Migrant and Minority Nostalgia in Karen Tei Yamashita's *Circle K Cycles*

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Abstract   This essay explores the concept of nostalgia through an analysis of *Circle K Cycles* (2001), a creative (auto)ethnographic text in which the Japanese American writer Karen Tei Yamashita portrays Japanese Brazilians' ethnic return migration to Japan in the 1980s and 1990s. In the face of social marginalisation and the hegemonic pressures of Japanese culture to conform to a standard of 'pure Japaneseness', Japanese Brazilians reinforce their attachment to Brazil, which they express in the form of nostalgia, or *saudade*. Yet Yamashita criticises any idea of cultural separateness and 'purity', both by experimenting with form and by describing phenomena of cultural hybridisation.

Keywords   Nostalgia. Karen Tei Yamashita. Circle K Cycles. Asian American literature. Ethnic return migration. Japanese Brazilians.

Summary   1 Introduction. – 2 Southward. – 3 Coming Full Circle. – 4 Saudade. – 5 "Your tradition is someone else's originality".

> What saudade must be killed to belong, to make a
> home, to realize desire?
> (Karen Tei Yamashita, *Circle K Cycles*, 2001)

1   Introduction

In *Circle K Cycles* (2001), a particularly understudied work, the Japanese American writer Karen Tei Yamashita (1951-) recounts the lives of second- and third-generation Japanese Brazilians who return-migrate to Japan in the 1980s and 1990s to do unskilled jobs. Takeyuki Tsuda has named this type of migration "ethnic return migration" to distinguish it from the return migration of the first generation (2009c, 1). The Dekasegi (migrant workers) face difficult working conditions as well as social marginalisation due to the fact that returnees are often considered cultural foreigners (see Tsuda 2009c). As a result, they struggle to embrace transnationalism, which involves creating links to both homeland and host land (see Glick Schiller, Basch, Szanton Blanc 1992). Doubly outsiders, the Dekasegi live in a liminal, in-between space at the margins of both Japanese and Brazilian society.

However, a feeling of *saudade* – homesickness or nostalgia – toward Brazil prevails. In this essay, I analyse the theme of nostalgia, which has been overlooked both in existing work on *Circle K Cycles* (see Chuh 2006; Ling 2006, 2012; Kam 2008; Ragain 2018; Sheffer 2020) and, more generally, as an object of literary and cultural critique (see Su 2005; Walder 2011). In particular, I argue that Yamashita depicts a form of migrant and minority nostalgia that is both counter-hegemonic and conservative and that is closely linked to the phenomenon of ethnic return migration. Through *saudade*, Japanese Brazilians express their attachment to Brazil and their 'Brazilianness' against the hegemonic pressures of Japanese culture to conform to a standard of 'pure Japaneseness'. Yet Yamashita criticises cultural separateness both by experimenting with form – thus creating a unique "palimpsestic" (Chuh 2010), multi-genre, multilingual and polyphonic work – and by describing phenomena of cultural hybridisation and creolisation that unsettle any idea of 'purity'.

2   Southward

Yamashita is a novelist, short-story writer, playwright and professor. She was born in 1951 in Oakland, California, and she is a third-generation Japanese American. Yamashita studied English and Japanese literatures at Carleton College, Minnesota, and spent her junior year in Japan as an exchange student at Waseda University, Tokyo. She graduated in 1973, and, in 1975, she moved to São Paulo to study Japanese

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immigration to Brazil. It was during her Brazilian years that Yamashita started to write fiction. In 1984, she moved to Gardena, California, where she continued to write while working as an Executive Assistant for a local public television station. Since 1997, Yamashita has been teaching at the University of California Santa Cruz where she is a Professor of Asian American Literature and Creative Writing.

Among Yamashita's multimedia/stage performances are *Hiroshima Tropical* (1983), *Tokyo Carmen vs. L.A. Carmen* (1990) and *Anime Wong: A CyberAsian Odyssey* (2008). Her experimental novels, *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (1990), *Brazil-Maru* (1992) and *Tropic of Orange* (1997), address the themes of migration, cultural and national identity, globalisation, economic imperialism and environmental exploitation. After *Circle K Cycles* (2001), Yamashita published *I-Hotel* (2010), a collection of novellas that narrates the origin of the Asian American movement between 1968 and 1977. Her latest work is *Letters to Memory* (2017), which deals with the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II.

Because of the wide scope of Yamashita's interests, which often exceed the Asian American field to embrace the Latin American, she has received little scholarly attention from Asian Americanists. Published at a time when the transnational turn was at an early stage and the urge to 'claim America' was still dominant, the contribution of Yamashita's early works to Asian American studies went unnoticed. Nevertheless, Yamashita's innovative North-South or hemispheric approach is instrumental to the expansion of the transnational perspective in Asian American studies and to the destabilisation of "el provincialismo de los Estados Unidos" [U.S. provincialism] (Geirola 2005, 120; transl. by the Author). As Kandice Chuh argues,

> Although Asian American literary studies have in recent decades taken the 'transnational turn' [...], the particular rubric of 'hemispheric studies' has not found as much traction in the field as, for example, 'diasporic' or 'Pacific Rim studies'.[...] [M]ost transnationally inclined criticism in Asian American studies has been more involved in mining understudied or otherwise occluded east-west connections than in looking critically north or south. (2006, 618)[1]

Scholars have focused especially on the bilateral connections between the United States and particular Asian countries. By moving toward the southern hemisphere, Yamashita expands Pacific Rim and transpacific paradigms that continue to emphasise the United States, revealing Asian America's links to the South, that is, to Latin America.

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[1] Only Rachel Lee (1999) and Eleanor Ty (2010) have adopted a hemispheric approach in their critical studies of Asian American literature.

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As Jinqi Ling observes,

> Asian America can no longer be understood only in terms of its U.S. designation versus its various Asian origins [...] Rather, Asian America must also be grasped in relation to the configurations of other Asian diasporas that function within, across, and beyond Asian-Pacific and the Asian-Latin American formations. (2006, 2)

Yamashita's move southward adds a new dimension to Asian North America through which it is possible, by adopting a comparative outlook, to achieve a deeper insight into its communities and to develop a "minor transnationalism", that is, a "symbolic geography of relations that become the creative terrain on which minority subjects act and interact in fruitful, lateral ways" (Lionnet, Shih 2005, 2). Yamashita's recent return to more 'canonical' Asian American subject matter is also significant: her writing could be taken as an answer to various scholars' preoccupation with the idea that the transnational turn might eclipse the political, domestic dimension in Asian American studies (see Wong 1995; Cheung 1997). Truly glocal, Yamashita's writing has brought a global dimension into Asian American literature while also respecting its local dimensions and history, thus proving that it is also by adopting a transnational perspective that the local, domestic reality can be better understood and represented.

Certainly, Yamashita's "largeness of vision" (Rody 2004, 131) entails a certain amount of pain, which she metaphorically describes as a "backache": "My back aches. It is longer than it should be, expanded geographically. It is [...] a vertebrae of pidgin utterances [...] It is a bridge and a beast of burden" (Yamashita 2001, 17). Therefore, reaching distant geographies and forging transnational links enriches one's identity, but at the same time it also brings suffering as demonstrated by Japanese Brazilians' experience in Japan. In *Circle K Cycles*, Yamashita embraces transnationalism and hybridity against parochialism and notions of purity, but she also shows the underside of transnational migration and the issues that migrants have to face as they live in the liminal space between cultures.

3 Coming Full Circle

In 1997, Yamashita lived in Seto, Japan, for six months in order to study the Brazilian community living in Japan at that time. During her stay, Yamashita wrote a monthly travel journal for the website *Cafe Creole* – where it is still possible to find her diary entries.[2] *Cir-*

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2 http://www.cafecreole.net/index.html.

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cle K Cycles blends these non-fictional documents with fictional stories "to paint as varied and textured a portrait as possible of the life [Yamashita] saw and experienced" during her visit (Yamashita 2001, 11).[3] The text is divided into six chapters preceded by a Prologue and followed by an Epilogue, and each chapter is titled with a month name, tracing Yamashita's six-month stay in Japan. Therefore, *Circle K Cycles* constitutes Yamashita's account of what she has learned through research and lived experience about Japanese Brazilians.

Japanese Brazilians represent the largest community of Japanese descendants (*Nikkeijin* or Nikkei) outside of Japan with a population of about 1,900,000 (*The Association of Nikkei and Japanese Abroad* 2018). The year 1908 marked the beginning of Japanese migration to Brazil as Japanese people left their country to escape rural overpopulation and poverty. Between 1908 and 1941, 190,000 Japanese entered Brazil as Dekasegi.[4] The majority of immigrants worked in coffee plantations located in Southern Brazil, but, by the end of the 1980s, most second- and third-generation Japanese Brazilians lived in the urban areas of the most developed regions of Brazil, were well educated and middle-class (see Carvalho 2002, 3-7; Tsuda 2003b, 55-6).

As Tsuda notes, despite their socioeconomic and cultural integration in mainstream Brazilian society (see also Carvalho 2002; White 2003), Japanese Brazilians maintained a strong symbolic attachment to a Japanese homeland, and they were proud of their 'Japaneseness', which they considered less "an ethnic stigma to be avoided than a positive asset to be maintained" (2003b, 58-65).[5] Indeed, their 'Japaneseness' was seen in a favourable light by Brazilian people, due to Japan's prominent position in the global order and to widespread positive images about Japan and its culture (Tsuda 2003b, 2009d). Thus, when the economic crisis hit Brazil in the 1970s and 1980s, many Brazilian Nikkei decided

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3 *Circle K Cycles* can therefore be defined as creative non-fiction or as "fictional ethnography" (Yamashita cited in Palleau-Papin 2012). Given Yamashita's presence in the text, *Circle K Cycles* combines fictional ethnography and autoethnography, or "introspective ethnography", a self-reflexive research methodology and form of writing (see Imafuku 2008, 84). Autoethnographers "use personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and, in so doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders" (Ellis, Adams, Bochner 2011, 276).

4 This term indicates "labourers working on short-term contracts and returning to their homeland after a brief sojourn abroad" (White 2003, 312). The term was originally employed to define people from the rural areas who had to migrate to the cities to avoid poverty but who eventually returned home (Tsuda 2003b, 110). As Daniela de Carvalho explains, "In Brazil the term '*Dekasegi*' was used to refer to the *Issei* [firstgeneration Japanese Brazilians], and by the mid-1980s, was used to denote people of Japanese descent who migrated to Japan" (2002, 87).

5 Daniel T. Linger highlights that "it was rare for a Brazilian Nikkei to have set foot in Japan. One learned and reaffirmed Japaneseness through family and community assertions of identity, occasional consumption of traditional foods and celebration of traditional festivals, [...] Japanese language classes" (2001, 25).

to return-migrate to Japan rather than to other countries of the Global North such as the United States (Tsuda 2009d, 34). At the same time, Japan was experiencing the so-called 'bubble economy' and a labour shortage that especially affected small- and medium-sized businesses in the manufacturing and construction sector (Tsuda 2009d, 31-2).

Since internal migration from the rural areas was by then very limited, the Japanese government decided to turn to immigrant workers coming from other Asian countries. However, their presence disrupted Japan's ideal of an ethnically and racially homogeneous society (Linger 2001, 22-3; Carvalho 2002, 79). Hence, changes were made to the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Law in 1989 so that only Nikkei (up to the third generation) could legally become unskilled workers in Japan (Carvalho 2002, 79). Basically, "[t]he law promised a flexible, low-cost, culturally tractable and racially correct labor force to do the industrial dirty work disdained by Japanese citizens" (Linger 2001, 23), such as on the assembly line of the manufacturing sector.

In 1998, 274,442 South Americans of Japanese descent were living in Japan, of whom 81 per cent were Brazilians (Carvalho 2002, 80). Japanese Brazilians' 'return' to Japan is representative of a phenomenon that has only recently come to the attention of social scientists and that has been variously defined as "reverse immigration" (Oka 1994), "return migration" (Yamanaka 1996; Tsuda 2000, 2003b, 2009c; King, Christou 2011), "ethnic homecoming" (Tsuda 2009d), "diasporic homecoming" (Linger 2001), "dual diaspora" (Linger 2001) and "counter-diaspora" (King, Christou 2011). Return migration has been studied since the 1970s, but the first studies focused mainly on the return migration of the first generation and overlooked the second generation (King, Christou 2011, 452). More recently, Tsuda has distinguished between "return migration" and "ethnic return migration": while "return migration" concerns immigrants who return to their country of origin, "*ethnic* return migration" sees immigrants' descendants moving to their ancestral homelands (2009c, 1). Such "returns" often constitute a negative experience since returnees are considered cultural foreigners, and so they suffer social marginalisation (Tsuda 2009c, 3).

Whilst the representatives of the Japanese government assumed that Nikkei would more easily assimilate into Japanese society than other immigrants because of their Japanese descent and presumed cultural affinity, they soon realised – as did the Japanese Brazilians themselves – that Brazilian Nikkei were culturally more Brazilian than Japanese. For Brazilian Nikkei, such a realisation was particularly shocking since they were treated as Japanese in Brazil, and they had developed a nostalgic, romanticised vision of Japan, to which they felt attached as their true homeland (Tsuda 2009d, 32-3). However, they had "essentially return[ed] to a foreign country" (2009c, 3), thus becoming "strangers in the ethnic homeland" (2003b).

4   Saudade

What are the consequences of living in this liminal space, "between native and foreigner" (Tsuda 2000, 59), between Japan and Brazil, without completely belonging to one or the other? In *Circle K Cycles*, Yamashita creatively explores Japanese Brazilians' ethnic return migration to Japan and the issues that arise from being regarded as a foreigner in one's ancestral homeland. The sections of *Circle K Cycles*[6] that contain Yamashita's personal accounts of her experience in Japan aim to highlight Brazilian Nikkei's and Japanese people's different cultural and behavioural norms. Such differences contribute to separating Brazilian Nikkei from mainstream Japanese society and therefore to their social marginalisation. For instance, Yamashita presents "Japanese Rules" against "Brazilian Rules" (99-114). The "Japanese Rules" depict the Japanese as polite people who care immensely about appearances – so much that they turned to Nikkei workers in order to preserve the homogeneous appearance of their society – as well as revealing their rigidity and lack of spontaneity. Yamashita also inserts the English translation of a rule board originally written in both Japanese and Portuguese that she found at a condominium complex in Toyota City. Evidently, these rules are mainly intended for Brazilian residents and aim to 'correct' what Japanese residents consider to be disruptive behaviours, especially regarding waste disposal, noise and social gatherings. For instance, "let's stop barbecuing on the verandah", "let's take care with noise pollution", "please put trash out in accordance with the determined models and in the appropriate location" (108).

Tanya Y. Kam argues that:

> [t]he Japanese preoccupation with keeping refuse categorized […] suggests a culture concerned with maintaining appropriate divisions and hierarchies, thus separating the 'pure' Japanese from the mixed Nikkei Brazilian workers. (2008, 19)

Furthermore, as observed by Catherine Bates, "to believe in the complete disposal of waste is to imagine a purified self that remains sealed and self-determined, producing no global footprint" (2013, 210). Hence, Japanese people deny their global, transnational identities insofar as they distance themselves from and even reject those who have left the 'clean' space of Japan, creating a 'contaminated' diaspora.

As Yamashita reports, "The Brazilians have had difficulty following all these rules […] In the meantime, the Japanese residents are at their wit's ends. The Brazilians are unruly" (110). Indeed, the first

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[6]   Henceforth, the page numbers without other indication are from *Circle K Cycles*.

of the Brazilian rules is "there are no rules", and the second one is "all rules may be broken or avoided" (110). The other rules reveal the sociable and extroverted nature of Brazilian people, who enjoy parties and expressing themselves through body language such as kisses and hugs. Brazilians think that "cultures who find this kissing disconcerting are a cold people.[...] Japanese hardly show affection in public" (111). Nevertheless, Brazilian people are willing to integrate into Japanese society: walking around the condominiums, Yamashita notes the "oppressive quiet" that characterises the place, "the sound of people trying very hard to be quiet" in order to be accepted (110).

However, the Japanese notion of 'Japaneseness' prevented Brazilian Nikkei from becoming part of mainstream Japanese society. Tsuda explains that "Japaneseness is defined not only by racial descent but also by complete linguistic and cultural proficiency" (2009b, 242). As Daniela de Carvalho states, "The *Nikkeijin* as a category dismantle this concept, sharing the 'blood', but not the commonalities of Japanese culture and mother-tongue" (2002, 123). Many Brazilian Nikkei had become culturally Brazilian[7] and could not speak Japanese fluently, which constitutes a significant barrier to social integration in Japan (see Carvalho 2002; Tsuda 2003b; White 2003). Therefore, Brazilian Nikkei came to be considered "second-rate Japanese", "inadequate Japanese" or "*han Japa* (half-Japanese)" (Carvalho 2002, 121; Tsuda 2003b, 118). Essentially, "[t]hey [were] seen as having lost their 'Japaneseness'" (Carvalho 2002, 121), and so their cultural purity, something for which they were stigmatised and socially marginalised (Tsuda 2003b).[8] Thus, Japanese Brazilians became liminal beings at the margins of not only Japanese society but also Brazilian society: they found themselves in an in-between space, "a strange limbo. When in Brazil, they were always called japônes; now in Japan, the Japanese treated them as foreigners [...] [W]ho were they?" (Yamashita 2001, 139). Hence, transnational migration constitutes, in this case, a negative form of mobility that leaves migrants without a cultural identity or a homeland.

Yet Japanese Brazilians developed strong feelings of *saudade* toward Brazil (see Tsuda 2000, 2003a). Yamashita explains that *saudade* "is a word that cannot be translated, only approximated: long-

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[7] This could also be seen in their way of dressing, walking and gesturing (Carvalho 2002, 137; Tsuda 2009b, 243).

[8] Other reasons for their social marginalisation include their status as Nikkei since Japanese people commonly see Nikkei as traitors and consider emigration to be shameful; their status as Dekasegi, a term that originally indicated people of low social class from the rural areas who had to migrate to the cities to avoid poverty; their low socioeconomic status as unskilled factory workers in Japan; and their South American origin as Brazil is widely associated in Japan with negative stereotypes of poverty, crime and underdevelopment (see Carvalho 2002; Tsuda 2003b).

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ing, homesickness, nostalgia. In English it would seem to mean a longing for home, for the familiar that is distant and out of reach" (135). Yamashita highlights the migrant and protean nature of *saudade*, which originated in Portugal but, on South American soil, took new meanings. Indeed, "if the Portuguese brought the word *saudade*, others came to add their special interpretations: African slaves, Dutch traders, New Christians, Confederate soldiers, Spanish, Italians, Germans, Syrians, Japanese" (136). As for the Japanese, as we have seen, *saudade* was at first directed toward Japan, and it was then passed down to the subsequent generations, who developed a nostalgic, romantic view of their ancestral homeland. When Japanese Brazilians 'returned' to Japan, *saudade* travelled with them, but it took yet another shape: a sense of nostalgia, this time, toward Brazil – and, as I discuss later, a strategy of resistance against the dominant culture. Indeed, Brazil was infused with positive meaning when contrasted with the negative social experiences that Brazilian Nikkei had in Japan (Tsuda 2009b, 245), including difficult working conditions[9] and social marginalisation. Thus, Japanese Brazilians rejected transnational processes that would have linked them to Japan; instead, they reinforced their diasporic attachment to Brazil, which they expressed in the form of *saudade*.

Dennis Walder explains that

> [t]he phenomenon of nostalgia goes back a long way – at least to Homer's *Odyssey*, as well as ancient Chinese texts. But the word is of relatively recent origin, and is derived from a Greek neologism, combining *nostos*, or home, and *algos*, signifying pain or longing. Its early meaning was primarily pathological, as defined by the seventeenth century Swiss doctor, Johannes Hofer, to describe an epidemic of longing among displaced Swiss students and soldiers. (2009, 939)

Hofer described nostalgia as "the sad mood originating from the desire for the return to one's native land" ([1688] 1934, 381). Progressively, the term has come to indicate, more generally, a longing and desire for "a lost home, place, and/or time" that can be experienced by an individual or by a group of people – "even a whole society" (Walder 2011, 4). But, as the British Indian writer Salman Rushdie points out, if "the past is a country from which we have all emigrated" and so "its loss is part of our common humanity", the individu-

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9 Carvalho reports that "[m]any *Dekasegi* work[ed] from 15 to 19 hours a day" (2002: 97) at their "three Ks" jobs. "Three Ks" is the Japanese acronym for "dirty, dangerous, and difficult" (*kitanai* 汚い, *kiken* 危険, *kitsui* きつい) and indicates jobs that are typically eschewed by native Japanese (Tsuda 2003b, xi).

al "who is out-of-country… may experience this loss in an intensified form" (1991, 12). It is this peculiar form of nostalgia, that is, the one experienced by migrants, or migrant nostalgia – where 'migrant' refers both to migrants and to the travelling nature of nostalgia – that I am interested in and that Yamashita portrays in her text.

More recently, Anindya Raychaudhuri has defined nostalgia as "the mourning of a home that has been lost in time and space, and the various social, creative and discursive processes that can be deployed in order to attempt to remake the home, in the here and now" (2018, 11). Thus, the notion of nostalgia ranges from a desire to return home to homemaking, namely, all those mental and practical activities that help recreate a home away from home, when returning home is continually delayed or precluded. Hence, as Svetlana Boym notes, nostalgia can represent "a strategy of survival, a way of making sense of the impossibility of homecoming" (2001, xvii). As a consequence, nostalgia entails both pain (as suggested by the term's etymology), for what is lost, and pleasure, originating from the feeling of being at home again (see Walder 2009, 939).

Indeed, Yamashita adds that *saudade* "would seem to be a sweet sickness, but when Brazilians speak of it, they often use the expression *matar a saudade*, which means literally, *to kill saudade*. […] [T]o kill saudade is a delicious violence, a succumbing to desire" (135) and essentially a process of homemaking. Brazilians kill *saudade* by visiting home, but they have also brought Brazil to Japan, by opening businesses that enable them to consume Brazilian food, clothing or media products, such as newspapers, music or TV programmes. Anita Mannur has called this kind of nostalgia for a national cuisine "culinary nostalgia" (2009, 27). Yamashita rhetorically asks: "What is it that the food of your homeland, of your mother's kitchen, will provide you? Why do we crave it so badly? Why do our tongues pull us home?" (83). As a basic element of people's every-day life, food represents "an essential connection with home" (Katrak 1997, 270), and so it gives immigrants the illusion of being home. In bringing home closer, food kills – or maybe heightens – *saudade*.

Yamashita also describes the excitement among Dekasegi about football games involving the Brazilian team, such as the 1997 World Cup game between Brazil and Japan:

> they've skipped out of their jobs in order to see live […] the Brazilian champions, the team that sustains their dreams and self-perceptions in a distant home. To lose a day of work is no small thing, but the choice is a particularly Brazilian one, steeped in a confusion of identity, rebellion, and saudades. (130)

As Yamashita reveals, what counts is not who wins but the event itself, a form of joyful gathering during which Japanese Brazilians show their

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pride for Brazil and feel closer to it: "[f]or one day, they are *in* Brazil" (132; emphasis in original). A similar occasion is represented by samba parades: as Tsuda explains, Japanese Brazilians rarely participated in samba parades in Brazil, but in Japan they are a way to kill *saudade* and to express their inherent "Brazilianness" (2000, 64-5).

Indeed, Japanese Brazilians consciously and intentionally enacted what Tsuda calls a Brazilian "counter-identity", a form of ethnic resistance against the hegemonic pressures of Japanese culture to assimilate (2000, 56). Japanese Brazilians behaved "in conspicuously Brazilian ways in order to demonstrate to the Japanese that despite their appearance, they [were] not Japanese and [could not] be held to Japanese cultural expectations" (Tsuda 2000, 60). This process of enhanced 'Brazilianisation' affected clothing, language, self-introductions to emphasise Brazilian origin, and the appropriation and reinterpretation of traditional Brazilian cultural forms, such as samba parades (Tsuda 2000, 60-4). Raychaudhuri (2018) counters notions of white, imperial and conservative nostalgia with this type of "counter-hegemonic, progressive nostalgia" experienced by minority people, arguing that "radical nostalgia" can "sustain" the marginalised (4). In particular, nostalgia in the hands of minority people has a "liberatory potential […] that can be used to further active political resistance" but also, in everyday contexts (such as those portrayed by Yamashita) it aids the process of homemaking (16-17).

While Japanese Brazilians' experience confirms Raychaudhuri's view of minority nostalgia as counter-hegemonic and enabling, such experience also contradicts his belief that nostalgia does not involve nationalism and counters it instead (2018, 12). As Walder affirms, "Nostalgia and national identity are inextricably entwined" (2011, 5). Indeed, the practices and behaviours described above show that Japanese Brazilians' feelings of *saudade* led them to enact a form of "deterritorialized [Brazilian] nationalism" (Tsuda 2000, 56). Nationalism is "an extremely contentious site" that involves "ideas of suppression and force, of domination and exclusion" as well as "ideas of self-determination and freedom, of identity and unity" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 2007, 136). Likewise, nostalgia can be simultaneously "radical" and "conservative" (Walder 2011, 12), as exemplified by Japanese Brazilian *saudade*, which gives rise to a "resistant nationalism" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 2007, 138) and so is both counter-hegemonic and nationalist. Yet an excessive reliance on "exclusive and homogeneous conceptions of national traditions" (135) threatens to transform "resistant nationalism" (138) into a form of oppression and/or exclusion.

This risk is highlighted in relation to nostalgia by various critics and writers. Rushdie observes that the activity of homemaking triggered by nostalgia leads to the creation of "imaginary homelands" (1991, 10). Yamashita similarly indicates how *saudade* "lives in the *magical reality* of daily life", in a "*realm of imagination* and memo-

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ries" (136; emphasis added), thus underscoring the imaginary nature of the products of nostalgia. According to Rushdie, it is the "physical alienation" from the home country that prevents migrants from "reclaiming precisely the thing that [they] lost": as a result, they "create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands" (Rushdie 1991, 10). The Vietnamese American writer Monique Truong, who migrated to the United States in 1975 as a refugee of the Vietnam War, offers another explanation, which particularly applies to the experience of Japanese Brazilians in Japan. She affirms that nostalgia,

> a longing for the past, […] is often triggered by something that's lacking about the present.[…] [I]t would be a more gratifying experience to live fully in the present, but […] that's very difficult to do for immigrants, refugees, […] because the present is often harsh and not welcoming, and so we end up creating a fantasy of what the past was like. (cited in Fargione 2016, 4)

Therefore, Truong suggests that looking back might be "treacherous" (Fargione 2016, 4) and questions the feeling of nostalgia that characterises many migrants' experience.

She does so also through the title of her novel *The Book of Salt* (2003), which evokes an episode narrated in the Book of Genesis in which Lot's wife, after leaving Sodom, is turned into a pillar of salt as a punishment for having looked back to the city – her home ("Interview with Monique Truong" 2003). This episode has become emblematic of nostalgia and its underside. Indeed, Rushdie invokes "the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt" (1991, 10), that is, becoming crystallised into "narrowly defined cultural frontiers" (19) or, as Mannur asserts, of essentialising the homeland and the culture of origin (2009, 30-1). "The danger of nostalgia", Boym (2001, xvi) points out, lies in the tendency "to confuse the actual home and the imaginary one. In extreme cases it can create a phantom homeland, for the sake of which one is ready to die or kill". Although the kind of nostalgia depicted by Yamashita does not result in such extremism, she nevertheless warns against the risks of a nationalist drift that concerns not only Japanese Brazilians but mainstream Japanese society as well.

5 "Your tradition is someone else's originality"

Against the nationalist, and more specifically, separatist drift of both Japanese and Japanese Brazilian communities, Yamashita conveys, both through form and content, the hybridity that pervades Brazilian and Japanese cultures alike despite their supposed distinctiveness and separateness. As she does so, she criticises ideas of cultur-

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al homogeneity and purity. As Chuh affirms, Yamashita "illuminates the compresence – the interrelated simultaneity – rather than discreteness of places, objects, and histories ordinarily thought distinct" (2016, 542). For instance, the samba that Japanese Brazilians perform in Japan during festivals to express their 'Brazilianness' is actually different from the traditional Brazilian samba. Japanese Brazilians have appropriated and reinterpreted the traditional samba, which therefore turns into a new, hybrid cultural product (Tsuda 2000, 64). The very name of the festival during which this dance is performed hints at this process of hybridisation: "samba matsuri" (137) combines a Portuguese word and the Japanese word for celebration or festival. Yamashita also reveals that the origin of the Brazilian *pastel* is Chinese: then, "it was the Japanese immigrants who became attached to its production.[...] Now pastel is back in Asia, but it is [...] Brazilian" (85). She then lists a series of foods that result from the combination of different cuisines, such as Yamashita's own pastel made with *omochi*; jalapeño and smoked tofu or Japanese McDonald's teriyaki-chicken burger (86).

Yamashita states with regard to the Japanese language that it is "a kind of pidgin language" (53). Indeed, it comprises three character systems: *kanji*, which originates from the Chinese language; *hiragana*, the indigenous phonetic alphabet; and *katakana*, the alphabet that today is mainly used to reproduce foreign words and onomatopoeia. Through *katakana*, the Japanese language has incorporated many English words, but these have been altered: "Pasokon", for example, means "personal computer" and "konbini" "convenience store" (54). Yamashita also discloses that the mountain vegetables for which "the very traditional village of Shirakawa" is famous are imported from China and Russia and that they are packaged by Brazilians (85-6). Besides, there is "a rumor that the [Japanese] imperial family came centuries ago from Korea" while according to some scholars "the original Japanese are a lost tribe from Israel" (146). Yamashita offers many other examples, and in so doing she deconstructs ideas that Japanese society and culture are purely Japanese.

Yamashita concludes, "Nothing is sacred. Your tradition is someone else's originality" (86), a concept that she herself has put into practice by incorporating Latin American traditions and peoples into her writing, thus creating a unique work. Her representation of Japan and the Brazilian community as heterogeneous and hybrid is rendered on a visual level as well. The cover of the book is a colourful collage of images about Japan that challenges views of this country as monochromatic. Moreover, there is a picture of a Japanese girl whose curly hair disrupts her identification as 'pure' Japanese. Besides, her skin is not 'yellow', 'white' or 'black' but multicoloured. Yamashita also employs different types of font and formatting throughout the book, and the written text is accompanied, through

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the literary technique of montage,[10] by reproductions of a range of materials that variously refer to Japan and to the Brazilian community in Japan, including photographs, drawings, maps, charts, newspaper clips, postcards, recipes, signs and advertisements. The heterogeneity of these materials, of fonts and formatting reflects Yamashita's rejection of notions of cultural homogeneity and purity.

Circle K Cycles conveys a sense of hybridity also through its mixing of languages. For instance, there are entire sections written in Portuguese and Japanese – such as the rules section – and certain subtitles appear in a pidgin language that mixes Portuguese and Japanese. Furthermore, the chapter titles are all in English, but they are supplemented with a Japanese character. Many Japanese writings are also scattered across the text, and many of the advertisements that are reproduced are bilingual: Japanese and Portuguese. Foreign words also serve as tools of defamiliarisation:[11] their presence disrupts the homogeneity and familiarity of the text, thus catching the reader's attention and making the text actually visible to their eyes and therefore significant to their minds. Yamashita uses this technique to turn a familiar terrain into an unfamiliar and foreign one, thus giving "the [Anglophone] reader the sensation of being in a place where you can't understand signs", which is what Brazilian immigrants experience in Japan where "[t]hey're entirely lost" (quoted in Palleau-Papin 2012).

Yamashita expresses her awareness of global (inter)connections also through the theme of circularity, echoed by the title – where "Circle" and "Cycles" hint at the circularity of Japanese Brazilians' migration, from Japan to Brazil and back – and graphics of the book: the circled K in the title; page numbers are also circled; the acknowledgements are contained in a circular frame; the flyleaf and the back cover are decorated with interpenetrating circles or bubbles of various dimensions; and the titles of the chapters and their sections are slightly curved. As Kam asserts, "the cyclical shape of *Circle K Cycles*… point[s] to the development of a self that is not autonomous but inextricably connected to the external world" (2008, 10), and so *Circle K Cycles* could be considered a "collective biography" (9). As such, it does not offer a single truth or a pure perspective but a multiply inflected, polyphonic tale in which diverse and divergent perspectives meet. These are highlighted by the use of different, alternating narrative voices and tenses as well as by the presence of

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10 Montage is usually associated with Soviet cinema of the 1920s and particularly with the theorist and filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, but it then developed into a literary technique thanks to writers such as Eliot, Stein and Dos Passos (Barndt, Sperling, Kriebel 2016).

11 This technique was introduced in 1917 by the Russian formalist theorist Viktor Shklovsky.

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entire sections translated into Portuguese and Japanese by others, which makes *Circle K Cycles* a co-authored work. The "generic hybridity" (Chuh 2006, 631) of *Circle K Cycles*, which mixes fact and fiction, combining fictional ethnography, autoethnography and collective biography, also contributes to highlighting multiplicity and difference over homogeneity.

The experimental nature of *Circle K Cycles* suggests that the Japanese Brazilian community is not only heterogeneous and hybrid but also constantly changing. In the 1990s, a new economic downturn in Japan left many Japanese Brazilians without jobs, but since the situation in Brazil was even worse, many of them abandoned their hope of eventually returning to Brazil and decided to stay in Japan (Carvalho 2002, 95-6). During the 2009 global financial crisis, however, Brazilian Nikkei were the first to lose their jobs, and the Japanese government offered them financial help to facilitate their voluntary repatriation (Sharpe 2010). As a result, the population fell to under 174,000 in 2015, but since then, their numbers have been "bouncing back, helped by higher-paying jobs and an acute labor shortage in Japan" (Twaronite 2017). Yet it seems that the government's 2018 "residency program for fourth-generation Japanese descendants living overseas did not attract a single Japanese-Brazilian applicant in its first three months" (Toyama 2018).

Yamashita concludes *Circle K Cycles* with these words: "Nikkei on the move. I might meet you on a train in Bangladesh, a marketplace in Algiers, a sauna in Stockholm, atop a mesa in Hopi country, online at *CaféCreole* [*sic*]" (147). Therefore, "Nikkei has transformed from a designation of ethnicity to an unpredictable route through identity and difference.[…] [A] marker of transformation rather than stable identity" (Chuh 2006, 634). Nikkei thus become emblematic of the contemporary migrant whose transnational mobility is dictated by capitalist logic but also by ethnic ties, hope and *saudade*, and Yamashita suggests that there might not be an end to their peregrinations or to the hybridisation of their identities. *Saudade* will travel with them and perhaps take yet another shape, another direction.

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