are not result only of the *habitus* - a property of the individuals, groups or institutions -, but of the interaction between *habitus* and the *field* or current circumstances¹¹. *Habitus* is a precious concept that underlines all the evaluation of the results of the conducted interviews and it is both the result of an organizing action and a predisposition¹². It allows us to reflect upon the regulation of behavior without the necessity of open rules, as can be seen in the company environment. The uniqueness of the content of experiences by a particular employee is observed in parallel of a similarity in their structure with others from a shared background - e.g., the already mentioned ethnicity, gender and aging categories. The recognition of the moral value of actions and characteristics of employees through a differentiated career path is referenced by the idea of "embedded social structures" from Bourdieu¹³. The practical knowledge of societies requires the mastering of a system to understand it and this implies in knowing what is considered part of common sense and what is not. The principles of this system of division have as consequence an almost permanent conflict. Individuals create ties with one of the opposing groups while trying to manipulate these rivalries to work on their advantage. In the presumably meritocratic environment of a multinational company, not only the achievements from the work activity itself, but also how they are delivered and who delivers them is relevant. Bourdieu uses several synonyms in order to clarify the meaning of these categories of distinction: "classificatory schemes", "ways of classification", "mental structures", "symbolic forms" and "historical schemes of perception and appreciation" are some examples¹⁴.

1. Method

Semi-structured interviews with employees of the company were conducted between 2012 and 2013. The choice for the type of interview considered the experience of the author in the field of research, the flexibility in controlling the time required and the ease with which the wealth of the problems can be addressed. Subsequently it was confirmed to be a good choice also due to the difficulty of finding a large number of volunteers to be interviewed, invalidating survey research, and the gradual increase of the researcher's concern regarding the possibility of identifying respondents by their answers, quite plausible in fully open interviews.

Traditionally ethical concerns in interviews involve three aspects¹⁵. The informed consent, which is the authorization by the subjects of the research to use the information provided; the right to privacy, or a guarantee of anonymity; and protection against physical, emotional and other types of harm. For this research, respondents signed a consent form allowing the use of their information. The interview script was sent in advance to allow the respondents to prepare emotionally to address issues related to this research. Participants will be kept anonymous in accordance to ethical principles of research. Exposure could lead to retaliation by the company in question, as well as negatively influence the search of job opportunities in others.

¹¹ Michael Greenfell (Ed.), *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), 52.

¹² Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a theory of practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: University Press, 1977), 214.

¹³ Pierre Bourdieu, *A distinção: crítica social do julgamento*, trans. Daniela Kern and Guilherme Teixeira (São Paulo: EDUSP, 2007), 435.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Andrea Fontana and James Frey, "The Interview: From Neutral Stance to Political Involvement", in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005), 715.

The easiness by which you can associate an idea and a speech to an individual demands that the opinions given in this work need to be exposed in a very diffuse manner. This choice didn't led to any form of shallowness, but, on the contrary, what was observed during the interviews is a universe of discourses that reveals quite specific interests. The practical nature of this work comes from the fact that employees rarely share – as open as in this article – their experiences in events formally promoted by companies, such as performance evaluations or climate surveys. Using the speeches of the employees, a study of the meaning making of these conflicts was performed; it describes different situations and the associated category of distinction used as reference. In parallel, individual perceptions of belonging to each group was investigated. Each category of distinction selected for the analysis was inquired through a block of questions in which the first question indicated an overall topic. Along the interviewing process it was sought to delve into specific parts of the responses both in relation to technical terms as to personal ideas that required further clarification. Whenever possible it was asked to the respondents to associate responses of one question to another.

The language for the conduction of interviews was the Brazilian Portuguese, since all the interviewees had a native level proficiency of it. A discussion of the key role played by language will be presented in the subsequent sessions.

Finally, an evaluation of the level of access to the participants and of the author's limitations becomes a reasonable step. It fulfills the necessity to overcome the matter of 'excessive' subjectivity, particularly in qualitative research, which is sometimes erroneously associated with a lack of scientific rigor. In this sense, it is important to clarify where I locate myself in this research. As Saukko¹⁶ says, "research or research methodologies are never 'objective' but always located, informed by particular social positions and historical moments and their agendas". I am a former production engineer who worked years for the same employer, a Japanese multinational company in Brazil. In this period, once, I had a life changing experience of being asked by a newcomer Japanese executive if I was a *haafu*¹⁷ in the middle of a meeting. I wondered about the reason for the questioning; I was born in Japan, spoke fluent Japanese and there were no opportunities for extensive demonstrations of my behavior or of my way of thinking. Suddenly I felt excluded from a sphere of interaction which I previously thought was part of. I was also troubled by the use of the term *haafu*, discriminatory in nature against a whole human being, in such a spontaneous way. I immediately associated with another occasion when non-Japanese descendant Brazilian coworkers refused to include me in a conversation with a joke, accusing me that I could forward secret information to the Japanese managers. This perception is one of the main reasons that drove me to my Master's research in Social Sciences and Humanities, which the fieldwork was done in the company I previously worked. This paper is a synthesis of a portion of my dissertation.

This apparent inclusion of the researcher experience seems as a transgression of classical social research methods, but scholars such as Weber and Bourdieu dedicated a sound amount of effort on this process. Bourdieu¹⁸ said he learned a lot from two studies he conducted, one about the village where he lived as a child and another about the Parisian academy. Exploring these worlds, which were part of his life at some point, would have allowed him to obtain an objective view of "dark regions" of his own subjectivity. This notion of immersion in oneself, at first glance, seems to contradict the idea of studying cultures and societies since they exist beyond ourselves. However, the emancipatory effect of self-analysis is possibly the only way to understand the operation of societies and cultures we chose as objects of study, precisely because to understand something, we start from prejudices. This line of inquiry is inspired by a traditional discussion regarding Science and objectivity; Weber says that "all knowledge of cultural reality is always subordinate to specifically particular points of view"¹⁹.

The fact that the author of this research actively participated in the routine of the company and the complexity of the issue addressed guide us to a heuristic approach. In other words, the study is part of an intricate problem based on the researcher experience combined with an attempt to find references in various

¹⁶ Paula Saukko, *Doing Research in Cultural Studies* (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 3.

¹⁷ The term *haafu* refers to descendants of Japanese and people from other ethnic background.

¹⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Sketch for a Self-Analysis*, trans. Richard Nice (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

¹⁹ Max Weber, "A 'objetividade' do conhecimento nas Ciências Sociais", trans. Amélia Cohn and Gabriel Cohn, in *Weber*, org. Gabriel Cohn and Florestan Fernandes (São Paulo: Editora Ática, 2003), 97.

fields of study to establish dialogues with the interview responses. Accepting and exposing the diversity of these views allows us to reconcile the dynamic aspects of the world with our standing points within institutions, space and time, on which we depend to form our understanding - mine, the interviewees, the authors referenced and the readers. A similar idea is that the differences should be seen as complementary, statements by participants in researches should not be taken as absolutely objective. By avoiding excessive generalization and consensual abstraction, the multiplicity of voices in the interpretation of social phenomena can be observed. This gives room for reflection and apprehension of what may sound like inconsistency in the (so called) social norms. Obviously this requires the formulation of a coherent trail of thoughts, otherwise this elaboration would lead to an unintelligible result.

2. Results

Some authors prefer the presentation of personal statements in scientific papers using the “third person”, however, for the sake of a clear comprehension of the bias – inseparable from the vocabulary -, in this work, some statements will be reproduced exactly as the interviewee exposed using the “first person”. A clear understanding of the research results can be largely improved by this choice, considering that many details regarding the interviewees and the company will remain undisclosed. Basic personal data from the respondents follows below as reference on Table 1:

Table 1: List of interviewees.

Interviewee	Age	Years in the company	Japanese ancestry?	Fluent in Japanese? English?	Position
“B”	39	2.5 years	No	None.	Analyst
“E”	25	1.5 years	No	English.	Engineer
“F”	32	6 years	Yes	English.	Engineer
“G”	33	5 years	No	English.	Engineer
“S”	45	9 years	Yes	Both.	Department Chief
“N”	36	9 years	No	None.	Analyst

The characteristics presented in Table 1 are relevant when we consider that the design of the interviews directly involves issues related to ethnicity, age, level of knowledge of Japanese or English language and position. Presenting these characteristics of the respondents allows us to anticipate social expectations regarding their positions and compare them with their statements.

As detailed in the column showing the years of work in the company, all employees surveyed have an experience of less than ten years. In general, they all have relatively little service time we consider that there is a strong tendency for employees to maintain long term professional ties – even through life - with a single company in Japanese business culture. In this sense, values, practices and history of the company from its beginnings is a knowledge acquired indirectly by the interviewed employees. It is possible to verify in their answers, however, great familiarity with the practical consequences of these cultural traits in daily activities.

(1) Fluency in Japanese and English

B admitted: "I do not have much knowledge of English". B also told that he frequently met the vice president, a Japanese man who smokes a lot, in the smoking area outside the office. Initially he tried a few times to express himself using *Portunhol* - a mixture of Brazilian Portuguese and Spanish languages. When he felt more confident after a while, on a sunny morning, he said "good morning" and spoke the word "sun" both in Japanese pointing to the sky, but lamented that his limited knowledge of Japanese did not enabled him to go further on the

conversation. He felt frustrated for not being able to interact more in casual occasions as this. Reported that, once, the vice president tried to explain that his wife was ill and had undergone a surgery in the abdomen in Japan. B understood that she was pregnant and had done a C-section. B ended up saying "Congratulations" (in English) with a smile on his face. Later, coworkers who heard about the fact explained what really happened. On regular working time, B depends on colleagues to talk on the phone and sometimes to translate documents. He spoke about a time when he had trouble finding a file on the computer, because its name was in Japanese. Besides asking for help from colleagues, he uses the Google translator and a romanized dictionary. He feels that Brazilians put more effort in learning Japanese than the Japanese strive to learn Brazilian Portuguese. In addition, he reported that "the English used by the Japanese has a heavy accent and is difficult to understand" and that "it is not good English".

F does not speak the Japanese language "despite having Japanese ancestry" and uses English in the workplace routine. Sometimes he regrets not knowing the Japanese language, because he has frequent contact with Japanese employees and uses documents in Japanese to perform his activities. F prefers asking for help from colleagues in situations where translation is required: "We do what we can. If you have someone on your side who knows a bit of the language, we ask the person to try to translate". When he receives a document and there is no one around, he uses a dictionary, "as an example, the Google translator". The problem of the dictionary would be the difficulty in interpreting complete sentences and texts, after understanding the meaning of isolated words. Furthermore, according to him, company specific technical terms are often utilized and an external translator wouldn't be able to help. When asked "How do you find out about translation mistakes?", F replied: "We don't. We only realize there were mistakes, when a document is forwarded and someone else notices, for instance, a Japanese employee". He says that any conversation by the phone is obviously impossible. F says that the Japanese prefers video conferences to "be able to look at the face of the person you are communicating with." Before video conferences, meeting discussion material is sent in advance, together with the agenda for the discussion.

G uses English in meetings and presentations. "English is important to keep a communication. It's the least we can do". He asks colleagues to translate texts from Japanese and uses Google translator. G mentions an instance when he also used the Google translator to compare excerpts from a single email he received with the same content expressed twice, once in "intermediate English" and another in Japanese. There was no distrust about the character of the person who sent the email, but G decided to compare the two sections to make sure that they expressed "exactly" the same message. Among the Brazilian colleagues who speak English, he does not know many people interested in learning Japanese. The Japanese colleagues, in turn, would learn over time and later come to understand meetings in Brazilian Portuguese. The high level of Brazilian Portuguese proficiency of some Japanese managers surprises G in a positive manner.

E does not speak Japanese, "only English". Many of the meetings that E attends are in English. He declares that "English is mandatory at the company. Japanese is not, but it is distinctive". He emphasizes that "documents written in Brazilian Portuguese are useless". According to E, the manager who occupies a hierarchical position two levels above his can't speak Brazilian Portuguese. E says that "without knowledge of the Japanese language you can't advance in the company", because all decision making by top management is made in Japanese. He reached this conclusion when working with confidential projects involving only Japanese employees. The activities related to these projects involved entire meetings in the Japanese language. He explained that comments and discussions during the visits of executives from the Head Office are also all in Japanese. Once, he has spent a whole day without talking to anybody, even in the reception dinner after work hours. E felt excluded. Japanese descendant employees would advance their careers more easily and one of the reasons would be the knowledge of the Japanese language. He told that some managers stimulates the active participation of subordinates in project meetings and even simultaneously translate from Japanese to Brazilian Portuguese, but others only pass on the information later. On the other hand, the standard language in the production line would be Brazilian Portuguese. At the production line, mastering English would make an employee get noticed; at the office, things would be different. E said he felt discouraged to study Japanese when his superior denied a scholarship to a language course and definitely gave up trying to learn Japanese, when many people recommended that he should have an "advanced level" of English before anything else.

N says having difficulties to understand requests from the Japanese executives, because they ask him things in a mixture of English, Brazilian Portuguese and Japanese. His report also included accounts about hard times working with documents. He explained that the language study scholarship is tied to the annual performance evaluation. If the performance in the language course is bad, in addition to losing the scholarship, there is the possibility of missing salary raises and promotions. According to N, the company policy is that when the employee quits the course, it is not permitted to ask for the scholarship again. He says the English course was expensive compared to the value of his salary - the courses were not fully funded -, very rigorous for beginners and at an inconvenient time for those who uses the company bus. He commented that most people who know English or Japanese learned these languages before being hired by the company. Regarding Japanese employees, N affirms that few make efforts on trying to speak Brazilian Portuguese.

For S, the knowledge of languages is essential. When he is speaking with Japanese employees, he does so in Japanese. When there are Brazilians and Japanese employees, he speaks English. He takes for granted that an employee "without advanced knowledge of English does not get promoted" and, after English, recommends learning Spanish before Japanese. He generalizes that the knowledge of Japanese is unusual in an employee without Japanese ancestry and that the lack of knowledge in the language by the people with "Japanese appearance" is a reason to feel ashamed. He points out that whenever translators are involved, people should be cautious. Communication would become like the children's game of Chinese whispers - called as "telephone" by Americans -, the transmission of information is never perfect. In the opinion of S, it is always better having direct communication. The intonation, the body posture, etc. may indicate a greater or lesser sense of urgency which sometimes can't be transmitted by words. He contrasts aspects of the language by saying that "speaking Japanese isn't that difficult; writing is. I think that less than one percent of employees can read and write in Japanese". Within the company, knowledge of Japanese is very concentrated among a few assistants; few people can read emails and technical manuals in Japanese, for example.

(2) Employees of Japanese descent and Brazilian employees without Japanese ancestry

S is of Japanese descent. For him, the company is more conservative than other manufacturers. This company would follow the Japanese etiquette more strictly than elsewhere. On his description, he emphasized the importance given to the appropriate placement of each person according to hierarchy in meetings, business dinners or car seats. This carefulness would extend to the level of the hotel room and the travel class on airplanes. His perception is that the Japanese are very different and come to Brazil to bring the culture of Japan, using the influence of their high positions. For S, the company culture in Brazil is a mixture of local customs and Japanese culture. His experience is that whoever adapts better to Japanese culture remains longer in the company. He summed up the Japanese thought in the concept of long-term relationship, in contrast to an alleged Western thought of growing fast and developing the individuality. S has the impression that the competition between the employees is smaller than in other companies. One reason would be the value of salaries, very close to the same positions in different departments when in other companies the Sales and Financial area would have more prominence in this regard. Another factor would be the job rotation, which occurs not only on the production line, but also at the office.

S narrates as an example the failure of a trainee program promoted by the company. In other companies, in programs like these, a young person goes through positions in many areas and becomes a manager very fast. Most of the trainees eventually quit the company. In companies influenced by American culture, talented people would be promoted very fast; Japanese culture would favor the group. S believes that the system - the organization of work, the group of the employees, etc. - is what ensures the proper functioning of the company and not exceptional people. A "star" would stand out and disrupt the harmony; "stars" would not be good for the company. This last point would be difficult for a Westerner to understand.

S evaluates that the *nikkei* of fourth and fifth generations "are too Brazilian" because they don't speak Japanese and are not familiar with Japanese culture. The "most Japanese employees" would adapt better to the corporate culture, would be less frustrated and less anxious, understand how "things work", and would have a better performance. Most senior positions are occupied by Japanese descendants from the second or third generation. Compared to 20 years ago, 90% of executives would be occupied by Japanese descendants and today around 70%.

N separates the behavior of Brazilian and Japanese people according to the level of formality and strictness. If something goes wrong, the Brazilians find a way of succeeding by creative solutions, the famous *jeitinho* – many times criticized on the basis that it only incurs in non-definitive countermeasures. The Brazilian possesses the ability to adapt, be creative and flexible. In his own words, "the Brazilian doesn't stall", meaning that they don't obstruct or delay the progress of actions. Japanese employees would tend to limit their behavior on following procedures and manuals. Brazilians also would play during working hours, while Japanese would be more introverted, "stiff". In a critical tone, N mentions a framed document at the entrance of the company saying that the company commits itself to adapt to the local culture and not vice versa, implying that in reality this does not occur. He says he does not adapt the way he works.

From N's point of view, the Brazilian of Japanese descent suffers more pressure at work than the Brazilian without Japanese ancestry. Japanese Brazilians would feel an "obligation" towards knowing the Japanese language. This group of employees also would show solidarity to colleagues who do not know much about Japanese culture and would help by giving tips on how to behave. When discussing his impressions of the highest levels in hierarchy, N says that managers of non-Japanese descent do not try to copy the behavior of Japanese managers, focusing on results, productivity and other process quality indicators, giving less attention to behaviors. N says that when you present results to these managers prevails the concept that "if the results are good, nobody needs to know what has been done." On the other hand, the Japanese managers would be concerned about how the things were done.

E relates there are plenty of differences between Brazilian and Japanese people in the company. Japanese employees would not be "afraid" to criticize and sometimes offensively call their subordinates by names, such as "stupid". E understands the fact as part of Japanese culture. These criticisms would be to "help you become a better person", not a meaningless curse, but an indication that they care about the person. E relates that in the past on a single occasion he was called stupid, but he had already been warned about this kind of attitude during the interview for the admission in the company. This strictness on assessments would be generally higher in the relationship between Japanese employees and Japanese Brazilians; towards Brazilians of non-Japanese descent would be less common. Japanese employees would not only make personal criticism, but sometimes would throw documents in the air and complain that the work "is a piece of s...". Brazilians without Japanese ancestry would take reprimands too personally, interpreting it as unprofessional. Some managers behave this rude way without thinking about it, as if it was a regular professional attitude of the work environment at this company; other managers, on the other hand, would take advantage of these opportunities to make people feel "down, even offended". E says this latter group would be of Brazilians without Japanese ancestry distorting and transmitting this concern for professional development in an inappropriate way. There would be some descendants of Japanese who identify themselves with the Japanese culture, feeling the need to be closer to the Japanese employees and have more contact with them, and others who don't. Consistently, those with closer identification would begin to behave similarly. In summary, using E's words, the Japanese aggression would be "upon the person, not the task", indicating character flaws and not failures in executing tasks. Japanese employees would be very strict about the way people work.

In the opinion of G, the descendants of Japanese people try to work more like Japanese than Brazilian. In his words, "is a mixture, but it tends to be more like the Japanese employees". The G speech focused on discussing managers. Brazilian managers of Japanese descent would have a lot of contact with Japanese employees and more opportunities to better understand their culture, and somehow, grasp the requests of the Japanese performing a kind of "translation" to make easier for Brazilians to understand. In other words, the descendant would provide a wider context explanation to requests from Japanese employees. Not-descendant managers would also be able to perform the aforementioned translation, but regarding people skills, they would be better. They would be able to bring Japanese culture to Brazilians and manage the functions within the plant in a way that the results required or expected by the Japanese would be achieved. They would have great influence among the Japanese. They would have achieved this power of influence speaking English and looking for "exposure", disseminating the results of their work in appropriate places and moments. In the words of G, these leaders "do not stay in their corner" and have not only a good relationship with the Japanese, but also a stronger perception of what is the Japanese culture,

of what are the Japanese requests. They have a better vision of the concepts involved and of the environment than not descendants in general.

F compared the values of Brazilians and Japanese evaluating that the first group puts health and family above all and the second, work. F reported that, despite being a Japanese Brazilian, has the same priorities of non-descendants. Brazilian would also value the *esprit de corps* in the workplace, trying to solve issues between colleagues of the same hierarchical level, the operational level, before passing on to their leaders. F comments about the Brazilian trait to leave things to the last minute. Meetings between Brazilian would be more relaxed and open, there would be an effort to try to solve problems "before the Japanese finds out". Japanese would inform their managers immediately if something was not right. When F was asked how he would behave in a meeting in which half the participants were Japanese and the other half, Brazilian, he said he would try to "copy the Japanese." F believes that many Japanese end up *abrasileirando*, becoming Brazilians. They would create bonds of friendship with Brazilian and would leave the "Japanese system", taking these national characteristics to their country of origin. In his opinion, this would be an evidence that this bonding is real is the interest shown by the Japanese in coming back to Brazil.

B suggests that Japanese "are not outgoing, do not talk much, do not communicate much". They would be cold and reserved people. He identifies these peculiarities with communication difficulties and lack of emotion, but also with selfishness. The procedures and habits of Japanese managers would be actively followed by Brazilians of Japanese ancestry. These would be submissive, would not question how or what is imposed on them. B exemplifies through a situation which he presented:

"There was a case of a Japanese [Brazilian] with a relatively high position in the company. The VP [vice president] asked a question and he did not know the answer, and he stood there in front of the VP table and was practically "grounded", standing there. It was something I thought ridiculous. It is not for a professional, it is not for a man [to pass through these kind of things]. He should have left the table side, thought about the question and give an answer later. Or say 'look, I don't have the answer now' and get a scolding, but instead, he stood still. He [the vice president] demanded [the Brazilian] to stand there grounded. He stood there all the time. It was for more than 15 to 20 minutes of standing by the table. The VP left, went to another department and then returned. He just stood there with his head down thinking about an answer"²⁰.

B speculates that Japanese Brazilians of Japanese would tend to "be pulled" more to the Japanese side and eventually acting this way with non-Brazilian descendants. Non-descendants would understand this type of behavior as an aggression. B ponders that Brazilians of Japanese descent would be "demanded" more often, but in compensation "things gets going a little more for them". The Japanese leadership has expectations for them and requires more carefulness about their work. In his words, "if a report made by a Japanese Brazilian doesn't look nice, the Japanese will be shocked. If a Brazilian [not of Japanese descent] presents a bad job it will not shock them so much".

B theorizes that what differentiates Brazilian and Japanese is the threshold of acceptable submission and humiliation. Another point that he emphasizes in his account, is that the Brazilian do not value his culture, even when they're dissatisfied with the Japanese way of working. B says that the positive side of the Japanese way is of doing things thoroughly, right from the first time. This would be achieved through study, analysis and by avoiding repeating mistakes, polishing the skills without skipping steps. The problem is that there would be insufficient time; in the work routine everything would be "trampled" and, in this context, "employees get disoriented".

(3) Age and years in the company

B treats employees with longer company time and more technical experience differently. "Age also influences", he says. He even feels admiration for experienced employees. B gives as an example a co-worker who has been 20 years in the company, a difficult and stressed out person close to 45 years old, according to B, but from who he learns a lot. Even the managers treat the person differently. In a hypothetical situation where he becomes the manager of a subordinate with broader technical knowledge, he relates that it would make him feel

²⁰ B, interview by the author, 2013.

insecure and challenged. He says: "I would bring the person closer to me". He would give freedom of action and would ask for help. He never had managers younger than him and with less time at the company, but has already passed through the situation of being managed by persons with less technical knowledge. He exposed having difficulty to make questions and requesting decisions to people with less technical knowledge. B says that younger Japanese employees are skillful in using extroversion to create a better work environment, but usually communicate with older Japanese executives.

F says he treats all coworkers with respect, regardless of age, from the director to interns and apprentices. What he does is to change the way he communicate with them. He ponders that, in the corporate environment, people with more than 40 years of age prefer to deal with issues in person or by phone. Younger people would favor faster and informal contacts during a coffee break or at the coworker's own table and preferentially use email and instant messages. F avoids using slang when communicating with older employees. In his opinion, the younger "speak a lot of curse words". He believes that younger managers would be more agile and easy to reach and demand agility in solving problems. Older ones would complain about receiving incomplete information and request details. Another difference is that the younger would be more motivated, while older would use a lot the word "no" or the expression "it can't be done". F indicates that a recently hired employed suffers a major shock in the end of the first year at the company; if he still didn't fit at this timing, usually leaves the company. He says there are many people with few company experience and others with very long time.

G uses his "common sense" to treat employees according to their age. Young Japanese executives would have a different lingo, they would have casual conversations with subordinates; however, the elders would be more formal. Managers younger than him would use extroversion as strategy and deal with the "staffs" at the operational level. For G, the younger wouldn't be so useful as sources of technical information. He always tries to contact experienced people to learn.

E says that differentiation among employees by age and time of experience applies to any company, not only to the Japanese ones. He admires people with longer company time, but feels that his opinion is not considered in meetings with them. It's as if he was a mere spectator, regardless of his technical knowledge. He declares that the younger employees have to work harder than the older and always have strong arguments to "gain ground". E feels that he receives low credibility because he is young and have little experience. One of the strategies used by E is wearing a suit to cause an impression and try to increase his credibility. E thinks the first impression it causes in others is of being a "know nothing, because he is new at the company", a *Zé Mane* - an *average Joe* in Brazilian Portuguese slang.

E considers that the workplace dynamics is not the same in the production area and in the office; in the former, company time is more important and in the latter, the theoretical knowledge is more relevant. The managers of the production area would have started their careers doing what his subordinates were doing, "everybody operated a machine." On the production line the culture of "manual skills" relies on time, the expertise is created with the investment of time. In the administrative area, people gain leverage by the completion of higher education and knowledge of the overall company operation.

N is one of the respondents with the longest experience in the company and told about the change in the relationship between newly hired and experienced which occurred during his career at the company. When he was hired in 2003, the rule was "the beginner will do the hard work". N had to quit his college studies when he was new at the company due to a shift change. He says there is no more such strict discipline between the newly hired.

In the opinion of S, employees with more age and with longer company time would receive more respect from other employees. He reflects that the culture of lifetime employment in Japan would be directly related to this respect for more experienced employees because there would be less mobility between firms and older would automatically be more experienced. This culture would be misunderstood by the Brazilians as these would see it as a stimulus to accommodate and not work hard, but, in Japan the staff would be extremely dedicated in relation to schedules, procedures and training, even when there are technical limitations. He ponders that the influence of this concept in the company would be that employees with average performance and long company time would be promoted without the need to present exceptional results.

(4) Gender

B says it's difficult to establish a direct relationship between the sexism on the work routine in the company and Japanese culture, but observes that most managers are men and Japanese. B is surprised by the treatment received by female employees: "I am 39 years old, I work since I was 15, and never saw it." What he sees are situations such as the following: "I saw the female employee get the boots of the manager and carry them almost at his feet, opening his suitcase and placing it on the desk, putting the notebook and his jacket [inside] as if she was a maid"²¹ or "Just another day I saw a lady grabbing and dragging a heavy chair and everybody just looked at her. I went there and carried it for her. Do you know what she told me? 'Don't worry about it, they don't care about it around here'"²².

In his department, reports B, women work as secretaries, organizing ideas of others and preparing summary reports; they are never ahead of big projects, only compile information. The thoughts, ideas, design, presentations would always be under the responsibility of men. Other activities would be placing orders to repair the copy machine, scheduling plane tickets and hotel rooms to managers, booking meeting rooms. He expresses his indignation about the fact that they have expertise in importing and logistics, but end up doing "these services". A female coworker with twenty years of service still occupies the position of "analyst", a position only above trainees and apprentices. About working on the production line, at first he says that the production is a "heavy work" and therefore "it is understandable that women do not participate much," but when asked once again, says that if her physical ability is tested and she pass on this test there would be no problems.

F believes that men are analytical and do better at jobs that require concentration. For example: activities in industry and technology, engineering and quality assurance area. Women would be more emotional and do better at activities that involve more frequent interpersonal relationships. He gives as an example the human resources area and the commercial area. In areas F supposes men are better suited, the pressure for outcomes would be higher and women, for being "emotionally weak", would eventually "slip". The exception would be women who studied engineering and spent years "confined in the midst of men." These eventually would acquire the profile suited for engineering work and eventually "think like men." The women engineers would be "sexist" and "indelicate", but would know how to "deal with men", "with factory workers." In his opinion, the Japanese culture is sexist.

G notes that in the company is hard to see a woman in management position. There would be some in the human resources sector, but in other areas would not be easy to find them. The respondent raised the possibility of this occurring due to differences between working in industry, where male employees are predominant, and desk jobs where the majority would be constituted by female employees. In his opinion, the company culture is strongly related to this industry and influences not only the number of female employees, but the positions that they occupy, because in the administrative areas of the company, far from the production line, there would be proportionally more women. G believes that the production area management should be managed by men, because a woman would not be respected. In the areas of new projects and human resources, he says there are women in management positions. The professional demands from the male managers would be lower to female employees.

G believes that women are more emotional and, due to this fact, "more careful". The way he talks to a female employee would take into account her emotional state; if she is happy, or if she is feeling "hurt because of her husband or boyfriend." The interviewee thinks the way he speaks to men "doesn't hurt" them, the man would be more rational, "internalizing the professional demands differently".

E reinforces that in the company is clear that women have fewer opportunities than men. The management body would be completely composed by men. In the lower hierarchies there would be female employees, but at higher hierarchy, wouldn't. What he heard about gender is that women in Japan are more submissive than in Brazil and that the men are authoritarian. E has a clear impression that Japanese men treat women differently. Taking up excerpts from a previous discussion, he claims that Japanese male executives generally are not aggressive with Brazilian male employees without Japanese ancestry, because they have no great expectations regarding the

²¹ B, interview by the author, 2013.

²² Ibid.

competence at work and the level of technical expertise of this employee group. He added, however, that these same Japanese executives treat women employees in an even softer way, paying more attention on how they express themselves, showing that they would not see them as great professionals or future leaders. In other words, it is possible to infer, that in the company, the female employees constitute a group for whom the professional expectations would be lower, less demanding. E tries to treat colleagues equally regardless of gender. Women would be more careful and more communicative; their performance in the areas of human resources and sales would be better.

N is contrary to the idea of women and men sharing the same workplace. The problem is that he would be distracted, because "woman arrives smelling good" and "pass by you wearing vacuum packed [tight] pants". Adjust his conduct is also a nuisance to him, but N changes the way he talks, because women would be very emotional and men very straightforward. As an example, where men work, "there is a lot of cursing". Another issue is that "women can't bear to work hard." In other words, he explains that when there is a problem on the production line and it is necessary to take some measure of emergency involving manual labor, they don't do the job. "If the necessity to deliver a box [of car parts] arises in order to avoid a production line stop [and a female worker is in charge], she doesn't do it".

According to N, there would be no female employees "where everything happens" in the company. Most of them would be concentrated in sectors such as human resources and social service. Despite never having been a subordinate of a female manager, he believes that 'women in management positions don't reach the goals or are too arrogant'. Women would get offended with work discussions and weep, sometimes screams on their male coworkers. He told about a case in which he asked a *guardinha* (an intern from a local technical school called SENAI) to file a document and has been insulted. She said that "was not paid for that". Some secretaries would be more arrogant than managers.

S says that there are no women on the production line of the building where he works. In the new factory, the activity of unloading trucks by a subcontracted company would be completely done by female employees. In Japan, the prejudice would be greater. There would be an expectation that the woman will one day get married and have children, maybe leave the company in one of these occasions. Regarding secretaries, says it is an "endangered position", "almost a waste". According to S, "women should specialize in something else with more added value". On the other hand, he does not disdain the importance of the activity and relates that the level of demand for a proper preparation of meetings (schedules, layout of chairs, etc.) is very high and delays of minutes are sometimes harshly reprimanded. This would be one of the only reasons the secretaries of senior executives continue to exist.

3. Discussion

Scholars who study the Toyota production model in the automobile industry as Womack, realized the existence of a "technical superiority" of Japanese in relation to Western approaches, particularly in the USA, when Japanese multinationals of the automotive industry began to present themselves more competitive than their counterparts²³. The superiority would come down to a longer experience and systematization of work organization in a context of scarcity, achieved by, among other factors, the need for survival of corporations and individuals in a country devastated by war. These competitive advantages are basically a Japanese approach toward increasing labor productivity per person, not chasing cost reduction per vehicle through mass production as traditionally done by American companies²⁴. The positive evaluation of the Japanese production system comprised a set of recommendations concerning a more inclusive workplace. Veiled discrimination in this "Japanese environment" did not go unnoticed by the American author, pointing out a business environment with low presence of foreigners and women in management positions. Despite his surveys were conducted in the late 1980s and the results are presented in an arguable generalization of Toyota model for all Japanese companies, the

²³ James Womack, Daniel Jones, and Daniel Roos, *A máquina que mudou o mundo*, trans. by Ivo Korytowski (Rio de Janeiro: Elsevier, 2004), 263.

²⁴ Koichi Shimokawa, *Japan and the Global Automotive Industry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

resistance to the incorporation of minorities in decision-making probably resulted in the reproduction of several forms of classification, as presented in the interview results on this paper.

Inherent to the respect for minorities, the dispute extends to the sphere of knowledge and skills. Inseparable from the cultural heritage, language knowledge is an extremely important aspect in the workplace. From the reflections of the six respondents it appears that the knowledge of English is essential to perform work activities with minimal autonomy. However, there is a consensus on the difficulty of learning a new language and colleagues help each other by translating emails, documents and meetings. The use of dictionaries is criticized by F due to limitations when interpreting the translated words. Obligation and merit blend in the analysis of knowledge of the Japanese language by the Japanese descendants in the speeches of S, E and F. The dynamics in the production line is contrasted with the office by E; English is a minimum requirement at the office, on the production line is "distinctive", a merit. The language level was not discussed in depth, however, the accounts sustain the idea that it is useless without knowledge of specific technical terms. Understanding the context of what is said by the Japanese coordinators constitutes a genuine benefit.

The antagonistic relationship between Brazilians non-descendants of Japanese and Japanese executives is deeply influenced by the lack of knowledge of each other's culture, including language. However, by looking the answers from S and F we realize that the conflict is also presented to Brazilians of Japanese descent, but in another form. The account of B converges with the speech of F in the sense of observing a tendency of Japanese descent possessing a preference and the competence to behave as the Japanese, despite reporting that F has the same life priorities of Brazilian people. What is inferred from the position of F is that the conflict is internalized by Brazilians of Japanese descent, and for Brazilians of non-Japanese descent, expressed more openly. When the problem is not handled properly, it can reflect even in the termination of employment, as noted in the speech of S. In extreme cases, the differences are manifested by prejudices. Of the testimony presented by B it appears that non-Brazilians of Japanese descent would not be subject to the same level of professional expectations of Brazilian with Japanese descent, because he says that a job poorly executed by non-Japanese descendants would not be a surprise. F could avoid this prejudice from the Japanese behaving like them and apparently he would make this choice in a meeting with an audience composed by Brazilian and Japanese in the same proportion.

The organization's environment makes the mediators or "translators" between Brazilian and Japanese an essential part of daily routine, as seen from the speech of G. The behavioral aspect is reinforced by the language barrier and the narrative of N, indicating the pressure suffered by the descendants of Japanese to master the Japanese language. The risk of ill-intended manipulation of information by means of linguistic knowledge is present, however, as can be seen from the comments of N, the difficulties arising from the differences in language and culture give rise to solidarity that go beyond the scope of work.

What is observed in the accounts is the presence of an unsolved problem of internal integration jeopardizing the existence of a single, cohesive organizational culture²⁵. It can be inferred the existence of at least three subcultures: the culture of Brazilian employees without Japanese descent, the culture of Japanese-Brazilian employees and the culture of Japanese employees. The company operates under the already mentioned logic of Japanese globalization which precludes the end of the separation between these two groups; in the business environment, the Japanese culture is positioned at a level above the local culture of the countries in which they settle affiliates of Japanese multinationals²⁶. This polarization ignores the debate about cultural diversity on Japanese soil²⁷, seeing it as monolithic, and is enhanced by a history of isolation of the Japanese community in Brazil²⁸. The member of the *nikkei* community minimize tensions at the same time he takes advantage of them in

²⁵ Edgar Schein, *Organizational Culture and leadership* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2010).

²⁶ Harumi Befu, "The global context of Japan outside Japan", in *Globalizing Japan: Ethnography of the Japanese presence in Asia, Europe, and America*, ed. by Harumi Befu and Sylvie Guichard-Auguis (New York: Routledge, 2001).

²⁷ Yoshihiko Amino, "*Nihon*" to wa nanika (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2000).

²⁸ Sergio Holanda, *Raízes do Brasil* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1995). Darcy Ribeiro, *O povo brasileiro* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2006).

order to achieve a limited level of professional projection, having a complex and intertwined relationship with the Japanese executives²⁹.

The company in question shows that the age group is reflected in the hierarchy; older employee occupies the higher positions. If there was a policy of aggressive stimulation of competition between employees, probably the values would be less concentrated. From S's interpretation of the company culture, there is no room for "stars"; employees don't climb up fast the corporate ladder. The expectation is that the knowledge and skills are developed in a long term perspective, without giving space for leaps in the hierarchical position. It reminds us of the Japanese proverb *Deru kui wa utareru*, which translates into something as "a standing nail gets hammered".

The explanation of a classificatory scheme related to oppositions between age groups and generations³⁰ gives consistency to the presented accounts regarding age and time of service. Young people accept the image of individuals free of responsibilities imposed by older people when it suits performing activities by which they do not want to be held accountable. At the moment they start to aspire some space for social accomplishment, rather than endorsing the elders for their wisdom and prudence, they act to reverse its role in the hierarchy of influence. In such situations, young people strive to associate with the elders an image of "archaic" or "senile irresponsibility" in the words of Bourdieu³¹. Then young people are able to act like "adults" without hurting common sense. In the company, experience and length of service receive greater recognition than ambition, aggressiveness in the pursuit of results, the speed of action and motivation. These latter features are associated with younger employees who, regardless their technical skills, are unable to achieve a rapid career advancement. The management system requires people their acceptance of this slow progression.

The last category of distinction presented on this paper is gender. For Butler, it is essential to take special care when restrictions are imposed in the discussion about the meaning of gender because when we strengthen the traditional feminism, quite often, one comes to homophobic theoretical consequences³². The debate on gender proposed in this paper did not address the reflection on heteronormativity or on the construction of gender. Thus, the gender was treated as a binary, without developing it thorough beyond the "common sense".

One of the dilemmas in relation to the discussion of gender was the conscience, from the moment of the preparation of the interviews, that it would be very difficult to interview female employees in the company, since their number is quite reduced. The respondents' answers indicate that the gender issues in the workplace are common knowledge and not overlooked by men. There is a willingness to circumvent some effects of sexism, but it is not possible to see any perspective of systematic action. There are only changes in the individual approach in the treatment of colleagues and subordinates, resulting from discussions and awareness of the current exclusion system by men, who are both the beneficiaries and reinforcers of the problem. Similarly, the resolution of the issues raised in the workplace can't be obtained by simple answers and individual initiatives. So, at the same time that there is room for changes, there are also aspects which relativize the expectation degree of these workplace improvements.

The male employees would be more apt to perform activities that require mental skills, such as logical reasoning and analytical abilities according to G and F. The female employees in general would be more "emotional" and would have less control of their emotions, what would imply on a lower resistance to pressure for results. For N, this weakness would be an indication that women should not hold positions of leadership. In the opinion of G, another reason for the avoidance of female managers in the company structure, at least in sectors directly linked to production, would be the fact that they would not have his authority respected, since most employees in the production area are men. Therefore, generally speaking, to the female employees it would be assigned low value-added activities, as reports of S and B. There would not be many expectations from the Japanese executives on their professional growth, according to S and E.

²⁹ Harumi Befu, "The global context of Japan outside Japan", in *Globalizing Japan: Ethnography of the Japanese presence in Asia, Europe, and America*, ed. Harumi Befu and Sylvie Guichard-Auguis (New York: Routledge, 2001).

³⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *A distinção: crítica social do julgamento*, trans. Daniela Kern and Guilherme Teixeira (São Paulo: EDUSP, 2007).

³¹ Ibid.

³² Judith Butler, *Gender trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

It is noted by respondents' answers that the sexual division of labor is very present in the company. It is not clear in the answers if there are any attempts to circumvent this scheme of gender, everyone seems to think that the problem is not theirs. They are waiting it to disappear, get solved by its own or even a solution from the society, external to the company, which they forget they are part of. It is a convenient forgetfulness, aligned to a perception of the world which is in accordance with the established social order, naturalizing the conflict by masking the participation of individuals who foster it. Bourdieu³³ associates this kind of collusion to the concept of *logical conformism* from Durkheim³⁴, which translates into an identity between thought and conduct. Thus, Bourdieu approach his understanding of common sense, of which prejudices would be an integrated part, and the precepts of religious life in the view of Durkheim, in which no one would have the time and resources necessary to go beyond what is basic in terms of ideas and practices³⁵.

The opinion of F converges with E's indicating that female employees have greater ease at activities that require personal relationship. The areas that require most of this competence would be the human resources and sales, whose focus are on administrative duties in the office room. In the company, they are less prestigious areas compared with the production area, which concentrates most of the company's resources. On production line, for example, we hardly would observe female employees, according to S. One of the probable reasons for this may be the difference in the physical strength, which generally would be higher in men according to the account of B. B feels outraged with the fact that secretaries consider normal to carry "heavy" chairs for meeting rooms, showing another situation that exemplifies this view. Furthermore, not only the female employees would have less physical strength, but also would be less willing to perform jobs that require this feature, according to N. He claimed that in emergency situations on the production line, they would not participate in the resolution of the problem carrying boxes of car parts.

4. Conclusion

The research presented by this paper shows how the perceptions of gender, age and ethnicity are intertwined in the workplace. Hierarchical position and daily routine are influenced by these mixed conceptions of group roles, confirming the discussions of other studies such as the *gaijin* complex towards women without Japanese ancestry presented by Adler³⁶. Another recurring issue when discussing gender, particularly through comparative perspective between Japan and other countries of the industrialized West, are victimizing reflections that begin with "In Japan, is still so?"³⁷. The accounts of the interviewed demonstrate this perception of the Japanese business environment, attributing, in particular, to the female employees familiar with the Japanese culture, a submissive and vulnerable position, which does not necessarily matches the reality experienced by them. Often they don't even feel oppressed. According to the interviewees, there are situations where women even have certain advantages over men, as those when they are presenting reports. Nevertheless, the professional demands from them would be less rigorous. The complexity comes from the fact that advantages like this are related to the *machismo* of the work environment, where there are no great expectations about female employees, neither from Brazilian, nor Japanese male employees.

According to Tung³⁸, Japanese MNEs provides intensive cultural training as preparation for assignments outside Japan, but from the accounts collected for this research, it is possible to realize that they are very limited in the sense of not being able to avoid the undermining of local culture. Japanese employees were presented as not capable of speaking proper English or Brazilian Portuguese and that limits their communication with local employees. Japanese Brazilians would not only translate words, but also behaviors and complex structures of ideas to provide a proper context to requests made by Japanese managers, having a fundamental role in the

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Emile Durkheim, *The elementary forms of religious life*, trans. Karen Fields (New York: The Free Press, 1995).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Nancy Adler, "Pacific Basin Managers: A Gaijin, Not a Woman", in *Transnational corporations and human resources*, ed. Peter Enderwick (London: Routledge, 1994).

³⁷ Yuko Ogasawara, *Office ladies and salaried men* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

³⁸ Rosalie Tung, "International Human Resource Management Policies and Practices: A Comparative Analysis", in: *Transnational corporations and human resources*, ed. Peter Enderwick (London: Routledge, 1994).

functioning of the company management structure. The constant contact between groups would result in the adoption of behaviors and values, not only from the Japanese, but also from the Brazilian. The accounts of Japanese Brazilians presented in this paper show that they can suffer rejections by both groups, if they fail to demonstrate knowledge and skills that would allow them to be seen as "equals".

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