THE DEKASEGI AND PINOY DESCENDANTS:
Labor Conditions and Migrant Dynamics of Brazilian and Filipino Nikkeijin Workers in Japan

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INTRODUCTION

In a nation where myths of homogeneity are still widely told, foreigners glaringly find themselves socially and politically excluded. What comes from outside remains impure, unpleasant, and occasionally troublesome. This is how *gaijins* are depicted a century ago in Japan. Nonetheless, traces of xenophobia still persist despite the government's effort to embrace multiculturalism.

Japan, a state that strictly adheres to the principle of *jus sanguinis* or the "rule of the blood", has always venerated their nationhood and ethnicity as part of their national psyche. Citizenship indeed, is more than a political fiction, thereby non-negotiable. Conversely, the rule of the blood is still complex and tricky. The narratives of the Nikkeijins elucidate this point as they struggle for social acceptance in their own ethnic homeland. Lamentably, in the eyes of the society, they are still "gaijins" or outsiders.

Since the 1980s, thousands of Japanese descendants traveled across the Pacific to explore better employment opportunities in Japan. These Nikkeijins who had lived in Brazil and other Latin

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American countries believe that they possess the ethnic right to be incorporated to the Japanese society. They had endured the cheap and disposable labor system which astonishingly improved their socio-economic conditions. However, as they contest their ethnic identity and legal status, the Nikkeijin migrants have been vulnerable to various forms of abuses and exploitation.

The flow of Nikkeijin migration remains dynamic amidst global economic crises and stricter immigration policies. Descendants of Japanese nationals, not only from Latin America but also from the Philippines and Indonesia continuously arrive at the Japanese borders to reunite with their families and join the labor force, unaware of the appalling conditions that await them at the "kaisha"[1] (company). The purpose of this paper is to investigate the plights of these workers as they engage in a society that refuses to accept their "Japaneseness" and instead, ascribes them the lower occupations known as 3K (kiken, kitsui, kitanai) – dangerous, difficult, and dirty. As conventional research initiatives highlight the dynamics of push and pull factors as well as neoclassical theories that shape migration decision and its impact on global development, this study hopes to derive fresh insights on the linkage of ethnic belongingness to the prospect of assimilation and holistic development. With the assumption that migrant wellbeing contributes to the stability and continuity of global migration process, it is significant to inquire how individual migrants view their host society in general, and the way they are accepted within the confines of their workplaces.

Despite the widespread view that Japan does not accept foreign workers, present reality tells us that this nation's economy would not survive without the so-called outsiders. A glimpse at

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[1] Kaisha, in Japanese language, literally means "company." However, workers use this term referring to their respective factories or workplace.

Japanese factories in Aichi Prefecture reveals that the manpower is dominated by foreigners with different colors and languages. Most of these Latin American and Asian workers are not merely foreign laborers but in facto Japanese descendants, with grandparents or great grandparents born in Japan before the Second World War. Tormented by the prevailing immigrant politics in Japan, these descendants from Brazil, Peru, America, the Philippines and Indonesia have been contesting their identities reflected through their ancestry, legal status, and citizenship.

This paper explores the migrant experiences of Brazilian and Filipino Nikkeijins and the factors that ostensibly prolong the process of migration. Brazilian Nikkeijins, casually labeled as "dekasegi" *(people who go abroad temporarily to earn money)* and Filipino Nikkeijins, commonly known as Pinoy descendants among Filipino migrant and church groups, have continuously filled the shortages for low-skilled labor. While both groups of Nikkeijins consider themselves as temporary sojourners, social structures as well as individual agency create a rigorous trap in the host society, making them unable to terminate the migration cycle. The first part of the paper examines the dynamics of migration and the social agents that stimulate and sustain the migration process. The latter part focuses on their labor conditions and its correlation on identity struggle. Discussing the conditions and the challenges that they confront within and beyond their *kaisha*, this paper argues that there are parallelisms in the migration process of Brazilian and Filipino Nikkeijin groups, albeit different perceptions of identity and strategies in coping with the perceived discrimination in their respective working environment. Comparing the ethnographic results, this study reveals that the stark contrast of identity perception between Brazilian and

Filipino Nikkeijins significantly affect their views of assimilation, discrimination and the overall labor conditions.

The study employs life history interviews with 50 Filipino Nikkeijin workers residing in Aichi Prefecture. To compare the case of the Filipino descendants with the Brazilians, existing ethnographic studies of Brazilian Nikkeijins were reviewed, supplemented by a focus group discussion with Brazilian Nikkeijin informants who have been working in Nagoya.

LEGAL BASIS OF NIKKEI MIGRATION

Japan has been viewed as a nation that is hostile to foreigners including migrant laborers. This is very evident with the post war policies that pushed for the repatriation of Chinese and Koreans and restricted the entry of all foreign migrants[2]. By and large, Japan's citizenship and migration laws reflect the country's historical closure and isolation that has been experienced for more than 200 years. The "sakoku" mentality[3] has aggravated the xenophobia; conspiring with the principles of insularity and myths of ethnic homogeneity and the general perception that foreigners are outsiders that threaten and disrupt Japanese purity (MORRIS-SUZUKI, 2010, p.10).

Indeed, the entry of foreign workers remained very minimal throughout the postwar period. However, the changing economy from the 1970s to the early 1990s posed as a challenge to the restraining policies. While the nation remained closed to the idea of foreign

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[2]   During the American occupation, the SCAP (Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers) in collaboration with the Japanese leaders imposed restrictive policies in order to obscure the presence of potential migrants and obscure the presence of migrants who had already entered the country.

[3]   Sakoku is the principle of "locked country." It has been the foreign policy of Japan under during the Tokugawa regime which isolated the country from 1633 to 1853. The country reopened during the restoration of Meiji.

immigration, the evident increase of illegal and side-door entrant foreign workers had initially been tolerated by the government to support the booming industries of the rising economic giant.

Throughout the post-war economic growth and recession, three stages of migration development in Japan has been noted by Mori (1997). During the first wave of migration, women from the Philippines and Taiwan arrived to serve as hostesses in night clubs. These foreign entertainers occupied the vacancies in the red light districts which were unpopular for the local women. The second wave emerged in the late 1980s. This group is composed of single men from China, Korea, the Philippines, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Thailand who found employment in the manufacturing and construction industries. Such period also marks the arrival of foreign laborers who engaged in services, retail trade and restaurants. Finally, the third wave of migration began when the new immigration law was enforced in 1990. This amendment legalized the employment of foreign workers of Japanese descent known as the "Nikkei." Mostly from Latin American countries like Brazil and Peru, these groups of Nikkeijin satisfied the labor needs of large enterprises, specifically automobile assembly plants, auto parts companies, and electrical appliance industries.

It is important to highlight the legal shifts during the third wave. Because of the large influx of undocumented workers in the 1980s, the government responded by implementing the Immigration Control Act of 1990. Some of the important stipulations are the following (PAPADEMETRIOU and HAMILTON, 2000; REBICK, 2005):

1. The children of Japanese who had migrated to other countries, known as Nikkeijin, were allowed to take up residence in Japan and to work without restriction.

2. A limited number of trainee workers could be brought in for the purpose of training them skills that they would then use in their home country.

3. Except for the above categories, it is illegal to employ unskilled workers from overseas.

4. There was an expansion of the number of categories under which skilled workers were allowed to work.

As mentioned above, the revised law basically allows Nikkeijins to enter Japan even as unskilled workers while prohibiting foreigners from taking up unskilled jobs. With the implementation of this policy, the number of Latin American migrants has increased from practically zero to more than 250.000 (GOTO, 2006). Brazil has the largest number of Nikkeijins, mostly concentrated in Toyota (Aichi), Hamamatsu (Shizuoka), and Oizumi and Ohta (Gunma) (SUZUKI, 2008). Meanwhile, the Philippines has also lobbied for the recognition of Philippine Nikkeijin, initiating another wave of migrants from the Southeast Asian region. While the Japanese government remained extremely strict for Filipino workers due to its campaign on combating human trafficking and illegal immigration, Japanese descendants from the Philippines were eventually welcomed with the hope that they could contribute their skills in Japanese industries facing labor shortages.

In general, the main problem that has tremendously challenged the conservative immigration policy was Japan's demographic shift. The aging of Japan's population is accompanied by other detrimental phenomenon – birth rate decline, life expectancy increase, and total

population drop. In a study conducted by the NIPSSR, Japan's population has been projected in three variants; the worst case scenario was shown by the low variant which says that from a population of 126.93 million in 2000, the figure peaked at 127.48 million in 2004 and shrink to 92.03 in 2050[4]. As a consequence, the labor sector is concerned with the possible decline of labor force and its negative implications on productivity. According to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, the labor force will decline by approximately 4.1 million people in 2015 from the 2004 figure of 66 million. It is also predicted that by 2030, the entire working population will likely fall by some 10 million (MULGAN, 2006, p.125). As a result, economists forecast a decline on economic growth rate to 0.7 in real terms between 2004 and 2015, and 0,6 percent a year between 2015 to 2030. Then again, the government faces the challenge of overturning the policy of not accepting permanent foreign laborers. For the time being, a priority is given to the "Japanese blooded foreigners," the so-called "Nikkeijins."

TEMPORARY SOJOURN

The implementation of the New Immigration Law of 1990 paved the way for the entry of thousands of Brazilian Nikkeijin who took advantage of Japan's booming industries. According to Tsuda, these migrants are solidly middle class and relatively well-to-do in Brazil, with incomes higher than average earners (TSUDA, 1999, p.689). Hence, the term *dekasegi* became widely used denoting the temporary sojourn of these migrants who simply wanted to improve

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[4] This demographic data from Japan's National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (IPSSR) foresees high variant, medium variant, and low variant. The high variant predicts higher number of population growth, while the low variant indicates unstable low population growth.

their socioeconomic status by working for a certain period in Japan. Most of them had initially intended to return to Brazil as soon as they save sufficient fund for more investments. However, as many migration researchers have observed, these Brazilians have been prolonging the so-called "tentative stay." Thus, the distinguished scholar of Nikkei migration, Prof. Takeyuki Tsuda has theorized the "permanence" of temporary migration of these workers.

Tsuda explains that structural embeddedness is a perspective that "examines how stable immigrant populations become firmly embedded in the host society, persisting over a long period of time, even if the economic incentives which encourage migrants to remain abroad considerably weaken (TSUDA, 2003, p.692)." To illustrate, although Brazil's economy started to improve after the implementation of *Plano Real*, many Brazilian Nikkeijins still refused to go home, contradicting their initial intention to stay in Japan "temporarily." The reason lies on the progression of economic and social factors which eventually formed the layers of "structural embeddedness."

It is not surprising that most Filipino Nikkeijins share the views of Brazilian Nikkeijins on issues pertaining to the length of stay in Japan. Out of fifty interviewees, only seven (7) are aspiring for Japanese citizenship. Twenty one (21) participants are already holders of permanent residency visa, but they still express their intention to return to their home communities in the Philippines as soon as they fulfill their economic goals.

Filipino interview participants consistently maintained that economic factors had swayed them to migrate to Japan. Most of the responses denote financial difficulties in the Philippines, while a few had declared that they merely wanted to sustain or improve their current socio-economic status. Interestingly, upon analyzing

the biographical narratives, it can be surmised that most, if not all the participants are not from the poorest stratum of the society. Since majority of the interviewees are sansei (third generation) descendants, their issei (first generation) or nisei (second generation) family members who had migrated a decade ago evidently supported their financial needs prior to migration. In fact, twenty three (23) of them had obtained college degrees while fifteen (15) had acquired high school diplomas.

While it is possible that early Nikkeijin migrants who left the Philippines in the 1990s had experienced severe economic difficulties, my interview participants, mostly new generations of descendants had clearly enjoyed economic stability prior to migration. This fact is demonstrated not only by their educational attainment, but also manifested by their statements explaining their pre-migration status. Some Filipino interviewees like Malou, Vienna, Dennis and Noel were all company employees earning an above average employee income in the metropolis. Others like Alfred, Cams, and Ching were managing a small family-owned business (like sari-sari store or a small restaurant). Only very few participants like Greg and Marcy had experienced extreme poverty beyond doubt, citing their daily struggles of conquering starvation and looking for friends or relatives to whom they could borrow money for their necessities.

It can be argued that the Brazilian Nikkeijins' primary motivation to migrate is similar to the Filipinos. Coming from the middle-class socio-economic background with very good educational credentials, they decided to take unskilled job in order to earn monies that can be remitted to their families in Brazil. They were also concerned about the economic crisis in the country and its ominous effects on their socio-economic conditions. Most interestingly, they

believe that migration is the fastest way of improving their economic status. Quoting a UN Report, Knight reveals that Brazilian Nikkeijins

> wished to use their sojourn in Japan to improve or maintain their standard of living in Brazil by purchasing homes, cars, and luxury items such as video and audio equipment, home appliances, TVs, and other electronic goods- things that they had come to expect in their lives, but which had become increasingly affordable (KNIGHT, 2002, p.16).

Interestingly, other factors that propel Nikkeijin migration are only true for the Brazilian case. Knight clarifies that economic factors seemed to be the initial impetus for Brazilian Nikkeijin migration, but there can be other reasons. This may include the historical, ethnic, and socio-cultural variables that act as transnational connections between Brazil and Japan. There was indeed a "strong transnational ethnic affiliation" between the two countries which has been strengthened by the existence of vibrant Japanese communities in Brazil. Even before the process of migration, Brazilian Nikkeijins were already molded to act like genuine Japanese even in a Latin American setting. Thus, many of them view migration as an "opportunity to experience the true Japanese culture, discover their ancestral roots, and acquire useful technical skills whilst they were in Japan" (KNIGHT, 2002, p.16).

LABOR CONDITIONS

Salary is the most compelling reason for prolonging the 'temporary' sojourn in Japan. Economic benefits have consistently conflicted with emotional and psychological stress in shaping migrant behavior. This section discusses the working conditions of

the Nikkeijins based on my interviewees' perception. Both groups expressively articulated their stories of economic success countered by hardships, poor health, and a sense of being marginalized.

Unlike the usual process of job selection, Nikkeijin labor system does not offer a variety of choices and information regarding the *kaisha*. In the case of Brazilian Nikkeijins, prospective workers refuse to migrate until they acknowledge concrete job opportunities at destinations. Labor brokers operating in Brazil serve as a recruitment agency which initially process the immigration papers and match them to a specific workplace. They also serve as travel agents, issuing air tickets, arranging a pick-up service from the airport, and designating an accommodation close to the workplace. Brokers are responsible for placing a migrant to a particular *kaisha*, and transferring him if some problems arise. Higuchi calls it commodified migration system in which recruitment agencies or brokers serve as facilitator of migration process (HIGUCHI, 2005, p.9). Although it requires higher costs, migration becomes more viable and convenient.

Filipino Nikkeijins sometimes utilize the services of brokers upon entry to Japan. There are also some Nikkeijin organizations like Manila Nikkeijin-kai and Philippine Nikkeijin Mutual Foundation that provide legal advice for the processing of papers, and even actual job recruitment. For most of my sansei (third generation) interviewees, immediate family members or relatives did the processing of immigration papers and arrangement of accommodation. Sansei (third generation) and yonsei (fourth generation) mostly rely on their higher generation relatives to acquire an upgraded koseki tohon (family registry), process the certificate of eligibility, and look for a specific workplace or a trusted labor broker for them. Other participants disclosed that they were literally jobless when they first came to Japan because their relatives believed

that the most important thing is to enter Japan through a valid visa, whereas job seeking would be easier upon arrival.

In both Brazilian and Filipino cases, information regarding the workplace and job description is strictly limited. The consequence, as expected, is a tremendous physical and social distress due to the sudden shift of lifestyle and work environment. The difficulty of working in a Japanese factory depends on the nature of the company, the kind of job, and the attitude of the assembly leader. While both Brazilian and Filipino Nikkeijins experience have a certain degree of hardship in the workplace, some Nikkeijins feel that their job is tolerable and sometimes "fun". For instance, Vienna and Emily, both Filipino sansei, had worked in the assembly line of Sony. The routinely task is to insert a small component of camera to the machine in a running conveyor. Both Vienna and Emily think the job is easy and simple. Vienna said she enjoyed the job because the entire line is composed of friendly Filipinos who are also descendants. On the contrary, Emily did not enjoy because of the boring and repetitive procedures that they need to do everyday for ten hours.

Those who are working in an automotive, textile, and other machinery firms expressed a different response: it was extremely hard. To summarize their reasons, the difficulty is attributed to the heavy components that they have to lift. "We were treated like machines with batteries," according to Alfred. "I almost cried, I had never experienced such kind of work in the Philippines. We were carrying heavy tiles, and we can't even rest," said to Randy. One of my female interviewees, Cams, 23 years old, also recalled her experience:

> I was carrying heavy steel parts, and we had to move really quick. Obviously, it's a job for male workers. But I was already there and I can't complain. There was

a time when my dad, who was working at the same company but different department suddenly saw me. He tried lifting the steel and he realized how heavy those were. He pitied me, and somehow he wanted to help me, but he simply can't.

Although they told stories of severe hardships in kaisha, Cams, Randy and Alfred have been staying in Japan for more than five years. They have all considered the financial rewards of such physical agony. They have also mentioned that the hardest part is only during the first year, but the succeeding period became more tolerable. Now, they are already used to the physical distress.

For most of the *kaishas,* the only break time is during lunch (1 hour) and the 15 minute interval between regular worktime and overtime. Most Filipino and Brazilian Nikkeijins are also required by their leaders to do overtime work everyday despite the legal stipulation that overtime must be made optional for workers. However, in most factories, it has been a corporate culture to extend the amount of service time to the company. Workers who refuse to do overtime are usually reprimanded by their line leaders or superiors. One of my interviewees who has been working as an administrator in an automotive *kaisha* also mentioned that those who decline to work after regular time usually earn the Filipino moniker "tamad" (lazy).

Not surprisingly, almost all my Filipino interviewees admitted that overtime is essential to significantly increase their salary, hence they are willing to regularly do it except during those days when they feel sick. One key informant who used to work as a translator in a Japanese factory in Gifu noticed that nowadays, Brazilians tend to turn down overtime work while the Filipinos take this as their advantage to increase their income. This observation is consistent

with Tsuda's view that there has been a weakened work ethic among Brazilian Nikkeijins. Having stayed in Japan for a long period of time, these workers have now shifted to a more socially satisfying and enjoyable lifestyle (TSUDA, 1999, p.705). Thus, a number of my Filipino Nikkeijin interviewees noted that Brazilians are *tamad* (lazy), unwilling to do overtime, and very argumentative. Mr. Albert, a Filipino Nikkei who was assigned as a leader of Filipino, Peruvian and Brazilian Nikkeijins, also noticed that the *yarikata* (the way of doing things/the way of working) of the "Bs" (referring to Brazilian Nikkeijins) is often unsatisfactory, resulting to numerous "NGs" ("no good") or defective/rejected items. Albert proudly asserted that Filipinos, referring to both Nikkei and non-Nikkei, have better work ethic as they accustom themselves to the Japanese working environment. Despite that attitude, the "Bs", according to Albert, still receive better treatment and higher wage compared to Filipino Nikkeijin and other *gaijins*.

Factory work is indeed difficult for those migrants who had never experienced hard labor in the Philippines or Brazil. But worse than physical exhaustion is the psychological trauma of doing a demeaning job. Some of them had been employed in corporate or government offices or public schools and they had never imagined doing such kind of work which entails carrying heavy components, utilizing weighty and dangerous machineries, being exposed to extremely warm or cold working environment, and doing a routine job continuously.

In Tsuda's ethnographic work, one of the Brazilian *Nisei* who had worked as a bank manager in Brazil told him:

> I really feel the loss of my former status here because I had a high status in Brazil and associated with only educated people of my level. I was the boss, giving

> other people orders. My first day in the factory, I remember my supervisor chastised me for not working fast enough. It got me mad and I felt like telling him, "How dare you boss me around? My social level is much higher than yours!" Now, I'm used to the factory work, but I still sometimes ask myself: "Why in the world do I have to do such work in Japan?" Only the salary is good in Japan, but the work is so demeaning (TSUDA, 2003, p.173).

The loss of occupational status is a common dilemma for both Brazilian and Filipino Nikkeijins especially for those who had professional jobs in their home countries. My Filipino informants also expressed their disappointments, although it is apparent that they eventually overcame the social shock. It is interesting to understand the strategies of these former professionals in rationalizing and accepting their humiliating work in Japan:

> I told myself, "who cares?" Some of my fellow Pinoy descendants working in the same company are graduates of UP and Ateneo[5]. I also know somebody who used to be a professional engineer. They had good jobs in the Philippines, and they are all factory workers now. Well, they are happy… they are contented, because they all know that through hardwork, their families will have a better future.

The statement above came from Greys, 24 years old, a licensed pharmacist who used to work in a pharmaceutical company in the Philippines. Greys was supposed to take up medicine through the support of her sisters who are all working in Japan. However, feud among her siblings erupted until she realized that her sisters

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[5]   The University of the Philippines and the Ateneo de Manila University are both considered as premier, top-performing universities of the Philippines.

were no longer willing to provide financial support for her medical education. Thinking that it would be better to earn money for herself, Greys decided to migrate through the support of her older brother. Greys has been working at Kawamura Electronics for four years, and she has already dropped her plan to study medicine.

Another strategy to "accept" this type of job is to consider transferring to a better one after settling in. Abie and Camz, for instance, think that factory work is just temporary while they plan to apply as English language teachers. Abie is aware that the salary is relatively low and the job market is very competitive because most English schools in Japan are prioritizing native speakers and "Caucasian looking" foreigners. However, she is still determined to get out of the factory and try a "more respectable job" . Filipino informants who intend to work as English teachers revealed to me that they are already accustomed to the factory work, but still desire for a job that would not put their college education in a trash bin.

The Brazilians, according to Tsuda's accounts, have another strategy to get accustomed to the loss of occupational status. Those coming from the higher socio-economic class reject the collectively shared experience and solidarity, although the opposite occurs to the formerly impoverished Brazilian Nikkeijins. The richer ones emphasize their higher socio-economic background to differentiate themselves from the rest of the Nikkeijins. Hence, while Filipinos tend to say, "others also do that" , Brazilians tend to say "we are better than Nikkeijin immigrants." Through such differentiation, they are able to assert social superiority among other migrants. (TSUDA, 2003, p.299)

The salary of Nikkeijin factory workers ranges from Y160,000 (US$1,900) to Y300,000 (US$3,700). Such wage depends on the size of the company, the nature of work, and the frequency

of overtime. Most of my Filipino informants believe that the salary of Brazilian Nikkeijins is higher than those from the Philippines. Nevertheless, the amount of salary is good enough to purchase their daily necessities in Japan and send some amount for their relatives in their home countries. In the case of Greg, a Filipino sansei who is currently earning Y250,000, his monthly wage is good enough to support the education and daily needs of his two siblings in the Philippines. The lowest earner among my research participants was Greys, with a monthly income of Y160,000 (without overtime). Aware that this wage is comparatively low, she still considers herself lucky because of her company's eased policies on holidays and overtime duties. Moreover, she has been receiving many benefits including health insurance, pension, and twice-a-year-bonus.

To sum it up, both Brazilian and Filipino Nikkeijins told stories of physical and emotional shock during their first few months in Japan. Being previously employed as professional workers and having college diplomas from reputable universities in Brazil and the Philippines, it took some time and considerable emotional effort for them to get used to their new work status as factory workers. Some had already adjusted, while others, particularly some Filipino Nikkeijins are currently thinking of getting a better job, knowing that they are qualified to teach at English language schools. Both Brazilian and Filipino informants intend to stay in their present job, despite these experiences of hard labor and sometimes, discrimination. Overall, there is a sense of "satisfaction" because of the high wage that they are receiving from the present workplace.

PERCEPTIONS OF DISCRIMINATION

Being ethnically Japanese, Nikkeijins used to believe that they would be welcomed in their ancestral homeland. This perception is true especially for Brazilian Nikkeijins who were taught to behave in a Japanese way during their formative years in Brazil. Before migrating, they were exposed to the practices of "symbolic ethnicity" through various events and activities ranging from festivals, dinners, Japanese performances, traditional music and dance, and even Miss Nikkei beauty pageant (TSUDA, 2003, p.79). Together with their parents and other relatives, they had actively participated in Japanese communities within Brazil. Cognizant that they belong to the *primeiro mundo* (first world), Brazilian Nikkeijins tend to emphasize their "Japaneseness" during their pre-migration lives. Their positive perception of Japan had augmented their yearning for a Japanese homecoming.

Unfortunately, when homecoming took place, they hardly ever felt the warmth of their Japanese relatives. Although their physical appearance obviously displays traces of Japanese ancestry, they were usually labeled as *gaijins* (foreigners). Such experience has caused difficulties in adapting to work, school and the local community (SASAKI, 2008, p.59). This confusion distorts self-identity: Nikkei families had molded their children to become Japanese, and the Japanese society reshaped them to become another outsider (DECARALVALJO, 2003).

For Tsuda, this experience led to the disjuncture between community and consciousness (TSUDA, 2003, p. 245). They previously had "transnational hybrid identities" while in Brazil, a mixture of cultural affiliation to both Brazil and Japan. However, their dilemma in Japan has apparently caused their identities to move

in the opposite direction: to be more national and restrictive. They tend to distance themselves from the Japanese while affirming their allegiance to Brazil. A sansei Brazilian informant even told me:

> I don't know how we have changed our mindset. When we were in Brazil, my family and I used to be proud of our Japanese heritage. I remember our weekly visit to the Japanese shops in Sao Paolo; we enjoyed the sights, the Japanese items, the people speaking Nihongo. But now, when somebody is speaking in Japanese I sometimes want to pretend I'm deaf.

The Filipino Nikkeijins, on the other hand, do not experience this kind of crisis upon entry to Japan. Unlike the Brazilians, these Filipino Nikkeijins knew from the very start that they were Filipino citizens, embracing Philippine culture and lifestyle. Moreover, they had never wished for a "Japanese homecoming". Early Filipino Nikkei migrants, especially the first few batches in the late 1990s had even experienced economic hardships in the Philippines. With such difficult experiences in their provincial farms, they were used to hard and demeaning labor in the Philippines. If not for economic reasons, they were generally not interested to work and live in their ancestral home country. As one interviewee named Evelyn pointed out, "if not for my three children, I would rather stay in Davao, Philippines. I'm just here for my children."

Recent Nikkei migrants from the Philippines, usually *sansei* and upgraded *sansei* have improved socioeconomic conditions, however they still came as economic migrants without expectations of being welcomed as an ethnic Japanese. Their Japanese facial feature is only manifested, to a limited degree, by their eyes. Most of them have an obvious Southeast Asian physical appearance. Being a Nikkeijin, for them, is simply a legal status to enter Japan and

explore better employment opportunities. None of my interviewees felt a significant degree of "Japaneseness." They repeatedly told me that they are "Filipino" in heart and spirit.

Historically, Filipino Nikkeijin escaped from the public eye during the time when anti-Japanese sentiment swept across the region after the Pacific war. They had lost their documents and all physical evidence linking them to Japanese ancestry. During the administration of Corazon C. Aquino, these descendants had sought the help of the Philippine government to reach out to the Japanese authorities in order to be recognized as Nikkeijin. Tudor, in *Philippines Today* article published in 2006 reported that some 15 Nikkei associations were organized to help in the fieldwork and documentation researches of the descendants. It was only in 1999 when the first large group of Filipino Nikkeijin entered Japan with long term residence status through the concerted effort of the local government of Choshi, Japanese manufacturers, and Nikkei associations in the Philippines and Japan.

This "coming-out" of Filipino Nikkeijin entailed intricate courses and processes considering the social, cultural, political and legal battles that they went through. They have engaged in the "politics of recognition" through koseki-searching and koseki-registration movement. Through repeated negotiations with Japanese government, they have changed their self-identity from "Japanese descended Filipino" to "Japanese left behind (OHNO, 2007, p.243)." From "war stigmatized pariahs to visa-advantaged Nikkei", these return migrants have been reshaping the contours of Philippines-Japan labor migration as their number continuously increase after a series of policy adjustments.

Taking into account the historical and societal dimensions that dominated their pre-migration experiences, Brazilian and Filipino

perceptions of discrimination are fairly different. While Brazilian Nikkeijins emphasize the societal rejection to their ethnicity, Filipino Nikkeijins tend to highlight their experiences within the workplace, without giving reference to their "Japaneseness." This is probably the reason why the feeling of being discriminated is more intense in the case of the Brazilians than Filipinos. In Roth's ethnographic research, he quoted Vanessa, a Brazilian Nikkeijin worker who was asked to used her injured hand while working:

> I don't think that I'm an animal, Joshua. I'm human; I'm very human… I have Japanese blood in me – my grandmother is Japanese. Understand? I think he should have treated me as a human, for I'm not an animal. I don't know whether it's because Japanese are real cold, in relation to sentiments, but when it comes to money… they're going to die for money (ROTH, 2002, p.77).

The feeling of discrimination among Brazilian Nikkeijins is usually referenced to their identity as a Japanese-Brazilian. An emotional nuisance persists due to the failure to feel "belongingness" from the people whom she considered as fellow countrymen. It is worthy of noting that the Filipino group, including some nissei doesn't even associate the concept of "being Japanese." Thus, when I inquired about their experiences of discrimination, it was hard for them to think of any. Most often, they would say yes, there were cases of unfair treatment, but it can't be helped. According to them, they simply need to accept the hierarchical system and the norms of the society.

In my interviews with Filipino Nikkeijins, discrimination is usually felt in situations when unequal treatment among Japanese, Brazilians and Filipinos is apparent. There is a common sentiment

that local Japanese occupy the highest post in the kaisha's hierarchy; the Brazilians have a low place but the Filipinos have lower position (not necessarily the lowest, to give place to the non-Nikkei South Asians). For instance, Alfred noted that when a Brazilian Nikkeijin commits a mistake, the supervisor tends to ignore it. However, when a Filipino Nikkeijin is at fault, a major meeting will be conducted to humiliate the worker. Moreover, assembly leaders put more pressure to the Filipino workers to work harder and do overtime, while evidently being lenient to the Brazilian Nikkeijins. When I asked how they respond in such situations, the usual response is "*ganun talaga eh*," (that's they way it is). 29 years old Dan explains:

> Brazilian Nikkeijins are treated better despite the fact that they are very *urusai* (noisy) and they refuse to do overtime. They are even paid well. Yes, their salary is different from ours. But, what can we do? They are more Japanese than us.

As previously mentioned, there are also a number of informants who believe that there was no discrimination in the workplace. Despite the tedious physical demands of factory work and the hierarchical set-up in their workplace, a significant number of Filipino interviewees think that these are not forms of discrimination. These remarks are often heard from those who had experienced doing hard labor in the Philippines. They tend to compare their previous manual work in rural areas of a third world country, thus they feel that the present work in Japan is even more comfortable. None of my interviewees had also disclosed any incidence of verbal abuse or racial slur during their stay in Japan.

An ethnographic observation supports such observation that Brazilian Nikkeijins receive indulgent treatment. While doing participant observation in Toyama, it was noted that although some

Brazilian Nikkeijins commit serious mistakes or were clearly slow and clumsy on their job, they were not chastised nor reprimanded (TSUDA, 2003, p.137). The observer was convinced that there was an "infinite patience" toward an incompetent Brazilian Nikkeijin worker who could not perform the simplest tasks. Filipino informants, both administrators/translators and manual workers disclosed that such kindness and patience were clearly not shown to Filipino Nikkeijins. Brazilians, according to them, were still perceived as semi-Japanese while Filipino Nikkeijins were absolutely "foreign" for them.

This unequal treatment between Filipinos and Brazilians can be attributed to the fact that Brazilians possess closer physical and cultural resemblance to pure Japanese. It is also interesting to point out the common sentiment among my Filipino interviewees about their views of the dichotomy of white and black: Japanese fascination of white-skinned people is manifested to their preferential treatment to the Brazilians, while Japanese abhorrence to dark-skinned people is evident on their coldness to the Filipinos. Despite the sense of injustice, Filipino Nikkeijin workers have still maintained professional relationship with their non-Filipino co-workers. None of them complained about any form of abuse, be it verbal or physical from their superiors. My respondents also clarified that there has been no animosity or conflict whatsoever between Filipino and Brazilian Nikkeijins. In fact, they easily get along with them.

Lastly, the result of my interviews concurs with Tsuda's observation in his book titled "Strangers in the Ethnic Homeland" that treatment in smaller firms was better, because there was more interaction between the Japanese and the Nikkeijin (TSUDA, 2003, p.147). In smaller kaishas with very few laborers, Nikkeijins feel more warmth as their bosses frequently interact with them. Sometimes, the owners and managers even establish personal relationships with their

workers. Jeff, a newly arrived Nikkeijin from Davao, Philippines, delightedly told me that he easily got along with the owner of the food shop where he is presently working. He also described the Brazilians and Japanese workers as very friendly and "cool."

CHAIN MIGRATION: A Coping Strategy

Migration is not a simple, linear process of departure and return. It entails complicated dynamics, responding to various forces coming from the global market, the sending and host societies, and even the smallest unit of households. The case of Nikkeijin migration, whether Brazilian, Filipino, or Peruvian groups exhibits intricate mechanisms that lead to social embeddedness and one of its most vital features is chain migration. Castles explains the usual course of migrant decisions that lead to the arrival of family members:

> In economic migration, the primary migrant is usually a young man or woman in search of temporary work and often intending to return home once certain savings targets have been reached. The difficulty in achieving such targets leads to prolonged stay. This, in turn, encourages family reunion. People start to see their life perspectives in the new country (CASTLES, 2007, p.36).

Certainly, migrant dynamics and patterns dramatically change when a family member joins the migrant worker in the host country. As a general pattern, one family member is usually followed by another member, and this chain swiftly continues as long as the state permits entry to the other family members. Nikkeijin migration is a case in point because through *koseki tohon* (family registration) applicant Nikkeijin easily receives long term visa, hence the

expansion of Nikkei families in Japan. In the case of Brazilian Nikkeijins, reunification of family members sharply increased after the 1990s, and the impact is generally positive due to the increased family income, considering that the number of working members in a household increased (ASAKURA; MURATA, 2006, p.336). A recent study also reveals that family reunification of these Brazilian Nikkeijins "ameliorates mental status to a certain degree.[6]" With the arrival of family members, everyday stress is generally reduced while the degree of homesickness is diminished.

Chain migration, indeed, is a coping strategy to ease the stressful routines of migrant life in Japan. Both Brazilian and Filipino informants detailed how the arrival of their immediate family and relatives contribute to the improvement of their well-being. They have talked about the joy of being reunited, and the comfort of having a companion to ease their loneliness and stress during tough times in kaisha.

The process of chain migration is even more dynamic for the Filipino Nikkeijins. While some non-Nikkei Filipino migrants experience emotional isolation due to the absence of a support group, Filipino Nikkeijins enjoy the accessibility of their cousins, aunts, siblings, and sometimes parents. During times of financial, emotional, or even legal problems, they usually rely on their family members or close relatives. The presence of these relatives significantly lessens the possibility of depression and despondency due to homesickness. This is also one reason for their unwillingness to return to their home community. As my interviewee named Noel said, "almost all the members of my clan are coming here. Another cousin and uncle will

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[6]   Asakura and Murata employed multiple regression analysis to study the nonpsychotic disturbances of 265 Brazilian Nikkeijins residing outside Metropolitan Tokyo.

be coming next month. My sister has also lodged her application. Now, we're a very big, extended family in Japan. How can I leave now? Even if I want to leave, I simply couldn't, because these close relatives of mine need me."

It is important to emphasize the unique process that has facilitated the chain migration of the Nikkeijin parent, the son/ daughter, the grandchildren, the great grandchildren, and so on and so forth. The process, which has been popular among Filipino Nikkei migrants is called generation upgrading. Since the Japanese Immigration law only allows the entry of descendants up to the third generation, the members of the fourth generation usually stays in the Philippines. Thus, the second generation parent (for example, a father) applies for his own *koseki tohon* which, in principle, converts his status to first generation. His children, who were formerly third generation, become second, and the grandchildren left in the Philippines will be able to enter Japan due to their upgraded status as third generation. This process has paved the way for the unbroken chain of descendants and relatives entering the Japanese borders since the late 1990s.

Through generation upgrading, it is possible for a Nikkei migrant to have a larger kin network across the country. In the case of Greg, for instance, he has more than thirty relatives who are continuously spreading and growing in Japan. This is indeed advantageous for migrants because relatives in other prefectures provide referrals for prospective job with better salary and working conditions. If one Nikkeijin encounters any problem with his kaisha, his relatives within or outside Aichi would suggest a vacancy in other kaisha, or refer him to their trusted employment broker. Because of this, the dynamic mobility of Philippine Nikkeijins is very evident: they are not only considered as international migrants but also as

internal migrants because they frequently move from one prefecture to another in search of better working conditions.

Both Brazilian and Filipino Nikkeijins have developed the practice of chain migration with varying strategies and mechanisms. With both cultures bestowing high regard for family bonding, it is not surprising to witness how they utilize their social and financial capital in order to facilitate the entry of a family member or even a distant relative. It definitely entails considerable costs. As one Brazilian informant told me, it is no joke to accommodate a family member:

> I have to work harder for the airfare of my wife and daughter. Each ticket from Brazil costs $2,000 or more! I have to transfer to a bigger apartment, because the owner of my current apartment reminded me that I couldn't bring my family here. It's too much headache, but I know it is really necessary to do it[7].

Filipino informants also expressed the same concern, although the airfare is not really a problem considering the geographical proximity and the availability of Low Cost Carrier (LCC) tickets like Cebu Pacific and Jet Star. One-way air ticket to Osaka or Tokyo costs Y15000 (or US$180) during regular season, but it could get cheaper during off-peak periods.

Interestingly, while Brazilian family migration tends to form micro communities because migrant families occupy similar neighborhood, Filipinos tend to be more mobile and dispersed. Except for the cases of couples and families with young children, Filipino migrants initially live with their family or close relatives, but when better opportunities are offered in some other places, they tend

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[7]   This informant, who started to work in Toyota two years ago, will welcome his wife and daughter in September 2012.

to move out and explore the job prospect in other geographical areas. Undoubtedly, this kind of "internal" mobility is usually facilitated by other relatives or friends, if not labor brokers.

DEEPENING CULTURE OF MIGRATION

One of the similar elements in the migrant behavior of Filipino and Brazilian Nikkeijin is the "culture of migration." This means the citizens perceive migration positively, taking into account the benefits it can bring to the household and community. In the Philippines, success stories of OFWs (Overseas Filipino Workers) who used to work in the Middle East, Americas, or East Asia are widely told in local communities. Large houses in the provinces symbolize the years of hardships of those Filipinos who had worked abroad to alleviate their families from poverty. Second and third generation Nikkeijins, who had witnessed how their parents or grandparents financially supported not only the immediate family but also their relatives, were determined to take the same path, keeping in mind how fulfilling it is to help other relatives.

This "positive perception" on migration has been accompanied by a strong state policy to encourage migration. From the perspective of Philippine policymakers, migration is an important component of developmental strategies. Labor migrants have been hailed as modern day heroes not only because of their economic contribution through periodic remittances, but also because of their potential to transfer the skills that they had acquired abroad to the local labor setting. For more than four decades, the government has been supporting and facilitating migration of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) to almost all continents in the globe.

Brazil, on the other hand, has no comprehensive migration policy that facilitates migration of Nikkeijins. However, the culture of migration has been fortified by ethnic yearning for "returning" to their homeland. As previously mentioned, Brazilian Nikkeijins had developed their ethnic consciousness since childhood years through the Japanese traditions and norms introduced by their grandparents or parents. Proud of being a part of the positive minority[8], they have held such identity with a dream of seeing the land of their forefathers. Aside from this patriotic longing, migration became "culturally approved" and valued as an effective strategy to combat economic difficulties and achieve socio-economic mobility. The movement of Brazilian Nikkeijin became prevalent that about 18 percent of the entire Japanese-Brazilian population currently resides in Japan (TSUDA, 1999, p.713).

The destination country, Japan, has been viewed as an affluent state, an industrialized and modern place, a first world. Nikkeijins share those positive perceptions drawn from their images of Honda and Toyota cars, robots, computers and even Japanese food. Japan is supposed to be a place of cleanliness, calmness, and generosity. These positive perceptions are shared by both Filipinos and Brazilian Nikkeijins, with the exception of two female Filipino workers in their late 1930s. One of them, Ms. Ella, recalled that the people from their province think that going to Japan means working in entertainment clubs or being a prostitute. It should be noted that the massive migration of "Japayuki" (in social context, it means an "entertainer") had been very popular in the 1980s and 1990s before it was criticized by the United States government for its propensity

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[8] Tsuda argues that in the case of Japanese Brazilians, there has been a change from a "Japanese" to a "Brazilian" ethnic minority status, and this is also accompanied by a dramatic shift from a positive to negative minority status.

to promote human trafficking and exploitation. As a young, educated person, she turned down her father's offer to process her document for a Japanese visa. A decade later, after her husband retired from a computer processing company, she had realized that their wages wouldn't be sufficient to enroll their children in good schools. Hence, the couple migrated and both of them worked in a manufacturing factory in Aichi Prefecture.

The culture of migration is a contributing factor in sustaining the migration process of both Nikkeijin groups. Tsuda even argues that there are certain "cultural attitudes and social structures which develop and further advance the settlement process (TSUDA, 1999, p. 716)." This is evident in lifestyle changes and in some cases, a decline in work ethic. Similar to the case of the Brazilians, Filipino Nikkeijins who have been working for more than a year had admitted that they could not stop working due to some "personal wants". Shopping has become their weekend pastime, while socialization with other Filipino friends in *isakaya* restaurants has been a part of the Sunday routine. My Filipino interviewees are worried that quitting their job or going back to the Philippines would dramatically downgrade their social status, preventing them to purchase those things that they "want."

Another aspect of the "culture of migration" is the deeply ingrained perception of pessimism on the prospect of return migration. In the case of Brazilian Nikkeijins, in spite of considerable economic improvements from the sending communities, they still believe that "life would be harder in Brazil." Images of "poor Brazil" and "rich Japan" have been manifesting in Nikkeijin consciousness. Tsuda explains that these are the deeply ingrained cultural pessimism and lack of confidence about the long term prospects of the Brazilian economy.

Filipinos, too, share this attitude. The rise of President Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino, for them, has not even changed a little town. There were negative comments on politics and society, and a pessimistic view of the country's future. Ironically, almost all my interviewees talked about the "happiness" that they used to enjoy in the Philippines. Japan, for them, is a place of work with "no fun". Everyone has been adapting themselves to the cheerless environment and the *tsumetai* (cold) people. Indeed, they really want to go back home in the Philippines. But at the end of the day, they tend to ask themselves: what will happen to me and my family if I give up my work in Japan? Contemplating on this matter, they end up quitting the nostalgia.

ON BEING A JAPANESE: An Identity Struggle

Although Nikkeijins, in general, are ethnic Japanese by blood, their unfortunate birth outside Japan has made them foreigners. At present, Nikkeijins are not considered ethnic immigrants returning to their home country, but as foreign migrants coming to temporarily work in Japan. Upon entry, they possess a temporary resident status which, in principle, put their status below zainichi[9] foreigners but above most other foreigners (SHIPPER, 2008, p. 37). Despite such racial identity, Nikkeijins have limited political and civic rights, with no rights to vote in national and local elections and no legal protection against racism. On the positive side, Nikkeijins, in theory have full access to medical care and public health services (SHIPPER, 2008, p.30). Lamentably, I have interviewed several Filipino Nikkeijins

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[9] Zainichi are Japan-born foreigners who have lived in Japan for several generations. There are approximately 460,000 Koreans and 4,000 Chinese who are considered zainichi in Japan (SHIPPER, 2008, p.29).

who revealed that they have no health insurance or any medical care benefit from their respective companies.

As repeatedly emphasized, Brazilian Nikkeijins have experienced social rejection on the ground of being a "foreigner" in Japan despite their initial identity as a Japanese in Brazil. Interestingly, although Filipino Nikkeijins perceive Brazilian Nikkeijins as more preferred and privileged in Japanese kaisha, these Brazilians have been emotionally affected by their perceived marginalization. This has resulted to various consequences, ranging from ethnic resistance to an overwhelming effort to achieve assimilation.

The consequences of identity conflicts among Brazilian Nikkeijins may not be underestimated. While some opted to accept the status quo, others have demonstrated anti-social behavior and remarkable deviance. According to Tsuda, some Brazilians wanted to expose their "Brazilianess" to the Japanese public in order to lessen the societal expectation (like the expectation to speak fluent Japanese); thus a form of resistance is done by speaking Brazilian in a loud voice, using Brazilian style outfits, and refusing to study the Japanese language. Those Brazilians who try to act as Japanese are sanctioned by the majority by labeling them as the "ass kissers" and antinikkeijin ethnic betrayers who have switched sides (TSUDA, 2003, p. 338).

The Filipino Nikkeijins, on the other hand, do not take offense with the ascription of being a foreigner in Japan. Of course, the issei or first generation and Nisei or second generation Nikkeijins had historically associated themselves with the Japanese lineage due to the cultural conviction of their parents. As they became economically affluent in the early part of the century, the isseis intended to educate their children in the same way that Japanese pupils were educated in Japan. Japanese parents had prevented assimilation of their children

from the Filipinos and inculcated an attitude of being proud 'first class nations' (OHNO, 2007, p. 36). Although there were schools established to mold the Filipino Nikkeijins in Japanese manner, the "Japanization process" had become more problematic especially after the Second World War when the anti-Japanese sentiment had been stirred in the general populace. As years passed by, the second and third generation Nikkeijins had instead become more *Filipinized* than *Japanized* as they adopt the attitudes, religion, and certain facets of the dominant culture. In fact, although they are aware of their Japanese ancestry, they frequently associate themselves with other non-nikkeijin Filipino workers in Japan. For them, they are part of the "Filipino group" in Japan. They do not distinguish Nikkei and non-nikkei Filipino friends; they see themselves belonging to one group. These second, third and fourth generation Nikkeijins participate in Filipino church groups and contribute their time to the religious causes organized by the Filipino groups. As Lola Osawa, a second generation Filipino Nikkeijin said:

> I know that my father is Japanese. I still recall those moments when he spoke in Japanese to us. But really, I feel I am pure Filipino and I always have this urge to come back and live in the Philippines. This country is such a foreign place for me. I know, for sure, that I do not belong here.

Needless to say, there are also factions within the Filipino workers in Japan. Most of these conflicting groups are regionalistic: Tagalogs from Manila or Luzon island against the Bisaya groups from Central and Southern Philippines. Conflicts arise when Tagalogs think that Bisayan people spread gossips and make fun of other Filipinos using their regional language (Bisaya), or when Bisayans think that Tagalogs are bragging about their socio-economic status in

the Philippines. Filipino informants also talked about their version of "ass kissers" and crab minded Filipinos who attempt to spread gossip against someone who is economically getting better. Among my educated interviewees, there is also a feeling of discomfort against former Japayukis (entertainers/hostess in clubs) who are working with them at Japanese factories. In short, conflicts are usually caused by the spread of gossips and misunderstanding among fellow Filipino workers. Despite the factions, there was no hatred against those who prefer to naturalize their citizenship. One informant, a Nisei Nikkeijin who has recently embraced Japanese citizenship, has even felt that she has been more respected and admired by fellow Filipinos for championing their labor causes and serving as a vibrant voice in the Japanese management on behalf of the ordinary and powerless Filipino Nikkeijins.

Most Filipino Nikkeijins are satisfied with their ability to speak and understand simple Japanese used in kaisha for the simple reason that they are not intending to stay in Japan for a long period of time. Nikkeijin parents are also very cautious about the "Filipino-ness" of their children who are studying in Japanese schools. As much as possible, they want their children to grow up in a Filipino way. They talk to their children using the Filipino language and remind them about their roots and heritage in the Philippines. They also believe that the upbringing of children in Japan does not conform to their values as Filipinos, thus they adopt the Filipino system of raising their children.

CONCLUSION

As globalization compels the nation-states to open their borders for the economic migrants, Japan remains restrictive and

selective. It refuses to acknowledge the manpower shortages and the massive demand for foreign workers. Instead, Japan took the opportunity to utilize the skills and labor of those Japanese blooded foreigners. After all, policymakers were convinced that they are ethnically Japanese and they would not ruin the notion of societal homogeneity. As Ayumi (2003) claims, "*blood* was a symbol of familial ties… the conflated notion of Japanese race and culture, symbolized by blood, served well to justify the right of Nikkeijin to enter, reside, and work in Japan" (TAKENAKA, 2003).

However, Nikkeijin migration as an ethnic recognition remains a political rhetoric and a lip service. The migrant dynamics of Brazilian and Filipino Nikkeijins reveals the paradox of their status and actual conditions: they are ethnically Japanese, yet they are viewed as foreigners; they are legally documented, but treated as disposable workers; they are privileged and preferred by factories, but still discriminated. Brazilian Nikkeijins who have lived like "real Japanese" in Brazil came as early as the 1980s, laying the foundation for massive chain migration and ethnic clustering. Filipino Nikkeijins, who see themselves as pure *Pinoys*, have started to migrate in the late 1990s after struggling for an official recognition of their Nikkei identity. Since then, they had facilitated the entry of more relatives through generation upgrading.

Brazilian and Filipino Nikkeijin migration comes in complex trajectories responding to the conflicting forces of embeddedness and nostalgia. After years of working in Japan, Brazilian Nikkeijins tend to adhere to their Brazilian roots as a general consequence of the experienced ethnic rejection in Japan. The Pinoys, as usual, assert their Filipino identities as they prepare for a permanent settlement in their country. Brazilians and Nikkeijins wish for a homecoming to their sending societies, but the effects of economic wanting,

changed lifestyle, culture of migration, and chain migration have been sustaining the migration process. Furthermore, Nikkeijins realize the possibility that their socio-economic status would be downgraded when they quit their job in Japan. For others who came back to their home societies, permanent settlement becomes even more difficult due to financial uncertainties. This creates a trend of circular migration wherein migrants shuttle back and forth between Japan and their home countries.

The distinguishing factor that strongly differentiates the migration paths of the two Nikkeijin groups is the "Japanese identity" that has been inculcated to the Brazilians prior to their migration. No doubt, the Brazilian Nikkeijins have been raised within an ethnie or ethnic community. This category implies that they have a collective name that symbolize their uniqueness among others: they have myths of common origin, a shared ethno-history, common cultural characteristics, an association with a historic territory (in their case, it is their ancestral homeland- Japan), and a sense of solidarity (SMITH, 1995, p.133). Embracing this sort of identity has significant impacts on Brazilian migrant decisions, from the initial motives of migration to their everyday engagement within and outside the workplace. With strong allegiance to the ancestral culture, they had irreconcilable expectations during the early phase of the migration process. When these expectations had not been met, they resort to various mechanisms in order to rectify the distortion of social identity. The outcome is indeed a crisis of cultural identity manifested by resistance to the prospect of assimilation.

On the other hand, Filipino Nikkeijins do not feel nor even yearn for this sense of "Japaneseness" . Unlike the Brazilian Nikkeijins, Pinoy descendants do not recognize Japan as a homeland, posses no shared memories and myths, and a sense of exclusive

solidarity. Even after several years of staying in Japan, they still see themselves as "Pinoys" who would return to the Philippines soon. Without contesting for an ethnic recognition, such sense of neutrality has actually helped them to overcome the perils of hierarchical social and labor structure.

The behavior of Filipino Nikkeijins is clearly an expression of solid Filipino identity in contrast to the "resistance strategy" as demonstrated by the Brazilians. Prior to migration, Filipino Nikkeijins had already displayed a fervent commitment to Filipino vernacular culture. True enough, the shifts and distortion of identity as experienced by Brazilian Nikkeijins cause deeper emotional difficulties. For Filipinos, assimilation is also a struggle although they attribute such conflicts to the concept of cultural difference. At the end of the struggle, they have realizations that such differences are simply irreconcilable and structured; it will always be there and the Filipinos must simply comply to the social norms. This trait, indeed, is a contributing positive attribute of Overseas Filipinos who have been successfully engaging in various types of work around the globe.

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RESUMO

Com situação demográfica do Japão, o governo japonês começou a diminuir as políticas de imigração, especificamente para os nikkeijins. Depois de passar por uma série de debates políticos intensos, a Nova lei de Controle de Imigração e Reconhecimento de Refugiados de 1990 solicita a emissão de "vistos de residentes de longa duração" para estrangeiros descendentes de japoneses até a terceira geração e para os não-nikkeijin cônjuges. Com essa lei revista, nikkeijins e seus familiares foram autorizados a participar em trabalhos não qualificados temporários no Japão. Atualmente, nikkeijins da Ásia e da América Latina estão continuamente fazendo parte da escassez de trabalho nas indústrias japonesas. Essa pesquisa compara as experiências dos nikkeijins brasileiros e filipinos, que lutam dentro da estrutura de poder de seus kaishas. Olhando para os processos de migrantes e das condições de trabalho, o estudo revela as experiências semelhantes e contrastantes entre os atuais migrantes nikkeijin no Japão. Este artigo argumenta que a percepção da discriminação, assimilação e condição de migrante, em geral, é formada pelo mecanismo de afiliação étnica. Através de entrevistas de história de vida e estudos etnográficos dos migrantes brasileiros e filipinos, é evidente que

a autoavaliação de sua condição migrante é altamente dependente de seu senso de pertencimento nacional e sua identidade étnica.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Nikkeijin. Migração. Dekasegi. Mobilidade de trabalho.

ABSTRACT

With Japan's demographic predicament, the Japanese government has started to ease immigration policies specifically for the Nikkeijins. After going through a series of intensive policy debates, the New Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act 1990 prompted the issuance of "long-term resident visas" to overseas Japanese descendants up to the third generation and to their non-Nikkeijin spouses. With this revised law, Nikkeijins and their families were allowed to engage in temporary unskilled work in Japan. At present, Nikkeijins from Asia and Latin America are continuously filling the labor shortages of Japanese industries. However, the issue of Nikkeijin migration is more than an economic concern. Being descendants of Japanese nationals, their destination country is also an ancestral homeland- a place so dear to their great grandparents; a supposedly "home" for all the children of the Japanese nation. The government itself declared that Nikkeijins are preferred because of their ancestry and ability to assimilate to the root culture of their forefathers. With this rationale, do these Nikkeijin workers feel the warmth of ethnic homecoming as they live and work in the land of their ancestors? This research compares the experiences of Brazilian and Filipino Nikkeijins as they struggle within the power structure of their *kaishas*. Looking at the migrant processes and labor conditions, the study uncovers the similar and contrasting experiences of current Nikkeijin migrants in Japan. This paper argues that the perception of assimilation, discrimination and overall migrant condition is shaped by the mechanism of ethnic affiliation. Through life history interviews and ethnographic studies of Brazilian and Filipino migrants, it is evident that the self-assessment of their migrant condition is highly dependent on their sense of national belongingness and ethnic identity.

KEYWORDS: Nikkeijin. Migration. Dekasegi. Labor Mobility.