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## **Living as Migrants in a Place That Was Once Home The Nisei, the US Bases, and Okinawan Society**

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# Living as Migrants in a Place That Was Once Home

## The Nisei, the US Bases, and Okinawan Society

Born in Okinawa of Okinawan mothers and Filipino fathers, many Nisei who were brought up in the Philippines have returned to Okinawa as adults to seek economic mobility, acquire Japanese citizenship, and search for part of their roots. However, their mixed heritage, lack of proficiency in the Japanese language, and reliance on the US military bases for their livelihood put them in an ambivalent position in Okinawan society. Concerning the controversial US presence in Okinawa, the Nisei have ambivalent sentiments, which reflect their own uncertain position in Okinawan society, but this ambivalence also mirrors the conflicted views of other Okinawans.

**KEYWORDS: OKINAWA · PHILIPPINES · RETURN MIGRATION · ETHNICITY · PROFESSIONAL MIGRANTS**

In 1903 Okinawans, along with Chinese and Japanese, migrated to the Philippines to work on the construction of the Benguet Road (now known as Kennon Road), the major thoroughfare leading to Baguio City. Upon completion of the road, some Okinawans decided to settle in Benguet, while others moved to Manila and other provinces. Most of them settled in Davao, which earned the moniker *Dabaokuo*, owing to the significant population of Japanese and Okinawan migrants in the province. During this time, intermarriages between Okinawan men and Filipino women were not many, especially because Okinawan women went to Davao as “summoned wives” (Ohno 2006b, 92). Prejudice among Okinawans toward the locals, among the locals toward Okinawans (ibid., 92–93), and among mainland Japanese toward Okinawans was also prevalent. These Okinawans, at that time, were called *Otro Hapon* (the other Japanese) (Yu-Jose 1999, 91; Ohno 2006a, 7; Ohno 2006b, 92–93). When the Second World War broke out, most of these men were repatriated to Japan, leaving their families behind.

The prejudices between Okinawans and the mainland Japanese stem from the fact that Okinawa was historically not part of the country now known as Japan but was part of a group of islands formerly known as the Kingdom of the Ryukyus, with its own cultural traditions and distinct languages. At present Okinawans, despite their Japanese nationality, still experience discrimination for being not truly Japanese, or being “a different kind of Japanese,” due to perceived cultural and ethnolinguistic differences.

In the postwar era the American occupation of Okinawa called for the creation of military installations in the prefecture, which led to a “construction boom” (Sellek 2003, 82) that saw the need for construction workers. Once the bases were completed, there was also a huge demand for base employees. Aside from Americans, Third Country Nationals (TCNs) were hired for this purpose, and most of them were Filipinos. Many Filipinos landed in contractual jobs as laborers, cooks, and clerks, but others held white-collar occupations such as engineers, medical doctors, and musicians, among others (Yu-Jose 2002, 117). Some Filipinos even served in the United States Civil Administration of the Ryukyus (USCAR) (Tobaru 1998, 31). By the late 1940s to the early 1950s, an estimated 6,000 Filipinos lived in Okinawa, predominantly (90 percent) male and about half of them single (Ohno 1991, 243; Tobaru 1998, 31).

A large number of these Filipino men cohabited with or married Okinawan women. While the number of these intermarriages could not be clearly established, it was estimated that up until 1954 there were 1,004 marriages between Filipino men and Okinawan women (Sugii 2009, 45). The offspring of these unions have been referred to as Nisei, or second-generation Okinawan Filipinos.<sup>1</sup>

The Filipinos’ wages were very much higher than the other base employees and they were seen to be relatively well-off (Suzuki and Tamaki 1996, 88). At this time Filipinos ranked high on the pay-scale hierarchy, second only to Americans, while the mainland Japanese and Okinawans ranked third and fourth, respectively (Amemiya 1996; Yoshida 2001, 30; Sellek 2003, 82). When the work contracts of these Filipinos expired, most of them went back to the Philippines, bringing their wives and children with them.<sup>2</sup> In the Philippines, the Nisei and their Okinawan mothers were not spared from discrimination due to anti-Japanese sentiments prevailing at that time (Zulueta 2005, 2008a, 2008b). Okinawans were not differentiated from Japanese in postwar Philippine society, as in any other places where Okinawans migrated (Adachi 2006a, 16). As a result, many Okinawan women consciously assimilated themselves into Philippine society and failed to impart the Okinawan language and culture to their children (Maehara 2001, 16).

At present, most of these postwar-born Nisei reside in the Philippines, but some work and live in Okinawa and the Japanese mainland, and presumably in other parts of the world as well. Many of them were born in Okinawa, some were raised in the Philippines, while others were raised in Okinawa and eventually moved to the Philippines in their adolescent years. Some, however, were born and raised in the Philippines.<sup>3</sup>

The substantial number of Nisei who have returned to Okinawa can be characterized by migrations that have enabled them to construct a distinct identity as Okinawan Filipinos. These Nisei are in an unusual position. Arguably they are a part of the Okinawan diaspora, but at the same time they are also a part of the Philippine diaspora. The Nisei’s return migration to Okinawa can be seen in the context of the increasing migration of members of the Philippine middle class for whom financial security and the desire to maintain their status and lifestyles, as well as the attractiveness of greater opportunities in the host country or society, have become overwhelming goals. For the Nisei, ethnicity has served as social capital and catalyst in furthering this migration.

The existence of Okinawan Filipinos has been accorded little notice in academic research (Zulueta 2004, 2005, 2006, 2008a, 2008b), as they have generally been subsumed under the category of Japanese Filipinos. But doing so undervalues the separate histories and distinct identity formations of this particular group. Being born to Okinawan and Filipino parents, which distinguishes them from other diasporic Okinawans, the stories these Nisei tell are intertwined with the historical ties shared by Okinawa and the Philippines, as manifested in their migration histories.

The return to Okinawa, however, puts the Nisei in an ambivalent position vis-à-vis Okinawan society. Their citizenship as Japanese categorizes them as such; however, their insufficient knowledge of the Japanese language as well as their part-Filipino ancestry put them in a position of being outsiders to Okinawan society, causing them to be seen as foreign migrants. Nevertheless, their identity as Okinawan Filipinos enables them to celebrate their mixed heritage; they are able to construct a distinct identity as they continuously negotiate and define their identities in accordance with existing social conditions as well as their place in Okinawan society—a place that was once “home” to them.

Given that the literature on migrants of Okinawan and Filipino descent is scant, especially in regard to their return migration, this article aims to help fill the void, specifically by locating the position of these return migrants in Okinawa vis-à-vis the local population and analyzing their integration into Okinawan society. That class and status do not necessarily indicate a smooth integration or reintegration into what they once called home is illustrated by examining the Nisei’s sentiments regarding the presence of the US bases in the prefecture and how their views relate to the general sentiment Okinawans have concerning the US bases. In the process, this study hopes to show the complexity and diversity of “return migration” to Japan by people of Japanese ancestry.

### **“Return” Migration to Japan**

Much of the literature on the migration of Filipinos to Japan and of the Nikkeijin (people of Japanese ancestry) in general focus on people who work as low-skilled or unskilled workers in the destination. Many of these studies focus on migrant workers, most of whom are women, in the manufacturing and entertainment industries (Ballescás 1992, 2003);

Filipino wives of Japanese men in rural areas (Faier 2009); female and transgender/transsexual hostesses (Parreñas 2011); and undocumented day laborers (Ventura 2006). Although the large majority of migrants to Japan are of these types, the presence of middle-class and professional migrants should not be overlooked. The contributions of these migrants, as well as their attempts at integrating in their respective host societies, are important areas for investigation. Many of these middle-class and professional migrants are Nikkeijin and are thus part of a growing number of ethnic “return” migrants to Japan, as well as of Filipinos of Japanese descent (Philippine Nikkeijin) going to Japan to work.

Several recent works on the Nikkeijin in Japan (e.g., Tsuda 2003; Lesser 2003; De Carvalho 2003) have focused particularly on the Brazilian Nikkeijin or Japanese Brazilians who comprise a majority of the Nikkeijin population in Japan. The Immigration Law, which was revised in 1990, allows foreign nationals of Japanese descent (up until the third generation) to work and reside in Japan for an indefinite period (De Carvalho 2003, 79). This has created an impetus for the Nikkeijin to engage in “return migration” to Japan, which was (and continues to be) seen as a route to economic mobility and financial stability, both hardly achievable in their origin countries. However, due to the Nikkeijin’s handicap in the Japanese language (particularly in reading and writing), white-collar jobs elude them; thus they are relegated to blue-collar labor, particularly factory work. Many of these Nikkeijin returnees are from the Philippines. Current studies on the Philippine Nikkeijin, particularly focusing on the second (*nisei*) and third (*sansei*) generations, look at issues regarding their acquisition of Japanese citizenship or permanent residence visas in relation to their fluid identities as they shuttle between the Philippines and Japan (Ohno 2008, 1–22) and as they embark upon their return to Japan (Iijima and Ohno 2010; Ohno and Iijima 2010).

Ethnic return migration to Japan, be it temporary or permanent, such as the migration of the Latin American Nikkeijin, the Filipino Nikkeijin, and the Okinawan Filipinos,<sup>4</sup> is more often than not viewed within the context of the destination’s demand for labor and their capacity to take in unskilled work that the Japanese do not want (Tsuda 2003). The return migration of the Nikkeijin has also been viewed from the perspective of ethnic nationalism (Higuchi 2005; Joppke 2005). Moreover, most of these studies focus on an ethnically homogeneous group of people who return to the homeland.

However, the movement of the Nisei back to Okinawa challenges the view of a homogeneous migration stream.

Elsewhere I have shown that the three main reasons for the Nisei's return to Okinawa are: (1) to pursue a career and a better-paying job; (2) to acquire Japanese citizenship; and (3) to search for "what is Okinawan in them" (Zulueta 2008a, 42).

Back in Okinawa, most of them have been able to acquire Japanese citizenship because at birth they were listed in their mothers' *koseki touhon* (family registry), making them eligible to apply for citizenship. But because most of them lost their fluency in the Japanese language when they moved to the Philippines, their best option has been to work on the US bases as United States Forces in Japan (USFJ) employees.

The Nisei are hired by the Japanese government's Labour Management Organization (LMO) for USFJ Employees to work in US military installations dotting Okinawa. It should be noted that USFJ employees are civilian employees and are mostly Japanese nationals, who are hired by Japan's Ministry of Defense in order to accomplish the mission of the US forces stationed in Japan, and work on USFJ facilities. As USFJ employees, the Nisei get to enjoy benefits as do other government employees. In addition, they are said to get paid at a much higher rate than other government employees. Thus, the Nisei are not hired as unskilled workers to fill in jobs unwanted by the locals. Rather, as professionals, they occupy high positions on the US bases and enjoy the salaries and benefits of any other Japanese government employee. Not a few of these Nisei have returned to Okinawa as early as the 1970s and have been employed on the US bases.

Working outside the bases would have relegated them to menial jobs due to their lack of proficiency in the Japanese language, especially in reading and writing. Equipped with college (some even with graduate) degrees, as well as a high level of English proficiency, these Nisei have acquired good jobs on the US bases, with most of them occupying high positions in their respective departments. Their proficiency in English and their educational backgrounds put them ahead of the local Okinawans in terms of position and quality of work. It has been also said that around 80 percent of the Nisei residing in Okinawa work on the US bases (*ibid.*). Occupying high positions on these bases, the Nisei enjoy relatively middle- to upper-middle-class lives as compared to their local counterparts.

## My Informants

In this article I present findings from interviews of Nisei, five conducted in September 2007 and two in March 2010, for a total seven case studies. Most Nisei work on the US bases in a variety of jobs, ranging from office work to service-industry-related jobs to subcontracted work (e.g., Japanese construction companies hired to work on base-related matters).<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, several Nisei work as English teachers, service industry workers (i.e., hotel and restaurant employees), and professionals in other fields such as the university and established churches. A large number of them belong to the middle and upper-middle strata of Okinawan society. Hence, while I limit this study to those Nisei belonging to these classes as well as those working (or who have worked) in US military installations in Okinawa, I believe the findings from these seven cases are highly indicative of the situation of the large percentage of Nisei residing in Okinawa.

I found my informants primarily through email and telephone correspondence with the president of the Association for Filipino-Japanese Nationals (AFILJAN), a group composed of Filipinos (including those with Japanese citizenship) and Okinawan Filipinos (the president during this time was a Nisei).<sup>6</sup> In March 2007 I informed the AFILJAN about my plan to interview these Nisei later in September of that year when I would visit Okinawa for an initial fieldwork. Those who had been referred to me by AFILJAN subsequently referred me to their friends and acquaintances.

Of the seven informants, who are all referred to here by pseudonyms, four were working on the US bases while one was a former base employee who had become an entrepreneur but who is included here because his story and experiences as a former base employee provide significant insights. When I revisited Okinawa in March 2010, I was able to meet one of the Nisei I interviewed in 2007, who by then had retired from his base work. Most of the respondents have Japanese citizenship, which they easily acquired as they were listed in their Okinawan mother's *koseki*. Meanwhile, the two respondents I interviewed in March 2010 were introduced to me on separate occasions when I was in the capital city of Naha for a three-week fieldwork.

The usual length of an interview ranged from one hour and a half to two hours, mostly conducted in a café or restaurant, although one was held at the informant's home. Most of these interviews were conducted before or

after lunch or dinner, but the more relaxed conversations during the meal were as valuable as the formal interviews themselves. The interviews were conducted in English and Tagalog, with some Japanese words finding their way into the conversations.

### **The Citizenship of the Nisei**

All of my informants are of middle-class background and either currently working or have worked on the US military base. Their average age is 52 years, based on information given to me at the time of the interviews. All are married and have children.<sup>7</sup>

All my Nisei informants are Japanese citizens except for Carl who is a US citizen. Carl said that his decision to apply for US citizenship was due to the fact that he initially intended to stay long in the US and did not plan to work and settle in Okinawa. He is also not eligible to apply for Japanese citizenship as he was not listed in his mother's koseki. He works as a consultant for a Japanese company on the base, and is not directly hired by the LMO.<sup>8</sup>

The other Nisei informants chose to acquire Japanese citizenship and were eligible to do so because they were listed in their mother's family registry. And they were so listed because they were born out of wedlock, rendering them "illegitimate." At the time of their births, Japanese law stipulated that children born to Japanese mothers out of wedlock were to be granted Japanese citizenship. The Japanese Nationality Law operates on the principle of *jus sanguinis* or the law of blood or descent, which in Japan specifically pertains to patrilineal descent. Anyone with a Japanese father is eligible to become a Japanese national, while those born to a Japanese mother married to a non-Japanese father are not (Murphy-Shigematsu 2000, 204). In the immediate period after the Second World War, children born out of wedlock to Japanese women and American men became Japanese nationals, while those born to married couples became Americans as they took their father's citizenship (*ibid.*). This pattern is mirrored in the case of the Nisei.

For many Nisei, being born out of wedlock presented an easy "access" to Japanese citizenship, which they say was granted to them "automatically," as the law at that time automatically granted Japanese nationality without naturalization to those with Japanese mothers. Stipulations in the law at that time worked in favor of these Nisei, particularly in cases where the

parents of an Okinawan woman disapproved of their daughter's marriage to a Filipino, usually prompting the couple to elope and cohabit. The Nisei who emerged out of these unions were registered as Filipinos and Okinawans upon birth and for a time carried dual citizenship (although, strictly speaking, Japanese law allows only one nationality); at the age of 21 they were made to elect one of the two citizenships. Having been listed in their mother's koseki, they found it easy to acquire Japanese citizenship.

In contrast, the Nisei who were born after the marriage of their parents were not registered in their mother's koseki and became Filipino citizens. They could apply for Japanese citizenship with the proper documents, such as proof of their birth to an Okinawan. Recently, a written language proficiency exam consisting of hiragana and katakana (the Japanese syllabary used for local and foreign words, respectively) has been required of applicants.

It should be noted that Japanese Nationality Law, while seen as providing a legal status and a form of membership in the Japanese nation-state, has been linked to the myth of homogeneity, which forms a great part of Japanese identity. Moreover, Japanese nationality is based on membership in a family registry, with non-Japanese (*i.e.*, foreigners) administered separately (Wetherall 2006). Citizenship, while often conflated with nationality, is usually used to refer to rights conferred to people within a particular national territory (*ibid.*). These two concepts, however, are often used interchangeably in Japan (Lee 2006, 110). T. K. Oommen sees nationality as exclusionary, while citizenship is seen as an "instrument of equality" (Oommen 1997, 28), with the premise that people within a nation-state possess the same rights and obligations. Oommen (*ibid.*) argues that citizenship "provides the non-national ethnic and minority populations in a multi-national state with a sense of belonging and security." Citizenship in Japan varies according to one's "personal attributes" such as nationality, residence status, gender, age, and the like (Wetherall 2006, 11). While not all citizens in Japan are nationals (such as the *Zainichi* Koreans or Korean residents in Japan who have special residence permits, as well as the *Nikkeijin* who are given more privileges than other nonnationals in terms of residency and employment), the reality is that not all Japanese nationals are accorded the same citizenship status, with many of them treated as "second-class" citizens.<sup>9</sup> In this category may be found the Nisei as well.

## The Nisei's Reasons for Return Migration

Some Nisei initially returned to Okinawa for reasons other than the three main ones stated earlier. These could be categorized into structural push-and-pull factors as well as more personal reasons. What distinguishes the Nisei from conventional migrant returnees are their Okinawan ethnicity and English language skills, which serve as human capital that affords them greater economic mobility and access to resources.

Raphael, for instance, initially went on a short visit to Okinawa to avoid the troubles in Manila in the 1970s, just like some other Nisei who returned to Okinawa to escape the rule of then president and dictator, Ferdinand Marcos. Then in his late teens and barely out of college, he found that there were many work opportunities available on the US base; he eventually found one, and has not left Okinawa ever since. When Raphael was still working before his retirement in 2010, holidays from work meant acting as a tour guide for Okinawans visiting the Philippines, an activity that occupies much of his time now that he is retired.

Marco, then about 19 or 20 in 1976, also went to Okinawa for the same reason as Raphael's, and was explicitly advised by his mother to do so because he was a student activist in his university. Unlike Raphael, however, Marco finished his college education in Okinawa. He currently works on the US base.

In 1983 Vincent was around 22 when he decided to return to Okinawa to look for a stable job, despite the opportunities available to him in the Philippines. At the same time, he "felt that he was seeking for something," which prompted the return. After working for almost five years as an engineer on a US base, his first ever job, Vincent went to the US to work in an export-import firm. His ten-year experience in the US firm encouraged him, then 37 years old, to venture into entrepreneurship in Okinawa. Vincent currently owns a water store and a termite control business in Okinawa, as well as a Japanese-style spa in a posh district in Manila. He manages both businesses and travels frequently to the Philippines to oversee the latter enterprise.

Carl was also based in the US before finally deciding to settle in Okinawa to work as a consultant for a Japanese construction company in one of the US bases in the prefecture. He was already in his thirties when he decided to settle in Okinawa, preferring to work there as he saw it then as "more stable" economically than the Philippines.

Stephanie, meanwhile, was already in her thirties in 1986 when she returned to Japan to apply for Japanese nationality. She had been moving back and forth between the mainland and Okinawa before finally settling in Okinawa to work on her current job in a US military base (previously she worked on the base as an editor for the air force and marines). Due to her inadequate skills in reading and writing in Japanese, the only jobs available to her on the mainland were mostly in factories.

Sonny was 35 when he decided to return to Okinawa in 1985 in search of work upon the advice of a priest-friend, despite doing well with a travel agency business in Cebu. Sonny also had a similar experience to Stephanie as he could only find factory work at Hino Motors in Tokyo. He was also doing blue-collar work in Okinawa, despite being eligible for US base jobs. Sonny chose to go into blue-collar work because, in the 1980s, it was more financially rewarding to work in factories than on the US bases. He said that, at that time, the US government was responsible for employing base workers. Only when the Japanese government took over in 1987 and gave base workers higher salaries did Sonny decide to work on a US base.

For Meryl a family-related reason prompted her initial return to Okinawa in 1980, when she was in her twenties. She again returned to Okinawa in the late 1980s to join a training program at the Bank of the Ryukyus. Despite her work at a bank in the Philippines, she decided to move to Okinawa upon marrying a Nisei who had been working on the US base. She, too, currently works on the base.

Despite the divergent personal histories of these Nisei and their different reasons for returning to Okinawa—to escape the political turbulence in the 1970s Philippines, to search for roots, to find financial security, to form a family—the US bases served as their economic refuge at the outset or, in the case of one informant, when conditions changed that made work on the US bases economically attractive.

## The Nisei and the US Bases in Okinawa

Working on the US bases does not shield the Nisei from the controversies that hound the US presence in the prefecture. Although ambivalences characterize Okinawan society's responses to the US military installations, to conclude that US base workers necessarily agree to the presence of these bases because of the economic benefits they derive from there is rather hasty. It would also be tantamount to dichotomizing the issue between probase and

antibase sentiments and movements. This section examines the sentiments of the Nisei regarding the presence of the US bases in the prefecture and analyzes their ambivalence concerning this issue, which is significant in the way the Nisei see and locate themselves within Okinawan society.

Opinions about the presence of the US military installations in Okinawa vary but tend to be regarded as lying on opposite sides of the spectrum. The planned construction of the offshore base in Henoko in northern Okinawa to accommodate the transfer of the Futenma Air Base in crowded Ginowan City, for instance, has been met with divided sentiments. On this issue alone Okinawans have been far from unified. Support for the construction of the base in Henoko comes mostly from the lower classes and the unemployed, people who expect to benefit from the presence of the base through the creation of jobs and propagation of an informal economy. Opposition to its construction comes mostly from members of the middle class who are not directly dependent on the US bases for their livelihood. Many opposers also come from civil society groups such as environmental organizations. This division within Okinawan society is expected and not at all new. Nevertheless, it is interesting to consider the opinions of the migrants, including the Nisei, concerning this issue.

The following are the Nisei's opinions, all recorded verbatim, regarding the US bases in Okinawa:

**I believe Okinawa needs the bases or else one fourth of the people will get unemployed; good for economy and workers [a]like; good for region[al] stability both [in and] around neighboring "Treat[y]" countries.**

**As long as the bases are here, they have a big influence on Okinawan life, economically, politically . . .**

**I think the US in Okinawa is a balance of powers here . . .**

**[Without the bases] how about us?**

**As far as safety [is concerned], I'm not for it, I want it out as well.**

**I think it's a minority issue [sic], politically-motivated 'cause if you'll ask everyone, they really don't care about the US bases, they care more about what's going on with their lives.**

**Okinawans will talk about crime rates, the US base [Americans] will talk about employment.**

As can be gleaned from these statements, it is apparent that most Nisei are in favor of the US military presence in Okinawa.<sup>10</sup> This result, of course, is not surprising as most of them work on the base, and hence rely heavily on the presence of the US military bases for employment. They also added that the US bases' existence helps not only them but the locals and the prefecture's economy as well.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that some Nisei are ambivalent about this issue. In terms of safety, one female informant is of the view that the US bases should be removed as well. Another informant's opinion is that Okinawa has become highly dependent on the US bases, and would prefer their removal for the sake of the younger generation, including his children, although he thinks to do so at present is not realistic. More than an issue of politics, the existence of the US bases on Okinawan land is of economic importance to a number of people, including the Nisei. Hence what is "realistic" also points to the "here and now"—the reality that they mostly depend on the bases for their livelihood and their children's future, not to mention the maintenance of their middle- to upper-middle class position and lifestyles in Okinawa. The succeeding generation of Okinawan Filipinos is also caught in this issue. For instance, the daughter of a Nisei was asked by her teacher to sign a petition on the closure of the US bases but she refused, telling her teacher that there are people, including her parents, who depend on the bases for their livelihood.

On the planned construction of an offshore base in Henoko, my Nisei informants have the following comments:

**If it is good for Okinawans, why not?**

**Yes, it'll be good for the people in Henoko—increase[d] employment in Henoko and business for locals.**

No comment [it's a political issue].

Yes, unless there is another option.

Why move it there . . . that's spending money! *Sasabihin nilang walang effect sa environment* (They would say that there's no effect on the environment). I'm not a scientist, but I don't think so.

Most Nisei are in favor of establishing an offshore military base in Henoko, mainly because it would create jobs for people living in the area. Others, however, take into consideration the environmental destruction that it would create, such as the threat to the *dugong* (sea cow), the destruction of Henoko's air space, as well as the effect that the removal of the facilities in Futenma would have on the fishermen's livelihood in that area. One informant is of the opinion that it is possible to move the facility to Henoko because Futenma houses only one group, the marines. Despite protests by various groups, he believes that they stand no chance against any American decision to move the base, as the US presence in Okinawa is supported and financially subsidized by the Japanese government.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, it is a well-known fact that many people, including Okinawans, and several groups or organizations, particularly environmental groups, oppose the creation of an offshore base at Henoko. Like some Nisei, these groups point to the environmental destruction it would cause—the threat to the coral reefs and the dugong, as well air and water pollution. However, probase residents, with their lives “enmeshed” in the US bases, say: “Our life is more important than the dugong's. Without jobs, we can't live” (cited in Inoue 2007, 188). They are “disturbed” at how these activist groups, most of whom are economically secure and not dependent on the existence of the US bases, oppose the construction of the Henoko base without understanding the local sentiments (ibid). Evidently the Nisei's sentiments echo the sentiments of local Okinawans, such as those in Henoko, whose livelihood and economic well-being rely on the existence of the US military bases.

Despite the knowledge and conscious recognition of the effects the military installations have on the environment as well as on peace and order issues, the Nisei, especially those who work on base, hope for the continuance

of the US bases, at the very least, in their lifetime. With most of them in their fifties, looking for work outside the bases or going back to the Philippines to look for work are not feasible options (Zulueta 2008a). Looking for off-base employment would be difficult for them due to their insufficient Japanese language ability, and the only work that would be available to them would be unskilled and menial work. Given their age, they also feel disadvantaged if they were to look for work in the Philippines in view of the stiff competition for jobs.

While on the one hand most of the Nisei hope for the continued existence of the US bases for their job security, it can be said on the other hand that these Nisei have no choice but to agree to the bases' existence despite the fact that some have ambivalent feelings about this issue. Statements such as “We don't have a choice but to work on base” and “It somehow scares us if we lose the bases here . . .” connote acceptance of and preference for the status quo over an uncertain future should the US bases be removed. Moreover, without the US bases they would lose not only their livelihood but also the “secure” and “familiar” spaces that have enabled them to construct themselves as a significant class of nationals—upwardly mobile, highly educated employees of the Japanese government. The US bases, for the Nisei, provide security and familiarity in a society where they are not fully integrated despite their legal status as Japanese citizens. This is because work inside the bases has created an environment that consists of what are familiar in the Nisei's lives—using the English language at work, the presence of fellow Nisei, American food and products that are also available in the Philippines—which contrasts with the society outside the US bases, where Japanese is the lingua franca and a slight difference in accent and pronunciation easily reveals one's “foreignness.”

According to one Nisei: “If the bases leave, what do we have in return? There's nothing in return.” There is uncertainty as to whether the Japanese government would provide employment should the US bases be removed; without such a guaranteed future, the future prospects of migrant workers as well as people of Okinawan descent, especially those without Japanese nationality, would be dim. The same can be said of the locals who depend on the US bases for their livelihood. Here it can be seen that the Nisei's ambivalent attitude toward the US bases reflects their uncertain place in Okinawan society.

## The Nisei in Okinawan Society

The Nisei seem to be in a paradoxical position in Okinawan society. Despite working on the US bases, they reside outside these facilities. Their children attend local Japanese schools. They are employees of the Japanese government and not entitled to live on the premises of the US bases or have their children study in schools inside the bases.<sup>12</sup> They are not even allowed to buy postexchange goods sold on the base and instead rely on people who are entitled to buy these goods to do the purchases for them (Zulueta 2008a, 84–85). Because many Nisei depend on the US bases for their livelihood and even if they consider the bases' existence a "necessary evil," they can be seen as forming a part of the "base society." At the same time, they are really not a part of the base society but rather of Okinawan society. But in Okinawan society their position is also uncertain. It is best to characterize the Nisei as living between the US bases and Okinawan society.

On the US bases the Nisei occupy higher positions than other overseas Okinawans, as job opportunities there primarily call for a high level of English proficiency.<sup>13</sup> Many even occupy positions higher than those of local people working on the bases. Stephanie, who works as a manager in a restaurant on the base, has several Okinawans and Japanese working under her. While acknowledging herself as Okinawan by ethnicity and Japanese by nationality, she says that she actually feels more Filipino than anything else. This may be attributed to her lack of fluency in Japanese and she considers herself "illiterate" in the language. Married to a fellow Nisei, with her children attending local schools, she says that for Okinawan Filipinos the presence of the US bases means work—"opportunities are inside the bases." For his part—although he says that he learned Japanese and even studied writing on his own—Raphael opines that Filipinos can survive in Okinawa without learning the Japanese language because of the existence of the US bases. The bases then, aside from providing a secure and familiar environment for the Nisei, also detach these return migrants (as well as the US military, their families, and other base personnel) from the host society by creating a social space that is distanced from Okinawan society. In addition to the fact that the US bases have their own set of rules and structures, outside interaction with Okinawan society tends to be rare, creating the paradoxical situation whereby the Nisei want to belong and integrate into Okinawan society but their work on the US bases tends to detach them from it. Moreover, their work on the base and the high social status they occupy are met with envy by the locals.

Thus, when they are outside the base, many of them avoid talking about their occupations. Their status, occupations on base, and their "foreignness" seemingly work against their smooth integration into Okinawan society.

Nevertheless, Meryl says that interaction with the local community depends on one's residence and circumstances. Having a child who studied in a Japanese school, much of Meryl's interaction with local Okinawans occurred through her daughter's school. For her one of the biggest challenges to the Nisei in Okinawa is having their children study in a Japanese school. This is because the Nisei have to interact not only with their children's teachers but also with their fellow parents, and they must perform the duties expected of them as Japanese/Okinawan parents. Meryl narrates the incident when she failed to give her daughter her *bento* (lunch box) as she was not able to read properly the class schedule given to her daughter, which was written in Japanese. Stephanie also mentions instances when she could not assist her child with his homework because she does not know how to read Japanese. Despite their being Japanese citizens, their lack of interaction with the locals as well as their inability to perform the duties expected of Japanese parents pose a challenge to their position in Okinawan society.

Aside from their children's schools, life outside the US bases is spent largely with fellow Nisei and Filipinos, and only to some extent with Okinawans, Japanese, and Americans, particularly in Catholic and Christian (Protestant) churches. In these places their Filipino identity is strengthened and their ethnicity as Okinawan Filipinos is performed through their interactions with fellow Nisei, with whom they share a common past and present.

Most Nisei in Okinawa experience what most Nikkeijin returnees do in regard to their interaction with their respective local communities. Aside from language problems, other problems include not being "culturally Japanese" or "culturally Okinawan" due to the host country's different customs and traditions. Language and culture may be handicaps, and for these Nisei being "mixed" seems to work as a disadvantage as well. One Nisei tells me how her Okinawan mother was "disowned" by her family and excluded in her parents' will. Okinawan culture and society are known for the closeness of blood ties and the importance given to "blood purity." The Filipino heritage of the Nisei may not be as much cultural capital for them except for the fact that they are considered native English speakers and are well educated.

On a societal level, some Nisei also experience discrimination from Okinawans despite their legal status as Japanese and their Okinawan heritage. “We are a minority within a minority,” Raphael says. “Okinawans are a minority in Japan, and we become a minority again within the Okinawan society”—a phrase redolent of the Nisei’s experience of double discrimination. Moreover, Raphael mentions that despite being Nisei Okinawans look at them as Filipinos: “you are never a Japanese, you are never an Okinawan, you’re always a Filipino in the eyes of the people over here.” He adds that the locals do not call them *gaijin*, a term which means “foreigner” or “outsider” and carries a derogatory connotation, but *Firipin-jin* (Filipino), which he thinks is for some people a neutral word, although it can be derogatory as well. Hence, as the Nisei say, “They look at Filipinos as second-class citizens.” Likewise, Marco feels that the Nisei are also discriminated against in Okinawa. He thinks that, although Americans favor Filipinos and Nisei because they are proficient in English, he thinks that the third (*sansei*) and fourth (*yonsei*) generation Nikkeijin from Latin American countries seem to be more favored as migrant workers. Marco feels that Nikkeijin from the Philippines, as well as the Nisei are still not given a warm welcome. This is also due in part to their Filipino parentage since Nikkeijin from other countries do not have mixed ancestry. Raphael believes though that “there’s always gonna be discrimination, it doesn’t matter just because you are half (Okinawan).”

The words “you’re always a Filipino in the eyes of the people over here” connote exclusion from Okinawan society. Not surprisingly, many of the Nisei consider themselves Filipino or more Filipino than Okinawan, while at the same time acknowledging their Okinawan ancestry. At the same time, those words as uttered by the Nisei suggest their desire to be considered a part of Okinawan society, even as at the same time they acknowledge their Filipino heritage. The fact is that the Nisei cannot be fully integrated into Okinawan society. Despite having lived in Okinawa for more than half of his life, Raphael says that he still wants to return to the Philippines and contribute to the betterment of society there, as he thinks that his contribution “won’t be welcome in Japan” and he is still considered an outsider.

Due to cultural differences, as well as their scant knowledge of the Japanese language, the Nisei are treated as foreign migrants—a minority within Okinawan society. This contrasts with their legal status as Japanese nationals as well as the elite status they occupy among locals and other foreign workers who are mostly engaged in blue-collar work. Having Japanese citizenship

but not being “culturally Japanese or Okinawan” seems contradictory in a society where the myth of homogeneity still exists. Language proficiency and communication are also important issues. As Raphael puts it, “You’re a Japanese that doesn’t speak Japanese . . . you’re completely lost.” As Nobuko Adachi (2006a, 14) aptly argues, “language is the threshold in the creation of a social boundary between Japanese locals and Nikkei workers.” Indeed, the insufficient knowledge of the Japanese language creates a boundary between the local Okinawans and the Nisei in Okinawan society, relegating them to a status considered foreign despite their Okinawan ancestry and Japanese citizenship. Legally they are Japanese, but culturally they are not.

## Conclusion

The postwar Okinawa-born Nisei who moved to the Philippines in their childhood and adolescent years but eventually returned to Okinawa emphasize both their Filipino and Okinawan roots. They hold claim to being part of both Okinawa and the Philippines. And yet their lives are totally fastened to Okinawa rather than the Philippines, even if they feel they are Filipinos and are seen as such by most Okinawans. In Okinawa, the Nisei with their mixed heritage are caught in the issue of authenticating themselves as people of Okinawan descent. To be included in Okinawan society and not be treated as foreign continues to be a longing of the Nisei. Unknown to most Okinawans, the Nisei reflect the same ambivalence toward the US bases that prevails in Okinawan society, although the Nisei’s ambivalence reflects their own uncertain position in Okinawan society. Their mixed ancestry, their cultural detachment from the average Okinawan, and their work on the US bases and their structural location of living between the US bases and Okinawan society prevent them, despite their legal status as Japanese, from being fully integrated in Okinawan society. They continue to be regarded as foreign migrants in the place that was once their home.

## Notes

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in Okinawa),” presented at the Keio University Special Research Meeting on Japan’s Foreign Residents on 10 April 2010.

- 1 *Nisei* is a Japanese word that means second generation. I use the term *Nisei* throughout this article to refer to second-generation Okinawan Filipinos, and its usage here is the same for both singular and plural forms. As in previous works (Zulueta 2004 and 2006), I use the term *Nisei* as a concept, written as a proper noun. Meanwhile, the term “Okinawan Filipino” refers to people with Okinawan and Filipino ancestry in general, regardless of generation; it includes the *Nisei* and their descendants such as the *sansei* (third generation) and *yonsei* (fourth generation).
- 2 Many of these women only had travel documents handed out to them by the USCAR. This was because Okinawans during this time were considered neither Japanese nor US nationals, rendering them stateless. Several of these women became naturalized Filipinos (through marriage), while some chose to revert to Japanese nationality upon Okinawa’s reversion to Japan in 1972.
- 3 There were cases wherein the Filipino husband left his Okinawan wife and child in Okinawa, and no contact was ever made upon the husband’s return to the Philippines. Hence, there are *Nisei* who were born and brought up in Okinawa, and presumably have not experienced setting foot on Philippine soil. Some *Nisei* of this type only have vague memories of their father. This social reality is the subject of a novel authored by a *Nisei* who travelled to Manila in search of his Filipino father (Sunamori 2000).
- 4 People with Okinawan ancestry, and in this case, the Okinawan Filipinos, are legally seen as *Nikkeijin*, owing to the fact that Okinawa is part of Japan. However, with the complicated historical relationship between Okinawa and the Japanese mainland, many Okinawans still distinguish themselves as ethnically and culturally distinct from the mainland Japanese. Because this study focuses on people with Okinawan parentage, I have decided to refer to them as Okinawan Filipinos rather than Japanese Filipinos. By using this category, I treat the Okinawan Filipinos independently from the Philippine *Nikkeijin*.
- 5 Base work is considered more lucrative than employment in companies and other establishments outside the bases. One informant told me that base workers receive an English-language allowance, thus they get paid more than do other government employees. The Language Allowance Degree (LAD) has four levels, and those with LADs of 3 and 4 can apply for higher positions on the US bases. Many of my informants relied on the Okinawan-Filipino network to land jobs on the US bases.
- 6 There is also an Okinawan-Filipino organization based in Okinawa called the Okinawan-Filipino Association or OPA, the existence of which I was not aware of at the time of my fieldwork in 2007.
- 7 Most of my informants are male. This is not to imply any gender imbalance among the *Nisei* working on the US bases. In fact, I met female *Nisei* who work on the bases during my subsequent trips to Okinawa but was unable to interview them formally.
- 8 The Labor Management Organization for USFJ Employees, Incorporated Administrative Agency coordinates with Japan’s Ministry of Defence in the hiring and recruitment as well as administrative matters that concern the USFJ employees (see LMO n.d.).
- 9 To some extent, this includes the *burakumin* or people belonging to the lowest caste status in Japan who were deemed as untouchables. The caste system was abolished in the Meiji Era in

the late 1800s, although *burakumin* (and their descendants) still continue to be stigmatized in Japanese society. Also not a few Okinawans see themselves as being accorded “second-class” citizenship status, despite being Japanese nationals. This is largely related to the ongoing presence of the US bases in the prefecture.

- 10 It is noteworthy that not a few foreign nationals as well as *Nikkeijin* and overseas Okinawans residing in the prefecture are in favor of the presence of the US bases, according to a survey conducted by University of the Ryukyus students in 2002. The reasons include: the importance of the US bases for the Okinawan economy (*Okinawa keizai no kasseika ni juuyou*), cultural diversification (*bunka ga tayoukasuru*), and the importance of the US bases on the prefecture’s relations with Asia and the world (*Ajia, sekai to no kokusai kankei no tame ni juuyou*). A large number of foreign nationals also included job security as a reason for agreeing to the presence of the US bases in the prefecture (cf. Suzuki 2005, 8; Kitaueda 2005, 70; Iwato 2005, 77).
- 11 However, in my recent trips to Okinawa (July 2010 and December 2011), when I had the opportunity to chat with some *Nisei* who I previously interviewed as well as those who I met on these visits, I found that they still have ambivalent feelings about the US presence in Okinawa, but want Futenma out of the prefecture rather than transferred within the prefecture.
- 12 Yoshida (2001, 177) states that under the cost-sharing arrangements between the US and Japan, which was approved in 1995, “Japan pays not only the regular salaries and fringe benefits, language bonuses, year-end allowances and retirement allowances of the Okinawans employed on U.S. bases, but provides facilities to accommodate American military personnel . . . and pays the bills for public utilities used by U.S. forces and their families.”
- 13 It has been found that the status of foreigners living and working in Okinawa is generally higher than those of the *Nikkeijin* (Suzuki 2007, 18).

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