Paper prepared for

The Fourth Euroacademia International Conference

Identities and Identifications: Politicized Uses of Collective Identities

Venice, Italy

4 – 5 March 2016

This paper is a draft

Please do not cite or circulate

Contested identities among Japanese-Bolivians pre-war and post-war descendants

Yvonne Siemann, University of Lucerne

The first phase of Japanese migration ("pre-war migration") to Bolivia started in 1899, when individual Japanese escaped from Peruvian plantations to Bolivian Amazonia. In the 1950s, two Japanese agricultural colonies were founded in Santa Cruz department ("post-war migration"). After a difficult start, many post-war Nikkei (Japanese descendants) have achieved considerable material wealth and an excellent reputation, whereas pre-war Nikkei have often been less successful.

Although 'Nikkei' can apply to all those with Japanese ancestors abroad, not everybody is considered Nikkei in practice: many pre-war descendants do not identify as Nikkei or join Nikkei activities. However, at the same time, some pre-war leaders claim legitimacy as descendants of the first Bolivian Nikkei vis-à-vis post-war descendants.

All these discourses have been influenced by official policies of the Japanese state, Japan's economic situation and Bolivian notions of citizenship. So how is Bolivian Nikkei identity defined by whom, how and why? What are the discourses of inclusion and exclusion, where are intersections with class identification and what does that mean for the creation of a Bolivian Nikkei community?

My research is based on a one-year stay in Bolivia (Santa Cruz area).

Keywords: Bolivia, migration, ethnic identity, Japanese-Bolivians

Introduction

In an article in Santa Cruz' main newspaper El Deber, the well-known poet Pedro Shimose makes a plea for pre-war Japanese descendants. As a second-generation Nikkei (Japanese descendant) from Riberalta whose parents arrived before WWII to Bolivia, he describes how these migrants and their descendants have contributed to Bolivia's development. He mentions Pando's ex-prefect Ernesto Nishikawa, former employment minister Alberto Kuajara, artist Tito Kuramotto as well as a great range of doctors, journalists or diplomats (Shimose 2012). His argument is that in general, pre-war Nikkei's contributions are not taken into account when talking about Japanese immigration to Bolivia, contrary to the well-known Japanese agricultural colonies founded after WWII. It is certainly true that while some articles and books have been published on and by Japanese Bolivians; pre-war descendants have caught much less attention. Furthermore, post-war Nikkei do not think they have much in common with pre-war descendants; they do not even identify with Pedro Shimose as maybe Bolivia's most well-known Nikkei (Amemiya 2001). In turn, although it is nowadays attractive to identify with Japan, Bolivian pre-war descendants generally do not consider themselves as Nikkei, unlike post-war descendants or even Peruvian and Brazilian Nikkei (who are mostly descendants of migrants who arrived before WWII).

This article describes contested identities of Japanese descendants whose ancestors arrived at different moments. First, I will show the relevance of the historical circumstances under which Japanese migration to Bolivia before and after WWII occurred. I then discuss the term Nikkei and how it is used in practice. Although much emphasis is laid on Japanese ancestry, it seems not to be the only criterion: some actors point to symbolic values to define identity, whereas others claim legitimacy referring to historic facts. Especially in the case of Japanese descendants in the Americas, community institutions on a local and/or national level have played an important role to define who is considered Nikkei and who is not. I then address questions of power, examining the Nikkei's sometimes complicated relation to Japan as well as the economic and legal context which has affected the different Nikkei communities in distinct ways.

Theoretical background

I start from the concept of complex, dynamic and sometimes contradictory identities which can be used in a strategic manner but which also possess an emotional side. Ethnic groups are just one among many entities one can identify

with. Ethnic groups supposedly shares a common ancestry as well as cultural and social characteristics. Identifying with such a group can occur at both individual and collective level, influenced by constant negotiations in social interactions. Following this concept, ethnic identity cannot exist the existence of other groups to distance from, using specific symbols or attributes (Barth 1994; Eriksen 2010; Jenkins 1997; Gans 1979). Contrary to this view, it is often assumed in popular discourse that ethnic groups have innate characteristics and fixed boundaries. But these identifications are not always voluntary, since membership definitions are often imposed from outside.

It is also necessary to take into account questions of power since social interactions always take place in a specific historic, social, economic and political context. Not only have different groups unequal possibilities to reach their aims (e.g. via material wealth, prestige or group size), but also the state is an important actor in the process of defining who is allowed to live inside its borders and under which conditions (for example, imposing forced assimilation on migrants). In other words, the position of an individual depends also on his or her ethnic origin and the positive or negative value attached to it. Ethnic identity is seen by some as "as a position or outlook that is adopted to achieve some specific end or to see it as the outcome of a set of particular historical and socioeconomic circumstances" (Banks 1996, 185), though it also possesses an emotional and irrational side. Nevertheless one should not forget that ethnic identity is just one among many possible identifications and not necessary of primary importance to the individual.

Historical background

The first phase of Japanese migration ("pre-war migration") to Bolivia started in 1899 when more than 90 Japanese contract workers fled the harsh conditions at Peruvian sugar plantations and, after an arduous journey, arrived in Bolivian Amazonia (Beni and Pando departments). During the Amazon rubber boom, many of them worked as rubber tappers (*siringueros*), others provided services e.g. for the "rubber king" Nicolas Suárez in Cachuela Esperanza. Kunimoto (2013, 46) estimates that around 2000 Japanese migrated to Bolivian Amazonia before WWII, although official numbers of MOFA are much lower. As a result of the rubber production's decline after 1910, some started to run shops, others worked as small-scale farmers.[1] These migrants were mostly young, single males who therefore often founded families with local women. Their descendants now live especially in the town of Riberalta, but also in Cobija, Guayaramerín and Rurrenabaque as well as in Trinidad, Beni's capital further south.

Whereas most Japanese settled down in the Amazonian lowlands, others went to live in the Andes (La Paz and Oruro). Besides railroad construction, commerce became their main occupation. In contrast to Japanese in the Amazonian lowlands, many married Japanese women they came to know via matchmakers. In 1930, 136 Japanese nationals lived in La Paz. In 1942, Bolivia as an ally of the US declared war to Japan, thus most of the migrants' economic activities were frozen and community institutions paralyzed. Furthermore, 29 Japanese were deported to concentration camps in the US (Kunimoto 2002; Mitre 2006; Sociedad Japonesa de La Paz 2012). Some others hid in the Amazonian lowlands where they did not suffer any discrimination or persecution.

The second phase of Japanese migration to Bolivia had an entirely different character. After WWII, two immigration agreements were signed between Bolivia and Japan resp. the US and two agricultural colonies founded in Santa Cruz department ("post-war migration"). After the war, Japan found itself in a difficult economic situation not least because many settlers returned from the former Asian colonies to the war-torn country. The Japanese government hence favoured emigration as a possibility to moderate this burden, so it was a lucky coincidence that after the Agrarian Revolution in 1952, the Bolivian government intended to develop its lowlands and was looking for settlers at home and abroad. In 1955, with the help of some pre-war Nikkei, the first agricultural colony (Colonia Okinawa) was founded for migrants from the archipelago of Okinawa which at that time was under US occupation. The second colony, San Juan, followed one year later in cooperation with a Japanese entrepreneur. Although Bolivia provided the settlers with 50 hectares of land, their lives turned out to be anything but easy: because of floods, illnesses, crop failure, and the general lack of basic services many migrants gave up and moved to Santa Cruz, to neighboring countries or back to Japan.

In the beginning, the settlers did not have much contact to Bolivian mainstream society, and only for secondary or tertiary education children left the colonies. But nowadays, non-Nikkei Bolivians make up for the majority of the colonies' population. Both Colonia Okinawa and San Juan, located around 90 respectively 140 km from the department's capital Santa Cruz, are now flourishing little towns with around 800-900 Nikkei inhabitants each. They are specialized in wheat, rice, soy beans, citrus and egg production. This prosperity is not only due to the migrants' own effort, but also because of material and financial support from the Japanese government (via JICA, Japanese

International Cooperation Agency) who invested not only in technical equipment, community buildings and medical facilities, but also supported Japanese education for children and vocational training for young adults.

Around 900 post-war descendants, originating from the two colonies, live now in the city of Santa Cruz. Some work in agriculture-related jobs, others have become doctors or engineers. Like in the colonies, Japanese descendants in Santa Cruz are highly organized: amongst other institutions, they have founded a cultural center (Centro Social Japonés). Not only are activities for the elderly held on a regular basis; but they also have a karaoke club, a tea ceremony group, as well as a Ryukyukoku Matsuridaiko dance group for children and young adults. Once per week, Nikkei children can attend Japanese classes, and in the evenings, Japanese is taught to non-native speakers. In general, Nikkei in Santa Cruz region have achieved considerable material wealth and are seen as trustworthy, hard-working and honest by non-Nikkei Bolivians - a reputation they are proud of.

Furthermore, also some pre-war Nikkei have settled down in Santa Cruz, since as one of the largest urban centers in Bolivia it offers much more opportunities than predominantly rural regions such as Beni and Pando. Some of them have grown up in Santa Cruz, whereas others have arrived in recent years from Amazonia. They seldom join Nikkei activities (an exception are those married to post-war Nikkei) and have not founded their own association, so it is unclear how many of them live in the city.

A decisive point for Bolivian Nikkei was when in the middle 1980s, Japanese economy was in need of manual labour force which gave rise to the so-called *dekasegi* phenomenon ("working away from home"). The government preferred unskilled labourers with ethnic ties to Japan, supposing that they were better able to adapt to life and work in Japan.[2] Most of these labourers were students or university graduates from Brazil and Peru, others did not even finish high school in order to work in Japanese assembly lines or as construction workers. In this way they could earn much more than in white-collar jobs in Latin America which at that time was struggling economically. Nowadays, Japanese economy is less attractive than before whereas Latin America offers more and more possibilities. Relatively few young Nikkei nowadays go to Japan to work or do so only after graduating. But many of those *dekasegi* migrants who are already in Japan have found it difficult to return to Latin America to start a new life again, and although there no precise data exist, up to 7000 Bolivian Nikkei might currently reside in Japan (Shōno and Sugiura 2013).

It is also difficult to know how many Japanese descendants live in Bolivia. Kunimoto (2002) mentions the generally accepted number of 13.500 Nikkei. However, she states that there could be up to 30.000 or even 60.000 if everybody with at least one Japanese ancestor is taken into account. Some descendants are not even aware that they have Japanese ancestry, e.g. they might only remember that their great-grandfather was an Asian immigrant. In turn, it is easier to estimate the number of post-war migrants and their offspring: about 2400 Japanese citizens live in Santa Cruz department which includes Nikkei (most post-war Nikkei possess double nationality) as well as some diplomats, JICA volunteers, or recent immigrants. Japanese Society in La Paz has 140 members as for August 2015, but there are of course Nikkei living in La Paz who have not applied for membership.[3]

Figure 1: Map of Bolivia.

What does 'Nikkei' mean?

Post-war Nikkei often state that they feel as both Japanese and Bolivians, referring to their ancestry and place of birth. Often they also mention characteristics such as being hard-working, honest and punctual (supposedly Japanese values) as well as being warm-hearted and flexible (supposedly Bolivian values), or even to their Japanese and Spanish language skills. They express that they like to live in Bolivia and consider themselves as 'the best possible mixture'.

Identifying with Japan is highly attractive in a developing country like Bolivia. Today, Japan's culture and values have gained a high attractiveness all over the world (Nye and Kim 2013): Japan is now related to positively rated images such as high-quality technical items, anime, martial arts or healthy food. Japan's rise in the global hierarchy has increased Nikkei's prestige with the help of media images from Japan (Tsuda 2001b, 414). These images have also changed the Nikkei's view of themselves and the discourse they use in public.[4] But it is often forgotten that Japan's image has changed a lot: before WWII, Japanese products in Bolivia were not held in high esteem since they were cheap and of inferior quality (Mitre 2006, 67–68; Befu 2009, 28).

In general, Nikkei say almost anonymously that they currently do not suffer from discrimination or structural disadvantages. However, they are often called *chinos* (Chinese) by non-Nikkei Bolivians. The perceptions of physical differences are socially interpreted; in other words, they are not seen as part of majority society. Also well-educated non-Nikkei Bolivians often inadvertently take part in these excluding discourses. Most Nikkei do not take this too seriously but as a kind of joke or as something inevitable. Sentences such as "you are really *camba*,[5] but your face..." or "if they would not have Japanese physiognomy they would be like any *cruceño*" show that there seems to be an incompatibility between looking Asian and being *camba* (or Bolivian in general). Although anybody who is born on Bolivian soil automatically becomes Bolivian citizen, Japanese (or other Asian descendants) do not pass as Bolivians in daily life.[6]

Whereas identification with Japan is sometimes imposed from outside, it is also attractive to have Japanese ancestors. But still, being of Japanese origin seems not to be enough to be considered Nikkei by everybody, although according to community associations' official discourse, 'Nikkei' can apply to all those with Japanese ancestors abroad. The term, a frequent subject of discussion at Pan-American meetings for Japanese descendants (Takenaka 2009), is defined by Kikumura-Yano as follows:

> "The term refers to all Japanese emigrants and their descendants who, while acknowledging their Japanese ancestry, have created unique communities within various national contexts throughout the Americas. The term also includes

> persons of mixed racial descent who identify themselves as Nikkei, as well as those who have returned to Japan but retain identities separate from the native Japanese." (Kikumura-Yano 2002, 10).

Whereas post-war descendants in Santa Cruz say that they feel proud of retaining many Japanese characteristics, the situation is quite different in Beni and Pando. When asking her what remains of Japanese culture in Cobija, association president Inés Oshima[7] from Cobija answers with a smile: "nada" (nothing). Post-war descendants from Santa Cruz share this opinion. They often refer to pre-war migrants when telling the story of Japanese migration and they are likely to mention that in Bolivian Amazonia, there still exist place names like Japón, Mukden, Yokohama and Tokio. But in the end they conclude that pre-war migrants have lost everything Japanese besides maybe their last name or their facial features. As a consequence, the general conclusion is that they are 'not really Nikkei'. Sometimes post-war Nikkei express this in quite a negative way, stating that pre-war migrants are 'too bolivianized': irresponsible, unpunctual, degenerated and lazy, just like non-Nikkei Bolivian lowlanders are said to be. Similarly, Amemiya (2001) states that pre-war migrants are considered rather "as an example to avoid" by other Nikkei.

To explain these differences between pre-war and post-war descendants, Mai Amuro, a third-generation Nikkei from Colonia Okinawa, states: "There culture is different; it is more Amazonian, much more Amazonian. People there are much more autonomous, much more independent." But more often, descendants point to a gendered role model when explaining why pre-war Nikkei are 'less Japanese' than post-war migrants. They generally avoid stating that mixed children are 'less Japanese'. But since the mother as principal care-giver was in most cases Bolivian, pre-war migrants like Carlos Wada did not have much contact with Japanese culture. A second-generation pre-war descendant in his 70s, he grew up in the city of Santa Cruz and describes himself as "camba neto" (a true *camba*). He has inherited some objects from his Japanese father which instill his curiosity, but he acknowledges that he does not know anything about Japanese culture besides what he has read on Japanese art and history:

> "My father never mentioned his country, I don't know, but maybe he taught some things, some traditions to my older brother, his oldest son. Some words in Japanese. But to the others he didn't teach us anything because he left early in the morning to go to work and when we woke up and had breakfast he was already away and he returned at night, so we didn't have the time."

The importance of upbringing is also stressed by Daiki Kaneshiro, a former president of the Japanese cultural center in his 50s. Partly of pre-war and partly of post-war ascendency, he states that even a prolonged *dekasegi* stay in Japan does not have an effect. For example, although some pre-war descendants in La Paz try to recuperate Japanese values insisting for example on punctuality, most of them have not done so.

> "They did not have the opportunity to learn [about Japanese culture] because they did not have this Japanese environment that we have here today. It is not their fault; they simply did not have the opportunity to live in an environment where father and mother were Japanese. But today many of them are in Japan, they went to work there and they learn many things over there. But when they come back to Bolivia one realizes that there are many things that if you do not learn them well in as a child they are very difficult to learn as an adult."

But even if both parents were Japanese, pre-war migrants have never formed a big community like in the colonies with its strong institutions. Furthermore were the possibilities to travel to Japan much more limited than today, and Japanese TV and media were non-existent, Carlos Wada states:

> "Probably my father said: why should I teach them anything, since they were 8 or 10 Japanese who arrived. They sometimes met to have tea and chat […]. But only after the 50s some newspapers from Brazil, from São Paulo arrived, some newspapers and books [...]. Therefore we didn't have a lot of contact with Japan or Japanese culture."

Another reason not to identify with Japan is that also the country's reputation has changed over time. Many older pre-war descendants remember that being a Japanese descendant was not as well regarded as it is today so they preferred to negate their origin in order to be regarded as Bolivians. Some even changed the writing of their name in order to make it seem less Japanese. Others avoided teaching their children Japanese since they feared they might suffer from discrimination, besides that Japanese seemed of no use for their lives. Some were also ashamed because Japan had lost the war (Shioiri 2013, 108). As a result, Camila Nishioka, a second-generation community leader from Guayaramerín, has difficulties to find a successor as president of the cultural association:

> "You know, it must be somebody who is educated, who behaves well. When the [Japanese] princess came [for the 100th anniversary of Japanese immigration] – you know, in Japan nobody can get close to the princess, touch her, shake her hand, or, even worse, kiss her on the cheeks [...]. So I want them to learn that in order to find a successor because all Japanese who arrive at Guayaramerín come to my house [...]. But sometimes these people [from

> Guayaramerín] have not had a good education and don't know what to say or they do something embarrassing [...]. Our people were born and grew up in the forest, they don't know about [Japanese] customs, so they commit errors because they don't know [...]. Because one lady who wanted to be the association's president, when we received the princess [...] she went towards the princess, shook her hand and kissed her and embraced her. I wanted to die on the spot!"

In her statement, it becomes clear that also class identifications influences if one feels or is considered Nikkei. In general, only some middle-class pre-war Nikkei with good education have the consciousness to be Japanese descendants, whereas the majority has not had the chance to get in contact with Japanese culture. Álvaro Taguchi from Trinidad was for example only able to travel to Japan on a scholarship since he had the possibility to learn Japanese before. Shioiri (2013, 123) explains that most Japanese migrants in Amazonia married women from lower strata of society; many also had large families and were not able to send all their children to school, especially when they lived far from urban centers. Álvaro Taguchi shares this opinion, pointing to the fact that post-war migrants already married partners with a relatively good education.

Despite this lack of identification, pre-war leaders claim legitimacy as descendants of the first Bolivian Nikkei vis-à-vis post-war descendants. The celebration for the 100th anniversary of Japanese migration was held in Santa Cruz by post-war Nikkei, but pre-war Nikkei complain that they are generally not even invited to anniversaries.

> "The leaders of the descendants of Japanese immigrants in Trinidad thought that the centennial should have been held in the Department of Beni, where the earliest Japanese immigrants arrived and worked and thousands of their descendants now live. They have a point. Yet, these descendants have no political or economic clout. Nor do they have a close association with the more prominent Japanese-Bolivian groups in La Paz or Santa Cruz or with the Japanese government. Thus, their view was ignored. For the Japanese-Bolivian community in the Santa Cruz region the descendants in the Department of Beni are just ordinary Bolivians." (Amemiya 2001)

This statement also points to the weakness of Nikkei institutions in Beni and Pando. These five associations in Rurrenabaque, Riberalta, Cobija, Trinidad and Guayaramerín do not offer regular activities since few Nikkei are interested nor have the means to pay membership fees (or even transport). Also the great celebration of anniversaries (which are regularly held in Santa Cruz department) is difficult under such conditions. As a result, the Bolivian umbrella organization of Nikkei associations Fenaboja (Federación Nacional de Asociaciones Boliviano Japonesas) has only four active paying members (Santa Cruz, La Paz, Colonia Okinawa and San Juan).

Few contacts between communities exist besides those on association level and not many nationwide activities have been carried out. In recent years, some post-war Nikkei from Santa Cruz have travelled to Riberalta for anniversaries and donated goods at the time of the big floods in Riberalta in 2014. Being of Okinawan origin, they express their wish connect to other Okinawan Nikkei all over the Americas and regularly attend networking activities in the Americas and Okinawa/Japan,[8] so their aim is to reconnect to Okinawan descendants in Riberalta. For COPANI (a Pan-American Nikkei sports tournament), which was organized by a group of post-war Nikkei in Santa Cruz in 2014, invitations to participate were also sent to Beni, but some interested pre-war descendants from Riberalta were not able to join for financial reasons.[9]

Although pre-war descendants are free to apply for membership in Nikkei associations in Santa Cruz, very few of them can be found in the associations' member list.[10] One reason might be that post-war migrants are a small, relatively united community. At a closer look, this might be less clear – cleavages between generations or between Okinawans and mainland Nikkei are quite visible - but in general, also Nikkei from other countries or Japanese find it difficult to become part of it. Another reason might be the language: post-war Nikkei are mostly fluent in Japanese, whereas few pre-war descendants have these skills. Although Spanish is becoming more and more important especially among the younger generations, Nikkei without knowledge of Japanese feel sometimes discriminated. As a result, some pre-war migrants like Carlos Wada are interested to join, but do not feel accepted because of their mixed origin and their lack of Japanese skills. They thus criticize post-war Nikkei as racist and discriminating.[11] Some young pre-war descendants join Japanese class, but they are not interested to be part of Nikkei institutions, even those who have lived in Japan. Some might not be willing or able to afford membership fees. In turn, post-war leaders state that it is difficult to integrate pre-war Nikkei who do not see any benefit in applying for membership.[12]

What is the Nikkei's relation to Japan?

Although in anniversary books and ceremonies much emphasis is laid on the efforts of the migrants themselves, the Japanese government's help for the colonies has been quite important. Ryonosuke Miyaguni, a second-generation Nikkei agronomist from Colonia Okinawa states:

> "Without JICA it would have been difficult in Bolivia. Well, there was not only JICA. There was also the prefecture of Okinawa [Japan], the embassy, but first of all JICA. Especially the economic aid has been very important for what is today the colony [...]. It was important because the Bolivian government could not offer this help, so without the support of the Japanese cooperation no one can say if we could have made it... It has been important to enlarge and develop […] the colonies' cooperatives, the schools, hospitals, roads, and also financial help on an individual level so they could buy machines and land."

But also the Japanese government has its interests, as Takenaka states when discussing the relations between Japanese-Peruvian community and Japan: "[It] remains in Japan's interest that Nikkei overseas continue to thrive in, and contribute to, their own countries, because that, in the government's view, would contribute to positive images of Japan." (Takenaka 2009, 1342) Since the colonies are 'more Japanese', Japan preferred to invest in them and not in the dispersed pre-war Nikkei. Takenaka concludes:

> „Resources from Japan help bolster the Japanese-Peruvian community by increasing its reliance on Japan. That is, so long as Japan remains its major donor and mentor, the community continues to identify itself as 'Japanese'. Japanese-Peruvians have always kept a subordinate position to Japan since the beginning." (Takenaka 2003, 477)

Although pre-war descendants are officially Nikkei, Japanese authorities have not shown interest towards them, as pre-war Nikkei complain, since they are not considered as 'really Japanese'. The Amazonian region is mostly characterized by forests and small-scale agriculture; it is 900 km respectively 1700 km away from urban centers like La Paz or Santa Cruz and basic services often lack, so the region is not interesting economically. During rainy season, it is difficult to reach because of the bad road conditions. Therefore, pre-war migrants like Camila Nishioka feel neglected by Japanese government. She vividly recalls her struggle at the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Japanese immigration to improve life conditions in Guayaramerín. But she did not obtain the financial means she needed for her projects and concludes: "If they [post-war descendants] want a hospital, they get a hospital!" Even the scholarships created for Japanese descendants are not of much use to them: since almost nobody in Beni and Pando has had the opportunity or the financial means to study Japanese, they are not eligible. Álvaro Taguchi from Trinidad accuses Japanese of ingratitude, since pre-war migrants have even sent money to Japan to help the suffering population after WWII:

> "The pre-war migrants were those who helped Japan and didn't receive anything for it. The others [post-war migrants] came and received everything [...]. Even the Bolivian government gave them land [...]. The Japanese government gave them everything and the others [pre-war migrants] were persecuted and discriminated [...]. I have found letters in Japanese which their family [in Japan] sent them here to thank for their gesture, that they sent them gold. But [the same migrants] didn't give their children anything – just poverty."

Betty Moriyama from Riberalta shares the impression to be neglected by the Japanese state, but she expresses satisfaction that, as a symbolic gesture, the 100th anniversary of the Japanese association of Riberalta was attended by the actual Japanese ambassador, since Japanese officials have generally only attended ceremonies in La Paz or Santa Cruz region.

Not even the *dekasegi* boom seems to have contributed to pre-war descendants' identification with Japan. Especially pre-war Nikkei have migrated to Japan to look for work, since economic mobility has been limited in Beni and Pando departments. Furthermore, higher education was practically non-existent in Bolivian Amazonia in the 1980s and 1990s and many could not afford to send their children to Santa Cruz to study.[13] Therefore, they saw their chance in working in Japanese fabrics. Japanese ancestry had to be demonstrated by *koseki* (family register) or similar documents and one also needed an employer's or family member's invitation as well as a guarantor in Japan, but there was no test on language skills or cultural knowledge. Because especially in Beni and Pando, going to Japan became suddenly very attractive, non-Nikkei Bolivians were suddenly eager to marry Nikkei in order to be able to migrate.[14] Documents to prove Japanese ancestry got economic value: in the 1990s, Japanese *koseki* were sold for around 2000 USD each. But there was also much fraud: Betty Moriyama remembers that her brother who died at the age of 12 suddenly had five children on paper, whereas some prospective migrants discovered that somebody else had already immigrated using their name. Furthermore, Japanese officials did not always accept the pre-war descendants' documents (e.g. because

the Japanese surname's orthography varied), and many documents were lost or burned in WWII in Japan, especially in Okinawa (Takenaka 2009, 269). Since many descendants did not succeed to obtain the visa, they also lost interest in Nikkei community activities. Camila Nishioka from Guayaramerín complains: "Not even 25% of all those who wanted could go. There is a boy who has sold his house once and his motorbike twice [...] but he didn't get the visa [...]. So because of this they lost courage." So although *dekasegi* might have revitalized links to Japan, it has not much changed the pre-war Nikkei's identification with that country. Another reason is that in Japan, Nikkei are generally regarded as foreigners. This might be less true for post-war Nikkei from Bolivia (or Paraguay) who can often pass as Japanese. But pre-war Nikkei from Bolivia, Peru or Brazil often have a mixed background and do not speak much Japanese (see e.g. Takenaka 2005; (Tsuda 2001a).

But not only are they considered non-Japanese in daily life, they are also foreigners on paper. In contrast to descendants from other nations, the possibility for Nikkei to apply for a passport is limited if one is not a direct descendant of a Japanese national. Pre-war Nikkei mostly do not hold Japanese passports because their ancestors did not have the possibility to register their children on time or because they considered the relation to Japan too dangerous.[15] Today, their children rather regret it: although in daily life in Bolivia Japanese passport might not be of much importance, it is nevertheless seen as a useful resource, for example if one wants to travel outside Latin America. Amemiya (1999) and Suzuki (2010, 61–62) also describe (maybe exceptional) cases where, with the help of Japanese diplomacy, Nikkei farmers could resolve land disputes with powerful local and well-connected non-Nikkei Bolivian farmers.

But nevertheless, *dekasegi* changed and revived Riberalta, as Amemiya (2001) states: "In two years in Japan a Japanese-Bolivian could earn more money than he would in his entire lifetime in Riberalta." Inequality in Beni increased, and, according to Álvaro Taguchi, many migrants did not achieve social mobility through *dekasegi*:

> "Ask the majority of those who have gone. They do not have a professional education. They have not even finished high school because when they were in 5th grade they had to go to work, and it was not a solution that they went to Japan to make money. I think that the most important thing is to support them in their studies so that they can make something of themselves, improve on a personal basis. This is better than sending them to work because there they are simple workers. When I went [to Japan] I interviewed several of them. They dedicated themselves to having children, working and wasting their money. Why? […] Because Bolivians are lazy and get tired easily. And they don't want to come back because they don't have anything here, they don't know where to go, and they don't have a house, their families lives like before. Few of them have made progress. They live like before, in poverty."

Conclusion

Although among Japanese Bolivian descendants, ancestry is generally mentioned as most important criterion for ethnic belonging, other factors are important as well, such as cultural knowledge or Japanese language skills. Furthermore, questions of economic and political power are important to consider. The Japanese state has influenced these identities through its affinity with post-war Nikkei, concentrating its support on their colonies. One reason that post-war Nikkei also maintain their Japanese Bolivian identity is simply because it is useful. In contrast, pre-war descendants with their weak institutions and lack of financial means feel neglected and do not consider themselves as Japanese descendants, although identification with a powerful state like Japan could nowadays be attractive. The example of Japanese Bolivian pre-war descendants thus makes clear that the dynamics of inclusion and inclusion are complex and affected by multiple influences.

References

Amemiya, Kozy. 1999. Land, Culture and the Power of Money: Assimilation and Resistance of Okinawan Immigrants in Bolivia. In *Encounters. People of Asian Descent in the Americas*, ed. Roshni Rustomji-Kerns, 121–30. Lanham [u.a.]: Rowman & Littlefield.

———. 2001. The Importance of Being Japanese in Bolivia. Accessed May 09, 2009. http://www.jpri.org/publications/workingpapers/wp75.html.

Banks, Marcus. 1996. *Ethnicity: Anthropological Constructions.* London [u.a.]: Routledge.

Barth, Fredrik. 1994. Introduction. In *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference.*, ed. Fredrik Barth. [Nachdruck der Erstausgabe von 1969], 9–38. Oslo: Pensumtjeneste.

Befu, Harumi. 2009. Concepts of Japan, Japanese culture and the Japanese. In *The Cambridge companion to modern Japanese culture*, ed. Yoshio Sugimoto, 21–37. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.

Busdiecker, Sara. 2011. Researching while Black: Interrogating and Navigating Boundaries of Belonging in the Andes. In *Black subjects in Africa and its diasporas: Race and gender in research and writing*, ed. Benjamin Talton, 15–30. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Eriksen, Thomas H. 2010. *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological perspectives.* 2.th ed. London: Pluto Press.

Jenkins, Richard. 1997. *Rethinking Ethnicity: Arguments and Explorations.* London [etc.]: Sage Publications.

Kikumura-Yano, Akemi. 2002. Introduction. In *Encyclopedia of Japanese Descendants in the Americas: An illustrated history of the Nikkei*, ed. Akemi Kikumura-Yano, 1–5. Walnut Creek, Calif. [u.a.]: AltaMira Press.

Kunimoto, Iyo. 2002. Japanese Bolivian Historical Overview. In Kikumura-Yano, *Encyclopedia of Japanese Descendants in the Americas*, 95–104.

———. 2013. De los Andes a la cuenca amazónica. In *Los japoneses en Bolivia: 110 años de historia de la inmigración japonesa a Bolivia*, ed. Iyo Kunimoto, 21–46. La Paz: Federación Nacional de Asociaciones Boliviano-Japonesas; Asociación Nippon-Bolivia; Plural editores.

La Gaceta del Norte. 1923. Factores de progreso en el Noroeste desde el año 1912. *La Gaceta del Norte*, April 14.

Mitre, Antonio. 2006. *Náufragos en tierra firme. Bloqueo comercial, despojo y confinamiento de japoneses de Bolivia durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial.* Santa Cruz de la Sierra: Editorial El País.

Nye, Joseph, and Youna Kim. 2013. Soft power and the Korean wave. In *The Korean wave: Korean media go global*, ed. Youna Kim, 31–42. London: Routledge.

Shimose, Pedro. 2012. Los otros japoneses. *El Deber*, December 26.

Shioiri, Yumi. 2013. La comunidad *nikkei* en el departamento de Beni. In *Los japoneses en Bolivia: 110 años de historia de la inmigración japonesa a Bolivia*, ed. Iyo Kunimoto, 87–142. La Paz: Federación Nacional de Asociaciones Boliviano-Japonesas; Asociación Nippon-Bolivia; Plural editores.

Shōno, Eriko, and Atsushi Sugiura. 2013. Las comunidades bolivianas *nikkei* en Japón. In Kunimoto, *Los japoneses en Bolivia*, 289–324.

Sociedad Japonesa de La Paz. 2012. *90 Años de Historia - Sociedad Japonesa de La Paz. 1922-2012*. La Paz: Sociedad Japonesa de La Paz; Imprenta Quatro Hnos.

Suzuki, Taku. 2010. *Embodying Belonging: Racializing Okinawan Diaspora in Okinawa and Japan.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Takenaka, Ayumi. 2003. The Mechanisms of Ethnic Retention: Later-Generation Japanese Immigrants in Lima, Peru. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 29 (3): 467–83.

———. 2005. Nikkeis y peruanos en Japón. In *El 5to suyo*, ed. Ulla D. Berg and Karsten Paerregaard, 205–27 20. Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos.

———. 2009. Ethnic Hierarchy and Its Impact on Ethnic Identities: A Comparative Analysis of Peruvian and Brazilian Return Migrants in Japan. In *Diasporic homecomings: Ethnic return migration in comparative perspective*, ed. Takeyuki Tsuda, 260–80. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Tsuda, Takeyuki. 2001a. From Ethnic Affinity to Alienation in the Global Ecumene: The Encounter between the Japanese and Japanese-Brazilian Return Migrants. *Diaspora* 10 (1): 53–91.

———. 2001b. When identities become modern: Japanese emigration to Brazil and the global contextualization of identity. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24 (3): 412–32.

Yamanaka, Keiko. 2000. "I will go home, but when?": labor migration and circular diaspora formation by Japanese Brazilians in Japan. In *Japan and global migration: foreign workers and the advent of a multicultural society*, ed. Mike Douglass and Glenda S. Roberts, 123–52. London: Routledge.

[1] It is often mentioned by both Nikkei and non-Nikkei Bolivians that because of these Japanese farmers, locals could have more inexpensive and varied food than before (La Gaceta del Norte 1923).
[2] Of course, this was not necessary for post-war migrants who, contrary to pre-war Nikkei, who generally possess double nationality.
[3] The case of Japanese Society in La Paz is somehow different, since it is composed by pre-war descendants and post-war descendants (as well as personnel of JICA or the embassy).
[4] Some Nikkei doctors make advertisement in the local newspaper, emphasizing that they studied (on a scholarship) in Japan, a highly technologized country and a place of modern knowledge which enables them to become experts in Bolivia.
[5] *Camba* refers to inhabitants of the Bolivian lowlands.
[6] The small minority of Afrobolivians, although mentioned as an ethnic group in the new Bolivian constitution and part of the national folklore, is still considered as foreign as well: "Bolivian national identity is founded on the idea that Bolivians are Indian in blood and cultural heritage." (Busdiecker 2011, 29).
[7] All names of interview partners are pseudonyms. Interview citations have been translated from Spanish.
[8] The prefecture of Okinawa is very active in promoting this kind of activities, unlike other Japanese prefectures.
[9] In her article on Pan-American Nikkei activities, Takenaka (2009, 1328) states that Japan is only oriented in well-off Nikkei, not *dekasegi* migrants who are seen as less successful since they return to Japan to work in jobs without prestige.
[10] Having Japanese ancestors is a precondition to join Nikkei associations as regular member (although activities are mostly open also for non-members).
[11] This is a different situation than in Lima, where it is highly attractive to join Nikkei associations (Takenaka 2003).
[12] No data exists on pre-war descendants' economic situation in Santa Cruz. Post-war migrants, however, generally belong to upper middle class, so non-Nikkei Bolivians see a strong connection between wealth and (post-war) Japanese descent. However, also post-war Nikkei increasingly prefer to stay away from associations instead of paying 15USD/month. One reason is that Bolivian Nikkei associations do not offer many facilities, compared for example to Peruvian Nikkei association APJ (Asociación Peruano Japonesa). The most important reason to formally apply for membership (instead of just attending some events) is now the commitment to Japanese institutions as such.
[13] Takenaka (2009, 270) observes that especially lower class Nikkei from Peru went for *dekasegi*, but not so much the urban middle class.
[14] Takenaka (2009, 269) states that in Peru, some migrants to-be underwent surgery to look more Japanese.
[15] Many children were not registered as Japanese nationals since it could only be registered until 14 days after birth and in remote areas this was difficult. This rule was revised and the period lengthened to 3 months in 1985 (Yamanaka 2000).

Biographical note

Yvonne Siemann has a master degree Spanish Studies, Portuguese Studies and Social Anthropology from the Universities of Freiburg i.B., Basel and Coimbra. She is now writing a PhD thesis on Nikkei identities in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia at the University of Lucerne (Department of Ethnology).