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## Squared diaspora: Representations of the Japanese diaspora across time and space

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### ABSTRACT

This introduction to the special issue on the Japanese diaspora sets the background to the theme by summarizing the key components of diaspora theory and pointing out some fallacies and conceptual shortcomings this volume attempts to overcome. The article argues that the complexity of the contemporary diaspora of Japanese emigrants and their descendants at the intersection with the emerging Nikkei diaspora provides peculiar insights into the spatial dimensions and social dynamics of transmigration. Rather than taken for granted the conceptual differentiation of diaspora and homeland, it argues to understand them in terms of dynamic relationships between space, time and identity, which are realized in discourses and forms of practice. Contributions to this volume square the conceptualization of the diaspora and the homeland. They provide evidence for the argument of the 'squared diaspora' by pointing out the shifting alignments of locality, identity and agency. Identity and representations of diasporic belonging therefore are varying and fluid concepts, depending on generation, ascription, and collectively shared assumptions about the utilitarian value of ethnic labeling. The volume also warn of the analytic shortcoming of privileging one subjectivity like place of birth or ethnicity over all others.

### KEYWORDS

Nikkei; transmigration;  
squared diaspora; Japan

The history of Japanese overseas migration has attracted considerable attention among scholars of migration studies, minority studies, anthropology and Japan studies over the recent past (Endoh, 2009; Hirabayashi, Yano, & Hirabayashi, 2002; Masterson & Funada-Classen, 2004). The International Nikkei Research Project (1998–2001) has documented the wealth of resources available in four languages (Japanese, English, Spanish and Portuguese; see [www.discovernikkei.org](http://www.discovernikkei.org) on the web) to reconstruct and realize the migration experience and the different stages of first contact, settlement, onward travel and eventual integration of sojourner migrants and settler families in destination societies. Yet, the literature is fairly uneven, centering on countries with large Nikkei populations, as descendants of Japanese ancestry are commonly labeled. In marked contrast to the richness of scholarship on Hawai'i (e.g. Kimura, 1988; Matsuda, 1968; Moriyama,

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1985), the United States (Azuma, 2005; Hosokawa & Wilson, 1980; Matsumoto, 1993; Minamikawa, 2007) and Brazil (Adachi 2006; Fiset & Nomura, 2005; Lesser, 1999, 2003, 2007; Staniford, 1973), and to a lesser degree on Peru (Takenaka, 2003, 2004, 2009), comparatively little has been written about the trajectories of smaller contingencies that moved into Canada (Adachi, 1976; Ujimoto, 1973), Argentina (Gómez & Onaha, 2008; Higa, 1995; Imai, 1995), Mexico (Ota Mishima 1982; Watanabe, 1983), Bolivia (König and Ölschleger 1994; Kunimoto, 1989, 2002) or Paraguay (Noguchi, 2003; Tajima, 1999), not to mention Central American countries like Columbia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic or Ecuador that received only a few hundreds of migrants from Japan. It is telling that *The Cambridge Survey of World Migration* (Cohen, 1995) features only reports of indentured migration from Japan to USA, Brazil and Peru. The blanks in such reports elide and erase the diversity of motivations and experiences among the Japanese migrants who have spread across the Americas.

### The 'diaspora' diaspora

The dearth of scholarly knowledge on the peripheries of the Japanese diaspora might be reason enough for dedicating a special issue to this topic. However, 30 years of sojourner remigration back and forth between the diaspora and the homeland have provided surprising and quite peculiar insights into the spatial dimensions and social dynamics of transmigration that bear the potential for advancing diaspora theory. Roughly over the same period, we have witnessed an unprecedented degree of academic interest in the word diaspora turning into 'a global word that fits a global world' (Dufoix, 2008, p. 108). In its original use, the term referred exclusively to the global dispersal of the Jewish people and their collective trauma of expulsion from the homeland (Cohen, 2008, p. 2). What originally was coined to denominate a singular historical incident and of concern for religious studies only evolved into a descriptive term. Early diaspora researchers adopted the Jewish diaspora as its archetype to capture similar and analogous experiences of groups of people whose sense of belonging is not bound to a territory and sphere of state power, but rather to the shared myths and imaginations of origin, wandering and other reference points from the past (Tölölyan, 2007, p. 649).

Ideal-type definitions of the diaspora as a particular form of collectivization are usually based on three premises: the central trauma of dispersion from a center to distanced and peripheral places, where one dreams of home while living in exile; actual or imagined relationships of a minority community with its territorial homeland; and the active maintenance of network structures and social organizations that connect diasporic communities over great distances. Safran (1991, pp. 83–84) and Cohen (2008, p. 17) have produced taxonomies of diasporas that are widely referred to in diaspora studies. The notion of diaspora then typically conveys the idea of migrant and settler communities of common ethno-national origin who are living at more than one location apart from their ancestors' land. Collective identity in the diaspora is based on the continuous association with the place of origin, while its members have to cope both with the traumatic experience of dislocation and with a troublesome relationship to the place of residence. Historical comparison is commonly found as an analytical framework of diaspora studies that take the classical taxonomy as starting point. While these studies

yielded valuable insights and merits, the lack of theoretical embeddedness and weak explanatory power are troubling for social sciences in particular.

Social scientists recognized the heuristic value of the diaspora concept in the early 1990s and adopted it as a key metaphor for late-modern identity politics in a complex and complicated world void of certainties but rich with possibilities (Hall, 1992; Trouillot, 2003). This transformation responded to discursive shifts which understood nation, culture and ethnicity no longer as primordial, territorially bounded monolithic units, but rather as heterogeneous and fluid designs that are negotiated in discourse and affirmed in practice (Clifford, 1994; Gilroy, 1993). More recently, political actors also showed signs of interest in the diaspora. Governments and international nonpolitical organizations have recognized the diaspora as a major agent in the field of capacity building (Ionescu, 2006; Manzenreiter et al., 2014). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) conceives of diasporas as 'members of ethnic and national communities, who have left, but maintain links with, their homelands' (Ionescu, 2006, p. 12). Remittances sent back home and investments in the homeland, as well as claims for participation rights in national policy issues and economic development at home document the unbroken commitment of the diaspora, despite many years or generations of spatial detachment (Manzenreiter, 2013). The IOM definition borrows heavily from the established academic discourse to refer 'to the idea of transnational populations, living in one place, while still maintaining relations with their homelands, being both "here" and "there"' (Ionescu, 2006, p. 12).

However, not every migrant group, or every community with the collective experience of displacement and multiple identification with more than one locality is qualified to be understood as diaspora. Due to the buoyant spread and rampant dispersal of the term in cultural studies and social sciences, in politics and art, and the consequential danger of losing all its symbolic and analytical power, Brubaker (2005, p. 1) spoke of the "'diaspora" diaspora.' In light of all the diverse interests and approaches, particularly if its metaphorical usage is also taken into account, any attempt at finding a concise and robust definition by deducting its principles from an incomplete set of examples is rendered a mission impossible.

Newer conceptions of the diaspora, as opposed to the classical definitions, therefore suggest understanding diasporas in terms of dynamic relationships between space, time and identity, which are realized in discourses and forms of practice. Brubaker (2005, p. 12) suggested thinking of diaspora 'in the first instance as a category of practice that redefines and remakes the world.' True, but it is more than that. Zeleza (2005, p. 41) itemized the multiple dimensions of diasporas being 'a process, a condition, a space and a discourse: the continuous processes by which a diaspora is made, unmade and remade, the changing conditions in which it lives and expresses itself, the places where it is molded and imagined.'

Living in one space and dreaming of another is at the heart of the fragility of the diaspora. Contrary to the nation-state, identity predates space in the diaspora, and the re-creation of space is essential for the production and reproduction of diasporic identity: diasporic lives take place in spaces that are suffused with other identities and laid out by others (Bruneau, 2010, p. 49). Punning on Tolstoy's famous remark in the opening pages of *Anna Karenina* on the role of unhappiness in making each family distinctive, Mishra (1996, p. 189) therefore judged that 'all diasporas are unhappy, but

every diaspora is unhappy in its own way.’ This statement is advanced in a later paper by a definition of diaspora as ‘people who would want to explore the meaning of the hyphen [as in Japanese-Argentine], but perhaps not press the hyphen too far for fear that this would lead to massive communal schizophrenia’ (Mishra, 2005, p. 1). Such a process is lasting, and never likely to be ended. Hence Zeleza defined diaspora as ‘simultaneously a state of being and a process of becoming, a kind of voyage that encompasses the possibility of never arriving or returning, a navigation of multiple belongings’ (Zeleza, 2005, p. 41). The subjectivity of diaspora has found wide resonance in postmodern strands of social theory. However ‘if the category of diaspora is internal to the consciousness of dispersed minorities [...], then it is possible to give short shrift to a whole host of extrasubjective factors, both “here” (hostland) and “there” (homeland)’ (Mishra, 2006, p. 38). In fact, territorial spaces and governments continue to be of significance for the making of diasporas, but more importantly, this statement indicates that diasporas do not only question the sameness of home and homeland, of nation and a people, but strongly deny it.

### **Squaring the diaspora**

All contributions to this volume demonstrate the complexity of the contemporary diaspora of Japanese emigrants and their descendants at the intersection with the emerging Nikkei diaspora. Most studies presented here in this special issue are questioning the purely theory-driven approach and contribute to our understanding of the squared diaspora by rich ethnographic data and thick descriptions. Focusing on representations of the diaspora or in the diaspora, most papers benefit from the deep insights gained from ethnography, participant observation, fieldwork and related qualitative research methods. All papers eventually refute the ethnic lens paradigm and provide convincing evidence for a constructivist understanding of subjectivity and identity formation in the diaspora. Taken together, these fine studies confirm generalized assumptions about diaspora life worlds, such as troubled relations to majority society in the hostland, intergenerational differences in terms of identification, seclusion and assimilation, and the particular significance of cultural representations of an imagined homeland and the continuous efforts of symbol-making for the maintenance of collective identities. Most studies take issue with the essentializing notion of Japaneseness, showing how this concept varies, depending on generation, inside or outside ascription, and collectively shared assumptions about the utilitarian value of ethnic labeling. Space and places are also a common point of departure in most articles, which might be of no surprise given that spatial relations are of constituting significance for migration and diaspora research and that ethnographic studies usually are grounded in specific localities.

Four articles engage with the role of food as a key vector for the cultural representation of identity, though the question of what is symbolized by Japanese food is far from being easily or identically answered. In the first article, Ayumi Takenaka, a leading researcher of Japanese diasporic lives in Peru, argues that the intersectionality of food as political and deeply personal provides a lens to interrogate immigrant integration to a nation-state. Drawing on fieldwork among Nikkei chefs, community leaders and gastro critics at Nikkei cultural activities and Nikkei restaurants in Lima, Takenaka shows that

culinary transformation and the recent celebration of Nikkei cuisine are symptomatic of the social acceptance that third- and fourth-generation Nikkei are finally enjoying in contemporary Peru. Nikkei cuisine is a unique blending of Japanese and Peruvian food styles that also left its marks in some globally acknowledged food temples in Paris, London or Manhattan. Yet in Peru, where community organizations are actively promoting the fusion cuisine, it also appears to be like a new branch of the country's national cuisine. Emphasizing the valued aspects of both foodways, its popularity is indicative of a positive identity the descendants of Japanese emigrants have acquired as Nikkei Peruvians. This is remarkable as the majority of Nikkei Peruvians come from Okinawa, a region with a distinct cultural identity that continues to struggle for cultural emancipation from majority Japan and its ethnic markers. That the Okinawa-born Nikkei in Peru are proud of their 'Japanese' roots is in marked contrast to the experience of former generations that struggled for acceptance as Peruvians of Japanese ancestry within a host society largely ignorant of cultural differences among Japanese. Still there remains an interesting cleavage between self-perception as either Japanese or Okinawan Nikkei and the way they are seen as Nikkei migrants within the Peruvian context.

Food and the Nikkei's problem of belonging are also of concern for Lyle De Souza. While all other contributions are based on empirical social research, his is the only one by a scholar from the field of arts and humanities analyzing literary texts by Nikkei authors. In particular, De Souza looks at the way in which food as a representation of cultural identity is represented in literary writings by Canadian authors of migrant background. Combining a close reading of the novel *Chorus of Mushrooms* by Japanese Nikkei writer Hiromi Goto with Koichi Iwabuchi's take on 'rooted transnationalism,' De Souza shows how interactions of the diaspora with the host society are played out within different social spaces. The focus is on food, and the spatiality of food production and consumption by grandmother, daughter and granddaughter of the Tonkatsu family is appropriated to index generational variations of belonging and acceptance of the Nikkei in Canada. Pointing out intertextual relationships with other literary sources by Nikkei authors, De Souza argues that it is impossible to ignore the politics of food: despite high intermarriage rates and perfect integration, racism has not been eradicated by multiculturalism. For the characters of the novel, food may have healing powers to overcome feelings of ostracism and to emancipate oneself from the struggle of identity.

Hisako Omori provides the third paper focusing on the role of food for identity formation and more precisely on the creation and maintenance of the homeland of an 'imagined community.' Her research, drawing on two years of fieldwork in Ontario, takes place at the parish of a Japanese Canadian Christian church for which the production and consumption of food, and even food talk, are strategies to mark social bonds and boundaries. Of particular prominence at church activities is a noodle dish from Western Japan (*udon*) using homemade chicken soup as stock. Omori argues that this localized dish (or manifestation of what De Souza might have called rooted transnationalism) is a conscious attempt to evoke a sense of double 'home,' connecting the parish members to the Western part of Japan where many have ancestral roots, and to their North American cultural context. Omori also argues that the global signification of Japanese cuisine as healthy and trendy food has helped Japanese Canadians reestablish their sense of identity which was severely shattered from the traumatic experience of

internment during World War II. After the war, churches like the one she observed provided a safe haven for Japanese Canadians to gather without feeling the imminent need to deny their cultural roots. It may be argued that church communities also provide a rare social space for women to become essential agents in the construction and interpretation of what is Japanese and simultaneously home-like.

The significance of place for constructing and representing feelings of belonging in a diasporic context appears to be so evident that the void of scholarship on particular places that Jutta Teuwsen observes in diaspora research is quite surprising. Referring to Marc Augé's notion of anthropological place as the opposite of non-places, Teuwsen uses a spatial approach to frame the observations gathered during fieldwork at the Shirokiya, a Japanese department store in downtown Honolulu. In line with Augé's argument, Teuwsen argues that identity, relations and history are three characteristics of places that are assigned with meaning and thereby open for people to express their identity. Teuwsen's study also touches upon food issues, as Japanese food became a primary commodity for the store over time. Yet, the ubiquitous display of Japanese food for consumption is not a source of ethno-national pride among those elder Japanese Americans in Hawai'i interviewed by Teuwsen, but rather a heavily contested issue. Taking their narratives and life histories into account, Teuwsen explains why there are generational differences in the attitudes towards the store and why the elderly particularly feel alienated by the transformation of the store from a warehouse specialized in high-quality Japanese merchandise into a department store centering on a wide variety of food stalls, including a beer garden, catering to the mainstream taste and popular desires of an expanding customer base. For the older generation that had grown up in poverty, the luxurious Shirokiya served as a museum of an imagined Old Japan, where only Japanese Americans went to reaffirm their own identity. Its presence in the city center of Honolulu symbolized to them the ultimate benefits of hard work and sacrifice, of which they reaffirmed each other when visiting the store, until the changed store concept attracted new customers, local migrant minorities and foreign tourists alike that were primarily interested in cheap and exotic Japanese food. To the elderly Nikkei, their presence was a violation of boundaries, at times even disrupting their sense of a racialized order of the social hierarchy in their new multiracial homeland.

Representations of cultural identity are also investigated by Yvonne Siemann, an ethnologist studying the Okinawan Bolivian community in South East Bolivia. This is quite a unique community in as far as the Okinawan Bolivians largely outnumber the descendants of emigrants from the Japanese main islands. Siemann's study focuses on cultural performance as a marker of diaspora identity. Based on participant observation among members of a dance group performing *Ryūkyūkoku Maturidaiko* (a modern derivation of traditional *eisā*) and informal talks and interviews with Okinawan Bolivians as well as non-Nikkei Bolivians, she demonstrates that the dance is not merely a popular pastime for children and young adults, but also a means for them to negotiate identity and strengthen ties with Okinawa and members of the worldwide Okinawan diaspora. That both performers and spectators also see the cultural performance as a representation of Japanese values underpinning their socioeconomic success in Bolivia is quite intriguing, given that *Ryūkyūkoku Maturidaiko* foremost helps the 'minority within a minority' resist incorporation into a mainland Nikkei identity.



Wolfram Manzenreiter's paper advances the notion of a squared diaspora by juxtaposing the constituting pillars of migrant community-building with the forces that are undermining their steadiness and viability, namely the influx of material and immaterial goods from Japan and the increased ease of intercontinental travel and immigration. Based on multi-sited fieldwork across various Latin American sites of the Nikkei diaspora, his paper points out the seminal role of political structures and social institutions in multiethnic societies that overlap, contradict or intersect with the newcomers' institutions and worldviews that are bound to the imagination of the past homeland. This interplay is most evident within contemporary Japan, where there remains a strong tendency to conceptualize the nation as a mono-ethnic society, despite its growing shares of minority populations. For the Nikkei, who more often than not ended up living and working in precarious conditions, returning 'home' has squared the sensation of being diasporic in the sense of being displaced more than once and having multiple relationships with two distinct nations which are neither just homeland nor hostland. Replicating their ancestors' traumatic experience of expulsion and rejection, they respond by relying on tools and strategies of community building that also secured their migrant ancestors' thriving abroad. The emerging Nikkei identity does not fully deny the repercussions of ancestry but certainly diminishes its centrality for subjectivity formation in translocal life worlds.

Suma Ikeuchi's research on the relationship between ethnicity and religious identity is situated at the convergence of return migration and global Pentecostalism. Drawing from the anthropology of religion, her approach to subjectivity formation among Nikkei Brazilian Pentecostal churchgoers in Japan critically deconstructs the oversimplified notion of ethnic religion built on the premises of prioritizing ethno-racial variables as the primary and irreducible level of analysis to which other social formations can be reduced. Findings from a year of fieldwork at the Missão Apoio Toyota in Aichi prefecture suggest that ethnicity is just as constructed and imaginative as religiosity. The Nikkei Brazilian converts who serve as Ikeuchi's informants switch between Brazilian, Japanese or plainly Christian when reflecting on their selves in the context of Pentecostal practicing. Thus, Ikeuchi argues that Pentecostalism provides the space for proliferating new and diversified senses of self. Her paper reminds us also to be wary of a functionalist understanding of co-ethnic networking, even though from a structuralist perspective religious conversion can be seen as a strategic response by immigrant minorities to the socioeconomic marginalization they are facing due to their ambiguous ethnic otherness and lower social status position.

Ana Sueyoshi in her article on identity and belonging of Peruvian Nikkei also takes issue with the fallacies of 'methodological nationalism' (Wimmer & Schiller, 2002) or the 'ethnic lens' (Glick Schiller, Caglar, & Guldbrandsen, 2006). Prioritizing citizenship, place of origin or ethnicity as a heuristic framework forecloses analytical alternatives, as Sueyoshi's account of intergenerational circular migration among the Peruvian Nikkei neatly demonstrates. This group is characterized by high rates of circular migration, particularly among first-generation sojourner migrants but also among their offspring born or raised in Japan who are sometimes sent 'back' to Peru for higher educational purposes. Data collected through questionnaires, interviews and follow-up surveys in Lima shed light on the Peruvian Nikkei's differences of identity building in Japan and Peru. Both generations repeatedly align their sense of self with the socioeconomic



structures of the place of residence, thereby generating quite different attitudes toward the Japaneseness of Nikkei identities. While the parent generation is limited in its capacity to overcome the restrictions of its marginalized socioeconomic positions and therefore assumes a defensive attitude toward its Nikkei background, the second-generation immigrants apparently arrived in a position from where they can grow professional careers (and thereby a sense of self) in two different countries by embracing their Japaneseness (first) and (later) their Nikkei affiliation. This study is remarkably upbeat on the benefits of transmigration, merits that are harvested by the migrants themselves as well as by the countries of origin and destination. That neither of these social spaces can be called homeland or hostland underscores how valuable the notion of the 'squared diaspora' is for an attempt at re-mapping the translocal life worlds of Japanese migrants and their descendants throughout time and space.

The last contribution to this special issue on the squared diaspora is an exploratory think piece written by Millie Creighton, well known for her research on transnational networking in the Japanese diaspora. In this essay on the uncertainties of belonging of migrant communities, she draws on examples from art and architecture created by Canadians to overcome their own experiences of forceful uprooting from home and community due to wartime imprisonment and incarceration. Creighton's essay is inspired by such diverse sources as the Canadian embassy building in Tokyo, the Trump administration's hostile stance against Muslims and Latin-American migrants, and the 75th anniversary of the internment of Nikkei by governments in Canada and the USA. The enforced relocation of families of Japanese ancestry and the seizure of their property remains a painful memory in the collective history of Nikkei across the Americas, reminding them of the ambiguity of home-making in the diaspora. This may have been further engraved in their collective memory by the many decades of struggle for official acknowledgement and excuse. This was granted in the late 1980s and early 1990s only, when the Canadian and US governments finally acknowledged the wrong of the state against their own citizens and legal residents who happened to share the same ethnic background. Out of this past, Nikkei organizations have emerged at the forefront against Islamophobic politics in the USA to protect the rights of any migrant minority. While this essay succinctly combines the core arguments of the squared diaspora by pointing out the shifting alignments of locality, identity and agency, its case studies also warn of the analytic shortcoming of privileging one subjectivity like place of birth or ethnicity over all others. Creighton's think piece also hails the human capacity for overcoming feelings of hatred and bitterness as a response to discrimination. Thus, the special issue closes with a vector of hope amidst current tidal waves of populist nationalism sweeping across the globe: in a world of transnational mobilities, what is needed most to guarantee the future of diverse communities is the commitment of their people to shared belonging and mutual understanding of all groups, including minorities, marginalized people and migrant communities.

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**Wolfram Manzenreiter** is Professor of Japanese Studies and Vice Head of Department at the Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Vienna. His research is concerned with social and anthropological aspects of sports, emotions, work and migration in a globalising world. He is author of several books and numerous articles and book chapter mainly on sport, leisure, popular culture and social issues in contemporary Japan. As a scholar of globalization, his research also extends into the larger East Asian region and the transnational networks of the Japanese diaspora. Book publications of note include *Sport and Body Politics in Japan; Happiness and the Good Life in Japan* (Routledge 2017) and *Life Course, Happiness and Well-being in Japan* (Routledge 2017, both with Barbara Holthus). Currently he is working on social happiness in rural Japan.

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