CHAPTER 10

Ethnic Hierarchy and Its Impact on Ethnic Identities: A Comparative Analysis of Peruvian and Brazilian Return-Migrants in Japan

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INTRODUCTION

As numerous studies have indicated, ethnic return migrants, though officially incorporated as “co-ethnics,” are often treated as foreigners in their ethnic homelands. Whether this is due to migrants’ alien cultures (e.g. Kawamura 2000) or their status as newcomers (e.g. Capo Zmegac 2005), “ethnic ties” do not necessarily facilitate migrants’ assimilation or acceptance in their ethnic homelands (e.g., this volume). In return migrating, migrants typically experience rejection and subsequently face the need to re-evaluate their ethnic identities. Some strengthen a sense of attachment to their countries of birth (Chinese Americans in China, for instance, may realize how American they are). Some embrace their multi-cultural backgrounds (asserting that they have the best of both worlds). And some transform or re-interpret their previous identities (Transylvanian Hungarians in Hungary regard themselves as the bearers of “authentic” Hungarian traditions as opposed to more modernized Hungarians in Hungary [Capo Zmegac 2005; Fox 2003]). Ethnic return migration thus ironically enhances awareness of ethnic difference, rather than of similarity, among “co-ethnics” dispersed across countries. Migrations driven by alleged ethnic affinity may, in practice, generate new forms of ethnic heterogeneity in the receiving context (Brubaker 1998).

Latin Americans of Japanese descent, too, go through similar experience in Japan. Having been admitted as “Japanese” (more precisely, as families of Japanese), those return migrants, mostly from Brazil and Peru, have nonetheless found themselves treated as “Brazilians” or “Peruvians” in Japan.
Japanese Brazilians and Peruvians began to migrate to Japan in the late 1980s in response to Japan’s ethnicity-based immigration policy, mostly for economic reasons in the context of severe recessions in South America. Ever since then, Brazilian and Peruvian migrants have grown in number, surpassing 270,000 and 55,000, respectively, in 2005. In Japanese descendants they may be, they have become Japan’s new “ethnic minorities.”

In response to this ethnic rejection, Japanese Brazilians and Peruvians, who had previously held identities as Japanese in Brazil and Peru, have engaged in the construction of difference vis-à-vis the Japanese in Japan (Capo Zmegac 2005). Their reactions however have not been uniform. Japanese Brazilians typically asserted a Brazilian national identity in contrast to the Japanese by strengthening their sense of pride and awareness as Brazilians (Tsuda, this volume; Mori 2000 etc.). They commonly expressed “patriotic sentiments” (Capuano de Oliveira 1998) in Japan, displaying the Brazilian flag in ethnic stores, dancing samba in public sites, and wearing buttons and clothes with Brazilian flags, even though they did none of these in Brazil (Tsuda, this volume, p. 29-31).

Peruvians of Japanese descent, in contrast, were less inclined to display Peruvian national symbols in Japan. Compared to their “more nationalistic” Brazilian counterparts, many Japanese Peruvians told me, they were often more ambivalent about their identities. The Peruvian flag was seldom displayed, and Peruvian cultural activities were less common in public sites. Instead of developing a greater sense of allegiance to Peru, Japanese Peruvians generally strengthened their identity as “Nikkei,” or as Japanese descendants, which they described as neither completely Peruvian nor completely Japanese but a unique blend of the two. Echoing the sentiments of many Japanese-Peruvians in Japan, one return migrant said, “We are not completely Peruvian, and here in Japan, we are gaijin (foreigner). So, we don’t have a patria,” referring to homeland as Tsuda (this volume, p. 35) defines the term—where one

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1 These figures include those who are officially registered in Japan, and exclude undocumented migrants and first-generation Japanese immigrants and their descendants holding Japanese or dual nationalities. Foreign nationals who reside in Japan for more than three months are required to register in local municipalities.
feels emotionally attached and one truly belongs. “So, we need to create our own *patria*. Let’s call it *Nikkeilandia*.” Polls do indicate a stronger tendency among Japanese Peruvians to identify first as “Nikkei” (65%) than among Japanese Brazilians (44%); only 12% of Japanese Peruvians surveyed responded that they identified first as “Peruvians,” whereas 26% of their Brazilian counterparts said they were “Brazilian” first (JICA 1992). As a primary basis for one’s identity, the idiom of the nation-state is often provoked in the process of identity negotiations among ethnic return migrants (e.g. Fox 2003; Louie 2000). Yet return migrants do not always resort to the nation as a strategy to cope with the status loss and humiliations they often experience in their ancestral homelands. As Tsuda (this volume, Ch. 12) points out, ethnic return-migrants undergo different experiences even in the same host country.

What explains the variation in migrants’ ethnic responses to ethnic return migration? When do ethnic return migrants reframe their identities in terms of country of citizenship? When do other factors, such as race, ethnicity, culture, or class, become salient in re-evaluating their identities? And to what extent are the processes of identity transformation accounted for by return migration policies or pre-migration legacies?

This paper examines various ethnic responses to, or ethnic consequences of, ethnic return migration by comparing the experiences of Japanese Peruvians and Japanese Brazilians in Japan. I argue that two consequences of return migration play a significant role in shaping return migrants’ ethnic responses. One is the way migrants are incorporated into a hierarchy in the host society—an ethnic hierarchy created and reinforced in the process of the return migration. The other is within-group variation (along lines of race, class, and legal status) that is enhanced as a result of the ethnic hierarchy.

In a nutshell, Japanese Brazilians were ranked higher than Peruvians in the ethnic hierarchy in Japan due to a number of reasons. First of all, it had to do with the higher status of Brazil relative to Peru in the global hierarchy of nations. With a higher GDP, a larger population, and more political influence, Brazil generally occupied a higher position in the global hierarchy than Peru. As Tsuda
argued in his chapter (Ch. 12, this volume), the status of migrants’ sending countries in the global hierarchy plays an important role in shaping how migrants are treated in the host society. In contrast to Brazilian return migrants who often resorted to Brazil to restore self-esteem in response to the ethnic rejection they experienced in Japan, therefore, Japanese Peruvians faced more problems in using the idiom of the nation. Secondly, Japanese Brazilian return-migrants, in general, maintained more Japanese cultural and racial features akin to the host population than Peruvian return-migrants. They were more likely than Peruvians to speak Japanese, and less likely to be racially mixed. Similarly, among return-migrants from Brazil, there were fewer Brazilians of non-Japanese descent; “returnees” from Peru, on the other hand, included many more non-Japanese descendants who, generally of poorer origins, entered Japan on fraudulent documents. Consequently, unlike Japanese Brazilians who asserted their Brazilian-ness, Japanese Peruvians, particularly of racially unmixed and middle-class backgrounds, tried to distance themselves from “pure Peruvians,” or non-Japanese Peruvians, emphasizing instead their status as “Nikkei” Japanese descendants. In doing so, the distance between Japanese Peruvians and other Peruvians increased in the context of return migration. While return migrating to their same ancestral country under the same conditions, therefore, Japanese Brazilians and Peruvians underwent different processes of identity transformation. Consequently, not only did they develop different kinds of identities vis-à-vis the local population; there was relatively little interaction between the two groups.

Ethnic return migration in itself generates ethnic consequences by effectively creating ethnicities and a hierarchy in which ethnic groups are differentially positioned (Brubaker 1998; Joppke and Rosenhek 2002). That is because ethnic return migration necessarily distinguishes between privileged migrants and others on the basis of ethnicity (Munz and Ohlinger 1998), setting criteria for defining ethnicity and drawing ethnic boundaries--who is co-ethnic and who is not, or who is eligible and ineligible to return migrate--/, even though such boundaries are often blurred in the sending context due to acculturation and intermarriage. Moreover, ethnic return migration fosters a hierarchy by increasing
a pool of potential “co-ethnic” migrants; it provides an incentive to identify as “co-ethnics” (Brubaker 1998; Joppke and Rosenhek 2002), intensifying, as a result, competition for ethnic authenticities (who is real ethnic and who is less). Ethnic return migration, thus, is not simply a passive product of ties presumed to exist for the sake of shared ancestry; it actively produces “ties” by defining and discriminating “co-ethnics.” These consequences, as seen in the case of Japanese Brazilians and Peruvians below, shape the experiences of return migrants. Having been incorporated differently into the ethnic hierarchy, Brazilian and Peruvian return migrants in Japan came up with different strategies to cope with the reality they confronted. The difference in their ethnicity evaluation processes—or ethnic responses as I call them—is a manifestation of this.

The findings reported in this paper are drawn from my field work conducted in Japan during 1996-1997 and 2003-2004. My work primarily consisted of interviews with return migrants from Peru, but I also interacted with a number of Brazilians, mostly business owners, community leaders, and workers at the factory where I conducted participant observation in 1997. The total of over 100 Peruvians interviewed were both of Japanese and non-Japanese descent. In addition, a survey was conducted in 2003-2004 among 40 Peruvian households, yielding life histories of 128 individuals (household members)2. Personal names used in this paper are all pseudonyms.

NEW ETHNIC HIERARCHY IN JAPAN

The ethnicity-based immigration policy of Japan created a hierarchy by stipulating one’s ethnic background as a decisive factor in determining who is to be admitted to Japan. The new immigration policy, implemented in 1990 to control growing inflows of illegal migration, strictly banned any type of unskilled migration, while excepting from the rule those with “special ethnic ties.” Under this policy, Japanese descendants, or Nikkeijin, were automatically granted a special visa, making them de facto the only group of foreigners allowed to engage in any type of work, including unskilled labor. As “co-

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2 The survey was conducted in collaboration with the Latin American Migration Project and Alvaro del Castillo.
ethnics,” Nikkeijin were also provided a number of public services, such as subsidized Japanese language lessons and employment assistance and counseling. Although citizenship was not granted automatically, Nikkeijin were still able to obtain citizenship and permanent residency more easily than others due to the descent-based immigration and naturalization policies in Japan.

The revised immigration law, thus, effectively created divisions among foreign workers based on the criterion of “Japanese blood” (Yamanaka 2004: 78). As an extension, foreign workers were further divided hierarchically by race or nationality instead of skills or qualifications (Shipper 2002: 41). At the top of the hierarchy, according to Shipper (2002), were South Americans with “Japanese blood,” along with long-term, well-acculturated Korean residents, while at the bottom were illegal and “darker-skinned” South Asians with casual jobs, poorer pay, and worse working conditions. (“Fairer-skinned” migrants from Europe and North America, who tended to engage in skilled jobs, were missing from his analysis.) In short, there was a close correlation between nationality (or race), the type of jobs and occupations, and legal status (Takenoshita 2006). Compared to other, and often illegal, unskilled laborers, Nikkeijin were indeed privileged, engaging in more stable work and earning more; they were often preferred by employers due to their legal status (Tsuda et al. 2003). According to Shipper (2002), the hierarchy, backed up by government officials and employers, reflects and reinforces the underlying notion of the Japanese public that matches certain races and nationalities with certain kinds of occupations and legal rights.

The privileged status of Nikkeijin over other foreigners (at least unskilled foreign laborers) was justified on the basis of their “special ties” to the Japanese. A Ministry of Justice officer explained, “For the sake of being Japanese descendants, those people have special ties to Japan. They have relatives here. So, it is natural that they have a desire to visit their families and learn about Japan. And we have the duty to accommodate their desires” (Kaigai Nikkeijin 1989:56). Furthermore, Nikkeijin, as family visitors, were allowed to engage in unskilled labor, since “it costs money to visit families,” according to
another officer: “Nikkeijin should be allowed to work in order not to be permanent burdens on their families” (Kaigai Nikkeijin 1989:57). Even though the majority of Nikkeijin had little contact with, or even remembrance of, their Japanese relatives in reality, they were admitted under the premise of familial ties to the Japanese. The ethnic immigration policy, as always, was justified as family migration, instead of labor migration.

Specifically, “family visitor” was defined as those who could claim Japanese ancestry within three generations (i.e., having one Japanese grandparent) and their spouses. In other words, they had to be second or third generation descendants of at least one Japanese immigrant (or they had to be children or grandchildren of a Japanese citizen). Second-generation Japanese descendants (nisei) were eligible for a three-year-long renewable visa, while third-generation (sansei) were entitled only to a one-year-long renewable visa. Later-generation Japanese descendants (fourth-generation and thereafter) did not qualify to enter Japan under this policy. The second-generation were also able to obtain Japanese permanent residency and citizenship more easily than the third-generation (the residency requirement for the former was typically 5 years as opposed to 10 years for the latter). Furthermore, the second-generation were exempt from presenting a record of criminal history, which became mandatory in 2005 for third-generation Nikkei visa applicants.

Generation mattered, fundamentally because it was a measure of social distance from the Japanese. Each generation removed from Japan was considered to have fewer ties. Second-generation children of Japanese nationals were thought to have closer ties to Japan than third-generation grandchildren. Fourth and later-generation descendants of Japanese immigrants, according to a policy maker interviewed, had “practically nothing Japanese”; with the passage of generations, he asserted, intermarriage becomes more common and a knowledge of Japanese culture diminishes. In this way, race and culture were together considered important symbols of “ties” to Japan. When racially and culturally unrecognizable as Japanese, later-generation Japanese descendants were simply assumed to have few ties to Japan,
while descendants of up to the third generation were expected to maintain some Japanese racial features and culture, and would, accordingly, integrate to Japanese society more easily than other foreigners.

To be admitted as Nikkeijin, therefore, it was most important to demonstrate generational proximity, or child-parent relations, to Japanese citizens by way of koseki (Japanese family registry), together with birth, death, and marriage certificates of each relevant family member and a family genealogical tree. Also required were ties to guardians who would guarantee one’s financial well-being while in Japan. Applicants needed to submit letters from an employer or a family member, in addition to a guarantor, who were all expected to be Japanese nationals or residents.

While familial and social ties to Japanese citizens were important, cultural competency was not. There was no language requirement, and knowledge of Japanese culture was not tested. Possibly, policy makers assumed that Japanese descendants had some cultural familiarity; as Joppke and Rosenhek (2002) point out, “true co-ethnics” should not have any cultural integration problems. True co-ethnics as they might have been, South Americans of Japanese descent, however, were not granted the same rights as citizens --such as citizenship--, and the process of naturalization did require basic Japanese language competency. Alternatively, then, cultural competency did not really matter, as Nikkeijin were to engage in temporary manual labor in any case. In this way, even though policy makers regarded Japanese language proficiency as an important requisite for foreigners’ successful integration into Japanese society, most Nikkeijin were admitted to Japan with neither sufficient command of Japanese nor actual ties to their (distant) Japanese relatives. Still, they were granted relatively privileged positions over other foreigners on the premise and expectation that they shared something fundamental with the Japanese.

BRAZILIANS AND PERUVIANS IN THE ETHNIC HIERARCHY

Nikkeijin were not homogeneous, however. Nor were they treated uniformly in Japan. The most noticeable difference among them was coded in terms of nationalities. Brazilians maintained, and were
considered to maintain, more Japanese cultural and racial features than Peruvians on average, and were subsequently ranked higher than Peruvians in the ethnic hierarchy in Japan. And this was reinforced by the higher status of Brazil in the global hierarchy of nations compared to Peru.

Language

Above all, Brazilians tended to speak better Japanese than Peruvians. According to a study on Nikkeijin in Japan (JICA 1992), 30.4% of Japanese Brazilians surveyed responded that they spoke Japanese well or fluently, whereas only 5% of Japanese Peruvians did. Moreover, over half (53.4%) of Brazilian respondents reported that they grew up speaking Japanese at home in Brazil in comparison to only 11% of Peruvians. More than a decade later, the level of Japanese proficiency among Peruvian migrants remained noticeably low. A study conducted by the International Press (1/1/05) showed that only 10% of Peruvian respondents “understood and spoke Japanese well enough” and 40% “did not understand or speak it.” In comparison, 45% of Brazilians surveyed by Kajita et al. (1999) responded that they spoke Japanese “fluently” or “well.” Another study shows that 64% of Brazilian respondents reported that they could understand or speak Japanese well, in addition to 17% more who said they were also able to write and read without any difficulty (Koyo Sokushin Jigyodan 1997).³

One explanation for the difference lay in the timing of Japanese immigration. Japanese immigration to Brazil began later (1908) than that to Peru (1899) and continued longer until the 1970s. During the post-WWII period, Brazil was the major destination, and one of five designated destinations along with Paraguay, Bolivia, and Argentina, to which the Japanese state sent emigrants as part of its post-war emigration policy. In contrast, Japanese immigration to Peru effectively ended in the 1930s when Peru broke diplomatic relations with Japan as a war-time enemy (and an ally of the U.S.) and banned Japanese immigration altogether. As a result, Japanese immigrants in Brazil were more recent

³ These studies primarily targeted Brazilian migrants in Japan, but small proportions of their samples (2%-6%) were Peruvians. These studies did not make a distinction between different nationalities.
arrivals; likewise, more Brazilian return migrants surveyed in Japan were first and second generation--5.5% and 41.2%, respectively-- in comparison to 0.6% and 26.3% for Peruvian migrants (JICA 1992). Japanese Brazilians, therefore, were more likely than their Peruvian counterparts to maintain closer contact with the immigrant (and presumably Japanese-speaking) generation.

Another reason may be found in settlement patterns. A relatively large proportion of Japanese immigrants in Brazil settled and remained in rural agricultural enclaves where they were able to maintain the Japanese language more easily in more or less isolated communities. The fact that many of them arrived as whole families (Adachi 2003) also facilitated the maintenance of the Japanese language. In the 1930s and 1940s, a majority of Japanese immigrants in Brazil owned land and continued to engage in agriculture (Adachi 2003) unlike in Peru where most Japanese immigrants, not being able to own land, had to leave farmlands for urban centers. This explained Japanese Brazilians’ relative geographical dispersion today in comparison to more urban-centered Japanese Peruvians; while 74% of Japanese immigrants and their descendants in Peru were concentrated in Lima, the capital, only 26% of the Japanese Brazilian population was in the city Sao Paulo, their largest concentration, according to estimates by the Sao Paulo Institute of Humanities Studies (2001). Similarly, 90% of return migrants from Peru, in comparison to 30% of Brazilian migrants surveyed in Japan by JICA (1992), were from Lima and Sao Paulo, respectively.

Arguably, the war-time experience had a decisive impact on their ability to retain the Japanese language in both countries. During and immediately before World War II, Japanese immigrants and their descendants in Brazil and Peru faced a series of discriminatory measures. Use of the Japanese language was banned, as were the Japanese ethnic press, schools, and assembly. Yet, nowhere in South America did they experience such measures more directly and severely as in Peru (e.g. Konno and Fujisaki 1984) where Japanese immigrants and their descendants became the direct target of the country’s worst racially-motivated riot (1940) and where 1,800 community leaders and businessmen
were forcibly sent to U.S. detention camps. While such measures often aimed to debilitate the Japanese community in Peru, in Brazil, they were generally carried out under the context of the country’s nationalization (or Brazilianization) project to assimilate its immigrant population (some of the measures, however, were implicitly directed at the Japanese [Lesser 1999]).

Finally, the geographical origins of their ancestors may explain migrants’ differential levels of Japanese proficiency. The majority (approximately 60-70%) of Japanese immigrants in Peru (compared to roughly 10% in Brazil) hailed from Okinawa where Okinawan, a language distinct from standard Japanese, was spoken. Several Japanese Peruvians pointed out to me that speaking and hearing Okinawan at home, they were at a disadvantage in “maintaining” the Japanese language in the first place.

**Race**

In addition to their generally superior command of Japanese, Brazilian return migrants, on average, maintained more racial features akin to Japanese natives than Peruvians. According to the same survey by JICA (1992), only 10% of Japanese Brazilians identified themselves as “racially mixed,” in comparison to 30% of Japanese Peruvians. A widespread perception among scholars, the public, and policy makers also suggested that Japanese Peruvians were more racially mixed than their Brazilian counterparts, because they were more readily assimilated in Peru (or Peruvianized) (e.g. Watanabe, 1996; Ninomiya, 1995). Yet, the racial difference, in reality, was more a result of who ended up migrating to Japan than their degree of assimilation and intermarriage in Peru. The endogamy rate among Japanese descendants in Peru, estimated at about 60%, was probably as high as, or even higher than, that in Brazil (See Morimoto 1991). In short, racially-mixed Japanese Peruvians were over-represented among Peruvian migrants in Japan; likewise, racially-unmixed Japanese descendants (particularly from rural areas) were probably over-represented among Brazilian return migrants, especially in the early 1990s (Tsuda, personal correspondence). In addition, there were more non-
Japanese descendants among Peruvian “return” migrants. In 2004, 7,300 Peruvians in Japan were estimated to be illegal (i.e., of non-Japanese descent), compared to just 4,700 for Brazilians (Ministry of Justice 2005). The Peruvian consulate in Tokyo estimates that the figure is roughly double the Japanese official figure (Paerregaard, personal correspondence). According to some remittance companies, close to half of all Peruvians residing in Japan traced no Japanese heritage at all (also Masuda and Yanagida 1999).4

There were several explanations as to why more non-Japanese descendants migrated from Peru than from Brazil. One was the visa exemption policy Japan had with Peru until 1994. Taking advantage of this, many Peruvians of non-Japanese descent entered Japan as tourists and overstayed their visas. No exemption policy existed for Brazilians in the 1990s.

Another factor was the lax system of keeping old population records in Peru. This resulted in the prevalent abuse of family registry documents, sold and bought most commonly in remote, rural areas. Along with the sales of documents, facial (eye) operations were performed in these areas (No such reports surfaced in Brazil or elsewhere). The abuse of documents spread further due to difficulties in obtaining proper documents in Peru. Having fallen victims to document abuse, some “real” descendants had to resort to clandestine means to “fix” their documents. (One Japanese Peruvian return migrant told me that he confronted a problem in applying for a visa upon discovering that he had 38 “brothers” who had apparently migrated to Japan using his surname.) Some Okinawan descendants had difficulty securing old papers from Okinawa where much was destroyed in the ground battle there during World War II. The Peruvian custom of using multiple names in one’s documents (instead of using one surname and one given name in Brazil and elsewhere) also complicated the process, as did the common practice of changing names in the process of immigration, since every name had to match all the

4 All illegal migrants are by definition non-Nikkei, yet not all non-Japanese descendants are necessarily illegal.
documents. All of these helped proliferate the process of, and demand for, falsifying documents, which, in turn, encouraged clandestine migration.

In addition to non-Japanese descendants, relatively large numbers of racially-mixed Japanese descendants return migrated from Peru. That was because poorer Japanese descendants, who were more likely to return migrate, tended to be racially mixed. It was particularly the case in (poorer) rural areas where Japanese immigrants, though small in number, frequently intermarried the native population. The relationship between race and class was not as noticeable in Brazil where many Japanese immigrants and their descendants remained in rural, as well as urban, areas, and represented all class strata in Brazil (Mori 2000; Koga 1995 cited in Noiri 2005). Lima’s Japanese community, originally established by wealthier immigrants, was more uniform, cohesive, and geographically concentrated (Takenaka 2003). Its membership has primarily been limited to middle- to upper-middle class Japanese descendants, and core members, who tended to maintain more Japanese cultural and racial features than others, were less likely to return migrate to Japan.

Even though the mixed race background of many Peruvian migrants was a result of migrant selectivity, this nonetheless shaped the stereotype of Japanese Peruvians in Japan. Mari Shimabuku, a Japanese Peruvian return migrant of racially unmixed background, lamented that she was always mistaken for a Brazilian or Argentinean in Japan because of her “Japanese face.” “Most Peruvians (in Japan) are racially mixed or are not Nikkei at all,” she said, “So people automatically assume that I am not Peruvian.” This perception that Japanese Peruvians were “less Japanese” than Japanese Brazilians justified the ethnic hierarchy propagated by the return migration policy. The hierarchy was, then, reinforced by the clandestine entry of many Peruvians, fueled further by widely publicized crimes committed by some Peruvians (most recently, a murder of a 7-year-old Japanese girl by a racially-mixed Japanese Peruvian) and occasional negative media reports from Peru (e.g., on the hostage crisis in 1997). In proportion to their population, Peruvian migrants have indeed committed more crimes than Brazilians.
(In 2005, 778 Peruvians and 137 Brazilians, were indicted for crimes (Keisatsu Hakusho 2006)). Although crimes involving Brazilians have been on the increase, and the number of non-Japanese Brazilians has grown (Yamaguchi 2003), the relatively negative image of Peruvians had already taken root in Japan, shaping public perceptions as well as employers’ preferences.

**Consequences for the Ethnic Hierarchy**

Reflecting the hierarchy, Brazilians generally assumed better-paying jobs than Peruvians. Brazilians, along with Argentineans who tended to speak relatively good Japanese, were also more likely than Peruvians to assume higher posts (such as group leaders in factories) and serve as interpreters and labor brokers. According to several Peruvian and Brazilian observers, Peruvians were generally the first to be fired at times of recession. In the midst of Japan’s recession in 2000, the unemployment rate among Peruvians was higher, 4.3%, than that among Brazilians, 2.6% (the national average was 2.9%) (Japanese Census). Brazilian migrants were also more successful in establishing businesses in Japan, particularly large companies, such as the International Press, a media conglomerate, and Brastel, a telecommunication company, both founded by first-generation Japanese Brazilians. There were no comparable Peruvian-owned companies in Japan as of 2006. On average, Brazilians earned more—17,000 yen more per month than Peruvians, according to a 1991 survey by Koyo Kaihatsu Center.

Return migrants were keenly aware of this ethnic hierarchy. Peruvians commonly acknowledged that Brazilians spoke better Japanese and maintained more Japanese facial features than themselves. In the eyes of many Peruvians, Brazilians also acted more like Japanese. As a result, “they feel they have more right to be in Japan,” according to Nori Oshiro from Lima, Peru, and they “always look down on us.” Japanese Brazilians, meanwhile, spoke badly of some “low-level” Peruvians who commit crimes and cause problems.
Communications between them were almost always in Portuguese. Brazilians never bothered to learn Spanish, according to Peruvians interviewed, and Peruvians always learned to speak Portuguese in Japan. This was partly a reflection of size, as there were more Brazilians than Peruvians. (In the U.S. where they are more Spanish speakers, Margolis (1994) reports that Brazilian immigrants usually learn to speak Spanish, often better than English.) Yet, Peruvians also seemed to give in to an Argentinean accent when speaking to Argentineans, even though there were fewer Argentineans in Japan. One Japanese Peruvian explained that because of their poorer command of the Japanese language, they have to turn to Brazilians (or Argentineans) to ask what Japanese leaders are saying; “When we want to speak to the Japanese, we ask Brazilians for help.” Also, they simply found Portuguese much more accessible in Japan. Since there were more Brazilians in Japan, more information and resources were available in Portuguese than in Spanish. (For Peruvians, Portuguese was certainly easier to learn than Japanese.) There usually were more jobs advertised in the Portuguese version of the weekly International Press, so some Peruvians told me that they resorted to the Portuguese version, rather than the Spanish one, in looking for jobs.

Japanese Peruvians made sense of the hierarchy, not only because Brazilians spoke better Japanese and looked more Japanese than themselves. More importantly, in their view, there were no “chichas” (false Nikkei) among Brazilians. “Compared to us, 90% of Brazilians are Japanese descendants,” said one Japanese Peruvian when asked about the major difference between Brazilians and Peruvians in Japan. The presence of “chicas,” they believed, damaged the image of the entire Peruvian population and posed obstacles to gaining acceptance in Japan. “Because of them,” said a Japanese Peruvian of racially unmixed background, “the Japanese think that Japanese descendants in Peru don’t look at all like Japanese.” “Because of them,” complained another, it has become difficult for all Peruvians to obtain and renew Japanese visas: “Whenever Japanese officials see Peruvian documents, they scrutinize them extra carefully. We have to wait longer than Brazilians to get our visas renewed.” All the
interviewed Japanese officers denied this, but many Japanese Peruvians insisted that it took them 6 months to renew a visa, while it took Brazilians only 3 months.

The problem, as Japanese Peruvians saw it, lay in other Peruvians—a problem they believed was not shared by their Brazilian counterparts. More precisely, even though they were brought in as descendants, they were lumped together with other Peruvians as unhyphenated “Peruvians.” This was problematic for real Japanese descendants, not only because they, as privileged migrants, were more highly placed in the ethnic hierarchy in the context of the return migration, but also because they generally came from relatively well-to-do backgrounds in the Peruvian context. (According to the survey I conducted among Peruvian migrants in Japan in 2003-2004, 55% of Japanese descendants previously held white-collar occupations in Peru, whereas only 25% of non-Japanese Peruvians did.) A Japanese descendant, Jorge Watanabe, said, “You never know about Peruvians here in Japan, because some of them come from really low-class backgrounds and they commit crimes.” Consequently, Japanese Peruvians, particularly middle-class ones of unmixed racial backgrounds, consciously tried to distinguish themselves from other Peruvians by asserting their ethnic difference. Within-group difference—along lines of race, legal status, and socio-economic status—thus, was a critical factor shaping ethnic return migrants’ responses to the ethnic return migration.
DEALING WITH INTERNAL DIFFERENCES

Pointing out a growing influx of non-Japanese descendants from Brazil in recent years, Yamaguchi (2003) argues for the importance of looking at groups’ internal differences. Conflict is frequently generated by internal difference, in terms of descent and social origins in Brazil, and this, in turn, projects negative images onto outsiders (i.e., the Japanese) (Yamaguchi 2003). Still, for Japanese Brazilians, the major “other” remained the Japanese of Japan, and subsequently, asserting a Brazilian national identity was the most effective strategy to distinguish themselves from the Japanese. It was particularly so, as the status of Brazilians was relatively high in Japan in comparison to other South Americans such as Peruvians. Moreover, as racially-Japanese Brazilians were the majority of Brazilian migrants in Japan, they had relatively more freedom to express (their version of) Brazilian-ness; anything different from the Japanese could be interpreted as Brazilian, unlike Japanese Peruvians who struggled to present “authentic” Peruvian culture in the presence of numerous “other Peruvians.” Thus, even though many Japanese Brazilians did not know how to dance samba “properly” (Tsuda 2003), their samba was still Brazilian enough in the eyes of the average Japanese. And so, anything that stuck out as different in Japan, from clothing to mannerisms, was indeed interpreted and expressed as distinctly Brazilian by Japanese Brazilians in Japan (Capuano de Oliveira 1998). Positive “Brazilian characteristics,” such as “human warmth,” were emphasized in contrast to “cold-hearted Japanese,” and values associated with Japanese in Brazil, such as “hard work,” became “Brazilian” in a land where most Brazilian workers put in long hours of work (Capuano de Oliveira 1998). A Japanese Brazilian return migrant I interviewed expressed his identity transformation succinctly: “In Brazil, I was a third-generation Japanese. But here in Japan, I am a first-generation Brazilian,” he said, emphasizing the word “Brazilian.” In asserting their Brazilian-ness, not only did they differentiate themselves from the Japanese. They simultaneously chose not to forge alliances with their fellow South Americans or emphasize their Nikkei-ness (or commonality with Japanese Peruvians).
Japanese Peruvians, on the other hand, had trouble claiming a Peruvian national identity to the same extent as Japanese Brazilians. In contrast to “nationalistic Brazilians” who always brag about Brazil being “the biggest country in the world,” said a second-generation Japanese Peruvian, Nobu Arakaki, their identities were “more problematic.” Ricardo Oshiro explained that Peruvians do not like to publicize the Peruvian flag as much, because “First of all, the Japanese wouldn’t recognize the Peruvian flag. They will confuse it with the Canadian flag, and if they realize it’s Peruvian, they might burn it,” he giggled. This type of negative comment was particularly common at the time of the Peruvian hostage crisis in 1997 when Japanese diplomats and businessmen were taken hostage by a Peruvian terrorist group MRTA. At the factory where I worked around the same time, it was quite contrasting to see many Japanese Brazilians placing stickers of the Brazilian flag on their lockers, while there was no single Peruvian flag in sight.

Japanese Peruvians often felt ashamed to be Peruvian. Their Brazilian counterparts had some positive Brazilian images they could resort to, such as famous soccer players recognized and praised by the Japanese, they thought, but as Fernando Guibu lamented, there was “absolutely nothing positive” about Peru. All about Peru, he said, was poverty, crime, and terrorism. And this image, they felt, was tainted further by “those Peruvians” (of non-Japanese descent) who “sneaked into” Japan illegally and committed crimes. Unlike their Brazilian counterparts, thus, Japanese Peruvians faced another “Other,” (other Peruvians) in addition to the Japanese, in negotiating their ethnic identity in Japan.

The separation between the two groups originated in Peru, yet it further increased in Japan as a consequence of the return migration. That was fundamentally because Japan’s ethnic return migration policy resulted in redefining the term “Nikkei” and redrawing the boundary between Nikkei and non-Nikkei. In Peru, Nikkei was a racial term, referring mostly to Japanese descendants with Japanese phenotypical features, and the term was most commonly used within Lima’s tight-knit Japanese community circles. In Japan, however, it became a status symbol with legal privilege. Since the
Japanese government automatically granted privileged legal status to all Japanese descendants (up to the third generation), the definition was broadened. While Nikkei mainly referred to racially “pure” and middle-class Japanese-Peruvians in Peru, in Japan, it legally encompassed all Peruvians who had at least one Japanese grandparent. In Japan, Nikkei also became synonymous with legal Peruvians (while non-Nikkei were labeled illegal). A third-generation Peruvian with one Japanese grandfather, expressed it well: “I don’t look Japanese and I am not familiar with any Japanese customs. I had never heard of the term Nikkei and never considered myself Nikkei in Peru. I learned only in Japan that I am Nikkei because I have a Japanese grandfather. Yes, I am Nikkei because to me it’s a matter of blood.” He then added that when he goes back to Peru, however, he would cease to be Nikkei. Likewise, racially-mixed and poorer Japanese-Peruvians, who had previously been excluded from Lima’s Nikkei community associations, discovered in Japan that they, too, were Nikkei because of their Japanese “blood.”

With the legal privilege conferred on Japanese “blood,” Nikkei became a status symbol in Japan. It meant the right to be in Japan, or more right than non-Japanese Peruvians to stay and work in Japan. Since the surname served as the primary symbol of Nikkei-ness, its value rose. Thus, Japanese-Peruvians of mixed descent almost always used their Japanese surname in Japan as a way of asserting their Nikkei-ness, even if it was their maternal name, rarely used in Peru. A quarter-Japanese-Peruvian, Carlos Kori went by Kori (a simplified and changed spelling of his maternal Japanese name Kuwaori), although in Peru he always went by his paternal name: “That way, people recognize that I’m a descendant (and thus legal). Then people treat you better if you have something Japanese.” Simultaneously, Carlos added, their employers (factories) often encouraged Peruvians to use a Japanese surname “to make things look better on paper” due to the legal status automatically associated with Japanese descendants. Nikkei-ness, symbolized by Japanese surname, meant legal privilege, thus increased status and employability.
In response to the amplified notion of nikkei-ness, a stricter definition of group membership emerged; racially-Japanese and middle-class Japanese-Peruvians who had cultivated a sense of Japanese-ness in Peru through Lima’s Japanese community activities, were now called “true nikkei,” “legitimate nikkei,” or “Nikkei nikkei” in contrast to racially-mixed (and poorer) “Nikkei” in Japan. While the “Nikkei nikkei” used these terms to distinguish themselves from “suspicious” nikkei and to protect their increasingly prestigious nikkei status, other Peruvians used the terms to refer to the group that is racially distinct (with “slanted eyes”) and socially “closed” and “racist.” Thus, the ethnic boundaries between “real nikkei” and racially-mixed “Nikkei” have hardened in Japan in response to the ethnic hierarchy created as a result of the return migration.

Unlike Brazilian return migrants who established communities as “Brazilian” in Japan, the emerging community among Peruvians was consciously defined as nikkei (or more precisely Nikkei-Nikkei), rather than Peruvian. Although some large-scale events were held together, such as the “Dekasegui Soccer League” (1997), newly created associations were mostly for nikkei with membership and leadership primarily limited to nikkei Peruvians.

For Japanese Peruvians who experienced downward mobility in Japan, claiming a “true nikkei identity” was a way to restore their honor, especially in the context where nikkei-ness, in contrast to Peruvian-ness, was associated with more status and privilege. This was quite in contrast to Japanese Brazilians. Being ranked higher in the ethnic hierarchy as “Brazilians” in Japan, Japanese Brazilians had little interest in associating with lower-ranked Peruvians as “Nikkei South Americans” or “Latinos.” Unlike their Peruvian counterparts who were troubled by the large presence of non-Japanese descendants, Japanese Brazilians were able to claim Brazilian identities more freely while simultaneously retaining prestige associated with nikkei status. In short, Brazilian-ness was more readily available for them to use to make sense of the ethnic rejection they experienced and the difference enhanced in return-migrating to Japan.
CONCLUSION

As this case attests, ethnic return-migration enhances ethnic divisions more often than forging ethnic solidarity. In their ethnic homeland, return migrants are typically treated as foreigners and marginalized. Migrants, in response, develop a discourse of difference vis-à-vis the local population; even where cultural or racial differences are minor, as in the case of Hungarian-Croatians in Hungary reported by Capo Zmegac (2005), minute differences are emphasized or created (Capo Zmegac 2005). Simultaneously, divisions among ethnic return migrants also become enhanced. That is because ethnic return migration creates an ethnically-defined hierarchy and stipulates who has the right, and more right, to enter and stay in the hostland based on the degree of ethnic proximity.

Ethnic return migration to Japan also enhanced ethnic divisions not only between the Japanese and migrants, but also among migrants themselves. Brazilian return migrants who were racially and culturally “more Japanese” than Peruvians were ranked higher in the ethnic hierarchy, and this made it more convenient for them to maintain distance from their fellow South Americans. Japanese Peruvians, on the other hand, engaged in the construction of difference from the Japanese and other Peruvians of non-Japanese descent. As the definition of Nikkei became amplified as a result of the return migration, the boundaries between pure Japanese descent Japanese Peruvians, mixed-descent Japanese Peruvians and other Peruvians were hardened with stricter group memberships. For Japanese descendants, it was a strategy to gain recognition as “authentic descendants” that were granted higher status within the Japanese ethnic hierarchy. In this way, transnational migration does not always lead to the construction of more inclusive, expansive, diasporic, and multiple ethnic identities among migrants, but can result in narrowing previous ethnic identities (Tsuda 2003).

The different processes of ethnic identity transformation between Japanese Brazilians and Peruvians reflected their strategies and positions placed in the new ethnic hierarchy in Japan. The hierarchy created divisions among return-migrants, while the strategies employed by return-migrants in
response further enhanced their internal differentiations. Just as the government used the notion of “ethnic ties” to justify their needs (to incorporate cheap labor), ethnic return-migrants, too, used the newly defined notion of ethnicity to enhance their own status given their positions in the new society. Ethnic responses of return migrants, therefore, were highly localized; the identities Japanese Brazilian and Peruvian return migrants constructed as “Brazilians” and “Nikkei Nikkei” were not trans-national identities, but were constructed in contrast to the Japanese of Japan and non-Nikkei Peruvians in the Japanese context.

Ethnic return migration does have important consequences for shaping ethnic identities of both migrants and the host population. Induced in the name of “inherent” ethnic ties, ethnic return migration nonetheless uses ethnicity as a tool to induce migration. Likewise, return migrants use ethnicity as a device to make sense of their newly found realities. Far from inherent, ethnic ties are constantly generated. And ethnic return migration plays an active role in the process of generating them.
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