As I got out of a taxi with my dusty backpack and suitcase at the centro (village center) of Colonia Okinawa, a farming settlement founded by Okinawan immigrants in the Santa Cruz Prefecture of eastern Bolivia, I immediately recognized two different types of gaze cast on me. The first was from taxi drivers who were congregating at the parada, or taxi stop, and street vendors who were selling snacks and drinks to those waiting for rides. Their stare with reserved curiosity seemed to have deciphered my nationality. *Otro japonés ha llegado*—another Japanese has arrived. The second was from those who were slowly driving their pickup trucks over the speed bumps on the road in the centro. After giving me a long and inquiring stare, they nodded at me as they passed me by. *Nihonjin deshō*—you are Japanese, aren’t you? They appeared to be acknowledging that I had come to their place, a village of Okinawans. Whenever and wherever I was in the village, I was always made aware that my appearance—physique, demeanor, outfit, and so on—were monitored by these two different types of scrutinizing gaze: one from Bolivians of non-Okinawan and non-Japanese descent (referred to as non-Nikkei Bolivians in this book) and the other from Okinawan immigrants and their descendants (Okinawan-Bolivians hereafter) in Colonia Okinawa. Among the memories from my field research in Colonia Okinawa, I remember most vividly the inquisitive looks that I received from the members of the two distinct groups and how my body instantly became an object of scrutiny in which cultural and socioeconomic differences between “Japanese” and “Bolivian” as well as
“Naichi-jin” (Japanese mainlander) and “Okinawan” were articulated and objectified.¹

The central question of this book arose from my memories of these inquiring and objectifying gazes as well as from numerous anecdotes I heard in Colonia Okinawa about physical, cultural, and psychological differences between “Bolivians,” “Japanese” (Naichi-jin), and “Okinawans.” How does an Okinawan-Bolivian person, for instance, appear, think, and behave—in short, become “Bolivian,” “Japanese,” or “Okinawan” (as opposed to Naichi-jin)—in his or her own eyes and in the eyes of others in different situations? What are the socio-economic implications of these differing yet purportedly “natural” attributes of Okinawan-Bolivians within the particular local context? In this book, I examine how people’s bodies came to symbolize and represent their “true” cultural identity as it was formed and expressed in everyday practices, and how these embodied cultural “truths” came to symbolize various degrees and forms of belonging (and nonbelonging) of individual subjects in the places they resided. This is the social process I refer to as “racialized belonging,” through which, as I hope to demonstrate, embodied, performed, and narrated “cultural” differences between population groups become essentialized and naturalized as both a

Colonia Okinawa Uno Centro area
reason for and a manifestation of discrepancies in socioeconomic statuses and senses of belonging.

A multisited ethnography of transnational migrants that “follows the people” (Marcus 1995, 106) offers a useful case study to explore racialized belonging, as it comparatively examines the social processes in two or more locales, where daily practices and narratives differentially embody their “culture,” which comes to function as evidence of their class positions and social statuses in each locale. In this ethnography, I portray transnational ethnic Okinawan communities in two nation-states: Okinawan immigrants and their descendants in Colonia Okinawa, Bolivia, an agricultural settlement established in the mid-1950s by Okinawan settlers, and Okinawan-Bolivian immigrants in the city of Yokohama, Japan, where hundreds of Okinawan-Bolivians have moved from Colonia Okinawa as dekasegi, or sojourning, migrants since the 1980s.

Although the individual experiences of Okinawan-Bolivians in Bolivia and Japan undoubtedly varied with differences in age, generation, class, gender, and other individual attributes, the relatively small size of the Okinawan-Bolivian community in Colonia Okinawa (approximately 850 people currently reside there) and strong ties between those who reside in Colonia Okinawa and those in Japan allow me to consider the Okinawan-Bolivians in both locations as part of a single community that has created a “transnational social field” of action and meaning (Glick Schiller et al. 1992, 19) that spans the two nation-states. The differing experiences of various Okinawan-Bolivians in the two locales, therefore, are examined together as those of a group of “transmigrants,” individuals who have socioeconomic footholds in multiple nation-states (ibid.).

To theorize the racialized belonging of transmigrants, this study examines multiple contradictions Okinawan-Bolivians (Okinawan settlers, or Issei, and their offspring in Colonia Okinawa, and Okinawan-Bolivian dekasegi migrants in urban Japan) faced in Bolivia and Japan. First, how did Okinawan-Bolivians experience and make sense of paradoxical socioeconomic class positions they occupied in a transnational social field? In Colonia Okinawa, many Issei (first-generation settlers) were affluent large-scale farm owners, although their second-generation, or Nisei, children struggled to transform their economically privileged backgrounds into upward class mobility in a larger Bolivian society. In Yokohama, meanwhile, Nisei dekasegi migrants could earn more money by working in the construction and manufacturing industries, yet the migrants suffered from financial instability and personal humiliation as blue-collar laborers. Second, how did educational institutions, such as community schools in Colonia Okinawa, shape Nisei and Sansei (third-generation)
Okinawan-Bolivian youth’s identities and behaviors? The schools believed that they were helping second- and third-generation Okinawan-Bolivians succeed in the larger Bolivian society as bilingual (Spanish and Japanese) and bicultural Nikkei (the descendants of Japanese immigrants) subjects, by teaching them the “standard” Japanese language and what they considered to be authentic Japanese culture. Yet, the schools appeared to have inadvertently encouraged the Okinawan-Bolivian youth to migrate to Japan as dekasegi laborers rather than pursue socioeconomic success in Bolivia. Finally, how did Okinawan-Bolivians interpret and negotiate their historical and cultural distinctiveness as Okinawans, whose past as the colonized subjects under imperial Japan still stirred ambivalent feelings toward Japan among Okinawans in Okinawa Prefecture and the Okinawan diaspora abroad? Okinawan identity among the Okinawan-Bolivians in Bolivia and Japan was subdued on certain occasions but strongly felt and expressed by them on others, especially when they had to deal with Japanese government officials. This study, then, is an attempt to understand the contradictory processes of class and cultural identity formation of transmigrants, an ethnography of postcolonial subjects in diaspora, and an effort to theorize race, class, and culture in a transnational context.

There are two underlying assumptions in this study. First, I consider that individuals are not unified and autonomous beings, who exercise free will to position themselves within social relations, economic conditions, or cultural climates. Instead, I regard each individual as a subject, “a locus in which an incoherent (and often contradictory) plurality of such relational determinations interact” (Certeau 1984, xi) and believe that their “agency is created through situations and statuses conferred on them” (J. Scott 1992, 34). Because these subjects make themselves and are made at the same time, it is imperative to define them as an ongoing formative process, not a finished product. The individual subjects occupy a certain “subject position,” which Tim O’Sullivan defines as “a contradictory mix of confirming and contending ‘identities’” (O’Sullivan et al. 1994, 310; cited in Parreñas 2001, 31). Thus, individual identities are defined here as contested and shifting “positions” in which subjects are placed and place themselves in relation to other individuals and institutions.

Second, in examining the changing subject positions of transmigrants and their embodied belongings in two different locales, I view these locales not as static and unified but as dynamic and heterogeneous domains that are constantly in flux socioeconomically, politically, and culturally. Spaces that transmigrants move across are neither “empty” (Lefebvre 1991, 15) nor “geometrical” (Certeau 1984, 117) spaces that are filled with the homogeneous
national or regional “cultures” of politicoterritorially defined nation-states (see Malkki 1995). Instead, the space of each locality is a “social space” that is always “actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed” (Certeau 1984, 117) by institutional and individual actors who provide specific meanings and boundaries to the space (Appadurai 1995; Gupta and Ferguson 1997). My discussions of racialized belonging locate “social spaces” for transmigrants under differing circumstances shaped by particular political economic conditions at specific historical moments. The aim of this book is, therefore, neither to uncover the “true” or “core” identity of Okinawan-Bolivians living in Colonia Okinawa and Yokohama nor to highlight “cultural clashes” Okinawan-Bolivians presumably experienced by encountering (monolithic) Bolivian or Japanese culture, but instead to elucidate the ways in which their subject positions have been defined within locally specific socioeconomic and cultural contexts of Colonia Okinawa and Yokohama in particular and of Bolivia and Japan in general, which have changed dramatically during the fifty years of the Colonia Okinawan community’s existence.

THEORIZING RACE, CLASS, AND CULTURE IN A TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXT

In examining the racialized belongings of Okinawan-Bolivians in a transnational context, I rely on two key concepts in recent sociological and anthropological studies: racialization and citizenship. Racialization is defined here as a social process by which certain bodily features or assumed biological characteristics of a particular group come to represent the group members’ inherent psychological, behavioral, and/or moral characteristics (Cornell and Hartmann 1998, 33; Miles 1989), while citizenship is conceptualized as a social process of self-cultivation and being-cultivated, the Foucauldian process of “subject-making,” within the web of socioeconomic and cultural powers of state and capital (Ong 1996).

Racialization of Culture and Class

After reviewing anthropological studies of Brazilian and Peruvian Nikkei-jin living in Japan (Lesser 2003; Linger 2001; Roth 2002; Tsuda 2003), I was struck by the fact that none of them addressed race as a key analytical concept in understanding the Nikkei-jin’s socioeconomic marginalization in Japan, although their situations frequently reminded me of the experiences that many other
racialized immigrants from developing economies face in Europe or North America. These studies, such as Takeyuki Tsuda’s ethnography, tended to argue that the immigrants’ predicament was mainly due to the “cultural” exclusiveness of Japanese society, which alienates the Latin American Nikkei-jin, who may be “racial” insiders (by sharing the ancestral origin and physical characteristics) but nonetheless are “cultural” outsiders (Tsuda 2003, 131–135).

The conspicuous absence of the race concept in these studies reflects a more general tendency among anthropologists. Anthropologists have been reluctant to engage the race concept in their analyses of societies where there are no obvious phenotypic differences—according to criteria set by the eugenicist “race sciences” a century ago—even though anthropologists have adamanty argued that race is a sociocultural, not a biological, category. By having defined race as “what culture is not” (Visweswaran 1998, 72), anthropologists have been largely disengaged from what Etienne Balibar called “new racism,” an absolutionist discourse that relies on the notion of essentialized and naturalized culture in which culture “can also function like a nature” (Balibar 1991, 22, emphasis original). This new discourse of race and culture aligns race “closely with the idea of national belonging and . . . stressed complex cultural difference rather than simple biological hierarchy” (Gilroy 1993, 10). Culturalist racism, or what Paul Gilroy calls “ethnic absolutism,” is a phenomenon certainly not limited to Western Europe. Anthropologist Takezawa Yasuko, for instance, refers to the governor of the Tokyo Metropolitan Area, who stated in 2001 that several violent crimes committed by Chinese residents in Tokyo in recent years were indications of “the ethno-national (minzoku-teki) DNA” of the Chinese (Takezawa 2005, 10, 82). Given these emergent discourses of naturalized cultural differences, I do not wish to debate in this book whether or not Okinawan-Bolivians are a racially (i.e., quasi-scientifically) distinct group apart from non-Nikkei Bolivians or native-born Japanese, or to determine whether they underwent either “cultural” or “racial” transformations in Colonia Okinawa and Yokohama; instead, I conceptualize Okinawan-Bolivians’ shifting subject positioning in Bolivia and Japan as processes of “racialization” (Miles 1989), by which individual Okinawan-Bolivians came to be viewed and to view themselves as part of a “naturally” collective entity through narratives and practices of cultural absolutism by themselves and their Others in both locations.

Like the naturalization of “cultures” that Okinawan-Bolivians experienced through subject positioning in Bolivia and Japan, Okinawan-Bolivians’ changing class positions in the two locations underwent a similar essentialization process. Theorists of racial “whiteness” have argued that one’s racial belonging
is akin to possession or lack of financial “property” or “wage” (C. Harris 1993; Roediger 1991; Lipsitz 1998), by envisioning race as a kind of “symbolic” capital, which, similar to cultural and social capital (e.g., prestige, social connections, knowledge, or physical skills), help shape individuals’ socioeconomic statuses (Bourdieu 1977, 1986). Although this concept of “race-as-capital” (or, more precisely, “racialized category—as—symbolic capital”) originally derived from historical examinations of European immigrants’ experiences in the United States, more recent studies indicate that, regardless of locations and historical contexts, it is a potent tool to understand the dynamic interplay between a racialized category and a socioeconomic class within changing social, cultural, and political environments. Furthermore, by ethnographically portraying the appreciation and depreciation of race-as-capital (racialized category—as—symbolic capital) manifested by Okinawan-Bolivians’ shifting and contradictory class positions in Colonia Okinawa and Yokohama, this study attempts to theorize the race-class nexus in a transnational context, where the local definitions and stratifications of races and classes in a particular society and the global politicoeconomic hierarchy within the capitalist world system (Wallerstein 1974) intersect.

Body as a Surface and Vehicle of Racialization

Where, then, should I observe and analyze the processes of cultural and class racialization of Okinawan-Bolivians in Colonia Okinawa and Yokohama? Following Michel Foucault’s propositions on the discursive production of sexual bodies (Foucault 1978), David Palumbo-Liu suggests that the discursively constructed human body functions as “a site of enormous symbolic work and symbolic production” and creates a “slippage” between multiple social categories, such as race, culture, and class (Palumbo-Liu 2001, 82; see also Omi and Winant 1994). I similarly envision human bodies not as “ahistorical, precultural, or natural objects” but as materials for “corporal inscription,” upon which cultural and class differences are “inscribed, marked, engraved” by various societal discourses (Grosz 1994, 53). Colonial discourses, for instance, relentlessly highlighted a certain bodily feature of the colonized people that appeared different from that of the colonizers as “a sign of inferiority or degeneracy...[and of the] natural ‘identity’” of the colonized. In so doing, the colonial discourses turned cultural and racial differences between the two groups into “common knowledge’ in a range of cultural, political and historical discourses” (Bhabha 1994, 78, 80, emphasis original).
At the same time, human bodies are “vehicles” for individual subjects to perform these differences in their daily lives (Butler 1990; O’Connell 1999), and these daily performances “actively produce the body as a body of determinate type” (Grosz 1994, x). Individuals’ performative practices could transgress, subvert, or legitimate the socially constructed and corporally inscribed social categories to which they belong as they cultivate, in the Foucauldian sense, their bodies into a representation of a certain social identity through the “stylized repetition of acts” they consciously or unconsciously perform in daily lives (Butler 1990, 140). From this perspective, an individual neither turns from a blank “subject’ before the constitution of a subject” into someone inscribed with a particular social identity, nor is he or she merely a “puppet of sociocultural processes” (O’Connell 1999, 65). Instead, an individual is always and already becoming a socially defined subject through everyday performances.12

By refusing to presume the existence of “raw” (blank, natural, or abstract) bodies before their social constitutions, two forms of racialization of Okinawan-Bolivians, as “Japanese” farm owners in Colonia Okinawa and as South American Nikkei-jin laborers in Yokohama, are conceptualized here as processes in which societal influences inscribed and naturalized certain cultural and class identities upon their bodies (physiques and behaviors), while individual Okinawan-Bolivians conformed to or resisted these categories through daily practices.

Racialized Belonging in Transnational Context

Examining Okinawan-Bolivians’ experiences in Bolivia and Japan provides an opportunity to pursue, as Takezawa (2005) and Kenan Malik (1996) encourage us to do, an integral, not merely comparative, theorization of the various processes of cultural and class racialization in a transnational-local nexus.13 Taking a cue from Bonnie Urciuoli, who has argued that racialized individuals are often “typified as human matter out of place” (Urciuoli 1996, 15, emphasis added), I argue that racialization, a social process that produces a human body as a “natural” manifestation of his or her culture and class, is also a process that turns an individual into “human matter [in or] out of place” in society, depending on his or her relationships with the powers of state and capital.

To address these varying degrees and forms of belonging in society, various scholars have redefined the concept of “citizenship” not merely as a legal relationship between an individual and a state, but also as “a more total relationship, inflected by identity, social positioning, cultural assumptions,
institutional practices and a sense of belonging” (Werbner and Yuval-Davis 1999, 4). Even within a nation-state, then, the population is divided along the “impassable symbolic boundaries” between those who truly belong and those who do not, and individual citizens’ “belongingness and otherness” are constantly marked, fixed, and naturalized through a “typically binary system of representation” (Hall 1996, 445). From this viewpoint, even a legal citizen of a state may remain excluded from “universal citizen” status in a nation-state (Glenn 2002, 20–21) if he or she continues to be “located outside the cultural and racial boundaries of the nation” (Lowe 1996, 10).

In my study, I take a slightly different tack on citizenship from these theorizations because I believe that individuals do not always desire “universal” (legal, economic, social, and cultural) belonging to a singular nation-state; some, including certain groups of transmigrants, may instead pursue flexibility in their national belonging (Ong 1999). Furthermore, the symbolic boundary making operates not only in the “system of representation,” but also in what Michael Herzfeld calls “etiquette,” a formalized and formalizing behavior in everyday life that distinguishes those who belong within the boundary from those who do not (Herzfeld 1996, 47–48, cited in Hartigan 1999, 291). I envision citizenship, therefore, as a two-way negotiation between individuals and their surroundings, or what Aihwa Ong calls a “dual process” of “subject-making and being-made,” which defines their particular modes and degrees of belonging in a local society through formalizing and formalized everyday practices (Ong 1996, 737–738).

Okinawan-Bolivians’ changing and often contradictory subject positions and their different modes of belonging in the places they live are outcomes of this dual process of citizenship. The cultural and class racializations that Okinawan-Bolivians underwent in Colonia Okinawa and Yokohama were, then, at the same time processes shaping both the forms and degrees of their belonging in each local society in which they lived. These simultaneous processes of racialization and citizenship, or racialized belonging, are what Okinawan-Bolivians experienced within a transnational social field that spans rural Bolivia and urban Japan. Through ethnographic portraits of Okinawan-Bolivians at their workplaces, in educational institutions, and within family relationships, this study will demonstrate how their culture and class positions were racialized through the discursive constructions and daily performances of themselves and their Others in each of the places they lived and how they, in turn, shaped and expressed the forms and degrees of their belonging in these places.
FIELDWORK SITES: COLONIA OKINAWA AND TSURUMI, YOKOHAMA

My exploration of the racialized belonging of Okinawan-Bolivians required a mobile and multisited ethnographic approach to provide insight into the situational, complex, and shifting meanings of racialized national and regional identities, such as Japaneseness, Bolivianness, and Okinawanness. Like many anthropologists, I had to fulfill different roles required of me and to act in accordance with preexisting norms in each site of my fieldwork. I also needed to negotiate multiple dimensions of my own social identities, as a Japanese Nai-chi-jin, a student researcher, a Japanese citizen living overseas, and a United States resident, in my interactions with community members and interviewees (Kondo 1986; Lutz 1988; Tsuda 2003). Below, I outline the contexts of my fieldwork in Colonia Okinawa and Yokohama, where I conducted most of the research for this book.

Colonia Okinawa

Colonia Okinawa (Okinawa Ijūchi, literally “Okinawa immigrants’ land”), an agricultural settlement founded by Okinawan settlers from the Ryūkyū Islands of southwest Japan, is a small rural village located 30 miles northeast of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, the capital of Santa Cruz Prefecture (Departamento de Santa Cruz), and 15 miles east of Montero, a small hub on the trans-Bolivian highway. Santa Cruz is the largest among the nine prefectures of Bolivia and constitutes approximately 34 percent of the land of the entire nation. A large portion of Santa Cruz Prefecture belongs to the eastern lowland, or llano, that shares its borders with Brazil and Paraguay. Unlike the Andean highland in western Bolivia, or altiplano, Santa Cruz Prefecture is known for its mild tropical climate, with an annual average temperature of 24°C to 26°C (75°F to 79°F), with distinct rainy seasons (November to April) and dry seasons (May to October). As the capital city of the agricultural- and oil-rich prefecture, Santa Cruz de la Sierra has recently become the largest city in Bolivia, with a population of more than one million, replacing La Paz as the country’s demographic and economic center.

Seventeen groups of Okinawan immigrants arrived in this location between 1954 and 1963 as agricultural settlers, and more than 1,500 people have moved into its three subdistricts: the oldest and most populous, Colonia Uno, and smaller and newer Colonia Dos and Colonia Trés. The vast majority of these settlers, however, soon left the Colonia for Santa Cruz de la Sierra, São Paulo, or Buenos Aires, or returned to Okinawa in the 1960s and 1970s. Around
2000, some eight hundred Colonia residents were members of Okinawa Nihon Boribia Kyōkai, or Nichibo Kyōkai, the self-governing organization for the Okinawan-Bolivians in the village. The majority of Nichibo Kyōkai members were Issei Okinawan settlers and their children, but there were a small number of Naichi-jin Japanese from the major four islands of Japan, who had settled in Colonia Okinawa since the 1970s through Japanese government-sponsored settlement programs.
Although the vast majority of Okinawan-Bolivians were cattle ranchers and farm owners whose main products were soybeans, wheat, and sunflowers, there were a small number of wage earners, such as administrative and technical staff at Nichibo Kyōkai and the Okinawan-Bolivians’ farming cooperative, Cooperativa Agropecuaria Integral Colonias Okinawa (CAICO), Japanese language teachers at the community’s schools, and nurses and clerical staff at the hospitals. The Okinawan population in the Colonia encompassed multiple generations: Issei, many of whom were in their sixties and seventies, younger Issei, who were born in Okinawa but migrated to Bolivia with their Issei parents when they were children, and the Colonia-born second-generation, Nisei, and the third-generation, or Sansei, most of whom were still school-age children. The Okinawan-Bolivians in Colonia Okinawa were among approximately 13,000 Nikkei Bolivians, the fourth largest ethnic Japanese population among Latin American countries. The two major centers of Japanese Bolivian population are Riberalta of Bení Prefecture and its surrounding areas and Santa Cruz Prefecture, particularly Santa Cruz de la Sierra and the two Colonias, Colonia Okinawa and Colonia San Juan de Yapacaní. While I recognize the importance of other ethnic Okinawan and Japanese communities, especially in the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, where there is a sizable population of Nikkei, including Okinawan-Bolivians, I did not include Santa Cruz de la Sierra extensively in my field research. It was not logistically feasible for my research to cover the experiences of both rural and urban Okinawan-Bolivians, not to mention their very different socioeconomic situations and labor relations, in a sufficiently ethnographic manner.

Between December 1997 and May 2001, I conducted field research in Colonia Okinawa for approximately fourteen months, though the majority of my research took place from July 2000 to May 2001. From my previous research trips, I realized that I would not be able to interact closely with Okinawan-Bolivians without having a certain official position in the community. Moreover, because the Okinawan-Bolivians’ residences were spread throughout the Colonia and I did not have a car, it was difficult to get acquainted with people simply by living in one part of the community. My solution was to agree to a request from Nichibo Kyōkai to become a Japanese-language teacher at the community’s elementary-middle school, a typical assignment for an outsider from Japan (see Chapter 4). I taught Japanese language classes at two schools in the Colonia and taught English to Okinawan-Bolivian middle- and high-school students during their school break. As a staff member at the school, a key community institution of Colonia Okinawa, I was able not only to participate in
numerous formal and informal social gatherings, but also to create and develop connections with the students’ parents and grandparents. I attended weddings, a funeral, and numerous informal gatherings at private homes. I was at the schools’ inauguration and graduation ceremonies, field trips, and welcome and farewell parties for other volunteer Japanese teachers. I participated in local festivals and events such as the Harvest Festival (hōnen-sai), the Colonia Okinawa Track Meet (undō-kai), Respect for Elders Day (keirō no hi), New Year’s Day, Mother’s Day, and Father’s Day.

Through these occasions, I came to know many, though not all, Okinawan-Bolivians, especially those who had school-age children. Although I identified myself as a graduate student at a United States university conducting field research for my doctoral dissertation, they viewed me primarily as a schoolteacher, which distinguished me from the community’s stereotype of an academic researcher as an intruder who stays in the Colonia only for a short period of time and demands their cooperation. I also joined a sanshin club, a group that gets together once a week to play sanshin, a traditional Okinawan string musical instrument, through which I befriended elderly Issei club members. I also regularly spent time at the Methodist Church kindergarten for Okinawan-Bolivian children and attended services at the Methodist Church, where I befriended several elderly Issei who were regulars at church functions. Although I managed to find housing for myself in Colonia Uno for most of the research, I also lived with an Okinawan-Bolivian family for about three months. During that period, I frequently went to the family’s farmland with the father of the family and dined, chatted, watched TV, and sometimes played board games with other members of the family.

During the course of my research, I conducted approximately eighty formal interviews with Issei, Nisei Okinawan-Bolivians, and Naichi-jin Japanese settlers and non-Nikkei Bolivians. The formal interviews, lasting an average of two hours, were normally conducted at the interviewees’ homes. The individuals selected for formal interviews were mostly those who had returned from dekasegi in Japan, but I also conducted a number of interviews with elderly Issei, whose children had migrated to Japan. While the interviewees had diverse backgrounds in terms of age, generation, gender, and other social identities, I reiterate that the goal of my research was not to delineate generalized patterns found among the interviewees’ answers. I instead explored how my interviewees invested meanings in and interpreted Japanese-ness, Okinawan-ness, and Bolivianness at specific sites and at specific moments, because these categories, like any axes of identity, are contested and shifting “open signifiers”
(Louie 2004, 21) that become relevant only through individuals’ narrations and actions.

Meanwhile, as an embodied “Japanese” subject, I faced more obstacles in socializing and conducting interviews with non-Nikkei Bolivians in the Colonia. As will be revealed in the following chapters, the social divide between Okinawan-Bolivians and non-Nikkei Bolivians was deep, and for a Japanese national, it was difficult to transgress social boundaries and establish close relationships with non-Nikkei Bolivians because they were suspicious of or utterly disinterested in Japanese outsiders. I managed to conduct several interviews with parents of non-Nikkei Bolivian students of the community school at their homes and had numerous casual conversations with those non-Nikkei Bolivian laborers and domestic workers who worked for Okinawan-Bolivians, but as they saw me as a friend of their employers, I often sensed their reluctance to be frank with me.

The different forms and degrees of interactions I had with various subgroups in the community remind us, as feminist and “halfie” anthropologists have pointed out, that anthropologists cannot simply discard or change their social identities in the field and that these identities are always defined in relation to their research subjects within the larger power dynamics in society (Behar 1995; Kondo 1986, 1990; Narayan 1993). My social identities, which manifested in my name, speech, and general demeanor during interviews and other forms of interactions, were also invested with certain significances by the individuals I encountered, regardless of my intention as an ethnographer. For instance, I believe that my embodied Japaneseness influenced, to varying degrees and in different ways, my interactions with Okinawan-Bolivian interviewees. On the one hand, as one’s connection to Japan—perceived or real—served as valuable symbolic capital within the Okinawan-Bolivian community, my interviewees might have been tempted, if not compelled, to be overzealous in exhibiting their “Japanese” identity in front of me, a Naichi-jin Japanese; on the other hand, as longtime residents of Bolivia facing a Japanese student researcher, they eagerly shared their “native” knowledge of Bolivian society with me.22

My age, gender, and occupation as a young (late twenties) male graduate student with an urban, middle-class background as well as my residence in the United States also factored into my research and general interactions with Okinawan-Bolivians. Most significantly, the fact that Yokohama is my hometown facilitated my conversations with Issei and Nisei; all Okinawan-Bolivian interviewees asked me, at one point or another, where I was originally from, and once they found out that I used to live where their children, relatives,
friends, and/or themselves had lived, they became more eager to talk about the topic of *dekasegi* in general. My background as a doctoral student, in contrast, had a more ambiguous impact. It sometimes appeared to stir respect and/or a feeling of inferiority among some interviewees, as few Okinawan-Bolivians had postgraduate education; other times, it incited playful ridicule from them, for I was “still a student” in my late twenties, without a “real job” and “real income” (one Nichibo Kyōkai staff member asked me, with mocking seriousness, if I would like to come back and work for the organization after I finished graduate school, as he predicted that I would fail to find a decent job). Some female interviewees I tried to contact were hesitant to meet me at their homes for an interview, citing their numerous household chores and the absence of their husbands during the day. Many nevertheless were comfortable speaking in “standard” Japanese and were willing to speak about school affairs, about which they were well informed. Consequently, while it was true that in the Okinawan-Bolivian community, as anthropologist Takeyuki Tsuda discovered in his field research in Japanese factories, male researchers often have more difficulty accessing female informants than women do with male informants (2003, 22–23), the Okinawan-Bolivian women’s familiarity with the Japanese language and my role as a teacher at their children’s school—considered a “female” domain in the community—helped me to establish a rapport with many Issei and Nisei women over the period.23 The interplay of these preexisting social categories and roles in the community and my personal background presented advantages and disadvantages for my fieldwork, reminding me that, as Andrea Louie writes, I was “a subject of my own research, if only in the ways that others perceived and interacted with me” (2004, 9), whether I was willing or not.

The majority of my interviews with Okinawan-Bolivian and Naichi-jin residents in the Colonia were conducted in “standard” Japanese rather than the Okinawan language (Uchināguchi) or Spanish, while the interviews with non-Nikkei local Bolivians were conducted in Spanish.24 Overall, Issei were most comfortable in communicating in Uchināguchi and were very competent in Japanese but were not fluent in Spanish (Anbo et al. 1998, 246). My request for interviews was occasionally turned down by Issei, who cited their discomfort in communicating in “standard” Japanese, as I could not speak to them fluently in Uchināguchi. Nevertheless, a vast majority of Issei and Nisei women had no problem communicating in “standard” Japanese, and they spoke far more comfortably in “standard” Japanese than in Spanish. Meanwhile, some of the interviews with Nisei, many of whom were more comfortable with Spanish
than with either Japanese or Okinawan, were conducted in both Spanish and Japanese. Some Nisei, particularly men, were clearly not very comfortable speaking in Japanese, even though few seemed to have difficulty understanding me when I spoke Japanese. As a result, our conversations mixed Spanish and Japanese.25

Finally, my study involved archival research at the Nichibo Kyōkai headquarters. For three months, I worked for the association part time, cleaning and organizing the old documents in storage. In exchange for this service, I was allowed access to the official and unofficial documents in the archive, including the existing records of the Colonia’s population changes over the past two decades. Because of the poor preservation and organization of the documents, I was unable to conduct my archival research in a systematic manner. The information I obtained through archival research was, therefore, at best fragmented, although some of the documents, such as the copies of the association’s community notices and transcripts of board meetings, compensated for my lack of access to the formal board meetings at Nichibo Kyōkai.

_Tsurumi, Yokohama_

In 1998, the number of Bolivian nationals in Japan was reported to be 3,461 by the Japanese government, but with those who have dual citizenship added, the population was estimated to be closer to 4,000 (Ikuno 2000, 294). Most Okinawan-Bolivians migrated to Kanagawa Prefecture or, more specifically, to the cities of Hiratsuka, Atsugi, Yokohama, and Kawasaki. The Tsurumi Ward of Yokohama became a major destination for _dekasegi_ migrants from Colonia Okinawa, especially the Nakadōri and Ushioda neighborhoods. Although the total Okinawan-Bolivian population has never been recorded, one researcher counted twenty-one businesses in Tsurumi that were owned by Okinawan-Bolivians from Colonia Okinawa, and at least 102 Okinawan-Bolivians lived in the district in 1994 (Tsujimoto 1998c, 320, 326).

I conducted my fieldwork in Yokohama from June to October 2000. Unlike in Colonia Okinawa, the Okinawan-Bolivian community in Yokohama, as in other Japanese cities, was neither geographically confined nor tightly knit. There was little daily contact and few community events that drew a large number of Okinawan-Bolivians. Instead, most socialization took place spontaneously and privately among families, relatives, and personal friends. I made several attempts to contact Okinawan-Bolivian _dekasegi_ migrants in the area to conduct interviews, but as they were preoccupied with work and family affairs,
I was able to conduct only a few formal interviews and had difficulty creating and expanding networks for my research. In addition, a formal organization among Okinawan-Bolivians in Tsurumi, Boribia Shinboku-kai, or the Bolivia Friendship Association, was defunct by the time I went to Japan.

I conducted much of my research, consequently, at workplaces and through an informal social network. In addition to frequenting the Okinawan-Bolivian–owned restaurants in Tsurumi, where I often encountered, conversed, and had drinks with dekasegi migrants from Colonia Okinawa, I worked as an electrician at T Denki, a Nisei-owned electrical installation firm in Tsurumi, for three months. As one of the T Denki staff, I went to work at several construction sites in Kanagawa Prefecture and the Tokyo Metropolitan Area with Okinawan-Bolivians. I worked side by side with these T Denki electricians, who were mostly young Nisei men in their twenties, and observed their work and interactions with Japanese Naichi-jin supervisors and coworkers, and among themselves, at various sites. I chatted with them while commuting from the meeting place in Tsurumi to the day’s work site, during the breaks, and on the trip back to Tsurumi. I often spent time at the company office, which was the T Denki president’s apartment, and drank beer and chatted with them. I did not conduct any formal interviews with my coworkers, but the informal conversations with these electricians turned out to be more revealing than the formal interviews I had with other Okinawan-Bolivian dekasegi migrants in the area, for the electricians were more relaxed and willing to talk openly about their pasts, their current lives in Japan, and their future plans.

Although I told most of them about my status as a graduate student at a United States university and my intention to write my tesis (dissertation) on Colonia Okinawa and dekasegi migrants in Japan, I was not always able to make a point of informing the Japanese Naichi-jin workers at the construction sites, where opportunities for prolonged conversation were severely limited. My Okinawan-Bolivian coworkers appeared less interested in my academic background and research objectives than in my experience as a Japanese-language teacher who had lived in Colonia Okinawa for an extended period of time. Even though my background gave me partial “insider” status among them, I was primarily regarded as a “Japanese” citizen who possessed cultural and symbolic capital in the larger Japanese society. My privilege as a “Japanese”—and Naichi-jin—became apparent in certain situations. For instance, while they talked mostly in Spanish among themselves, mixed with a number of “standard” Japanese terms and phrases and a few Okinawan ones, the electricians seemed to feel compelled to switch to “standard” Japanese, which they spoke fluently,
even after they realized that I mostly understood their conversations in Spanish. They were also clearly uncomfortable reading and writing in Japanese, so they often asked me to help them read road signs while we were driving to the construction sites and to fill out the employment registration forms in Japanese at the job sites. My interactions and conversations with my coworkers were, therefore, inevitably affected by their ambivalent feelings toward me; they felt they were superior to me as more experienced and skilled technicians yet inferior to me as less privileged members of the Japanese society at large.

Other than accounts of the particular conditions in which these electricians worked, my discussion of Okinawan-Bolivians’ dekasegi experiences in Japan relies heavily on recollections by those living in Colonia Okinawa who had returned from dekasegi in Japan. Given the considerable diversity among Okinawan-Bolivians’ dekasegi experiences, resulting from their differences in location of residence, workplace, gender, generation, age, and other factors involved, I do not claim that my participant-observation at construction sites along with T Denki electricians objectively and comprehensively captures the dekasegi migrants’ work and life experiences in general. Instead, in this book I try to present a glimpse of the migrants’ everyday work and lives in urban Japan that configured their subject positions.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Chapter 1 outlines the modern history of the Okinawan diaspora in three sections: the history of Okinawan immigration to Bolivia in the prewar and postwar periods, the foundation and transformation of Colonia Okinawa in eastern Bolivia, and the factors and processes of Okinawan-Bolivians’ dekasegi migration to urban Japan since the 1980s. In rendering the history, the chapter highlights the fact that Okinawan immigration and settlement in Colonia Okinawa and dekasegi migration to Yokohama are not merely population movements driven by local and global political economies but an illuminating case of the continuing displacement and struggle of colonial and postcolonial subjects. The chapter contextualizes the prewar and postwar waves of Okinawan emigration to Bolivia within this turbulent history of Okinawa and the Okinawan diaspora and describes in detail the postwar Okinawan migration to Bolivia, which was planned and sponsored by the United States military administration and the United States–backed Okinawan government during the occupation. From the 1950s to the 1980s, Okinawan settlers in Colonia Okinawa increasingly defined themselves as “Japanese,” rather than “Okinawan,” subjects, vis-à-
vis non-Nikkei “Bolivians,” as they asserted themselves as powerful upper-class *patrones* (large-scale farm owners). The chapter ends with a discussion of various contributing factors to the *deka* *se* *gi* migration since the 1980s, despite the Okinawan-Bolivians’ privileged class position in Colonia Okinawa, against the backdrop of changing socioeconomic conditions surrounding Colonia Okinawa, Bolivia in general, and Japan.

Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 provide ethnographic evidence to illustrate the processes of racialized belonging in key “critical sites” (Cornell and Hartmann 1998, 153): the workplace, educational institutions, and family and gender relationships. Chapters 2 and 3 contrast the class positions that Okinawan-Bolivians occupied in Colonia Okinawa with their positions in Yokohama and depict the ways in which their different class positions manifested in their interactions (or, in certain situations, lack thereof) with their local Others—such as non-Nikkei Bolivian laborers and native-born Japanese Naichi-jin coworkers and supervisors—at their respective workplaces. The ethnographic descriptions of and narratives provided by Okinawan-Bolivian farm owners in Colonia Okinawa and *deka* *se* *gi* migrant workers at construction sites in Yokohama not only exhibit the privileges that Okinawan-Bolivians enjoyed in rural Bolivia and the struggles they faced in urban Japan, but also show how both the Okinawan-Bolivians and their Others symbolically linked their class positions with their purportedly innate cultural (“Japanese,” “Bolivian/Latin American,” or “Okinawan”) characteristics. As a result, Okinawan-Bolivians’ class positions vis-à-vis their Others were primarily interpreted not as products of global and local political economies but as “natural” expressions of their different “cultural” backgrounds.

Chapter 4 focuses on educational institutions that actively sought to foster Okinawan-Bolivians as culturally hybrid subjects by infusing them with objectified and naturalized cultures. Specifically, the chapter examines Okinawan-Bolivian schools in Colonia Okinawa, where most Nisei and Sansei children received Japanese language education and learned about the Japanese and Okinawan cultures. In portraying the various school events in Colonia Okinawa, such as the school track meet and Japanese-language speech contest, the chapter demonstrates the ways in which these educational institutions enabled, even encouraged, Okinawan-Bolivian youth to form, nurture, and embody their identities through the terms and images of essentialized and naturalized (Japanese, Okinawan, and Bolivian) cultures. These educational institutions in effect shaped Okinawan-Bolivian youth into transnational subjects who have developed an ambiguous sense of belonging in either Bolivia or Japan.
In Chapter 5, my discussion turns to gender and family relationships among Okinawan-Bolivians, which often underwent drastic transformations during their migrations between Colonia Okinawa and urban Japan. The gender relationships among Okinawan-Bolivians were defined and practiced in the public, communal, and domestic spheres of the Okinawan-Bolivian community in Colonia Okinawa through subtly yet strictly defined male and female gender roles and codes of behaviors at workplaces, in community functions, and in homes. The gender division was further complicated by sociospatial segregation of Okinawan-Bolivians and non-Nikkei Bolivian men and women coexisting in these settings. Once Okinawan-Bolivians moved to a Japanese city, such as Yokohama, the gender divergence among Okinawan-Bolivians was often challenged by the radically different economic and social responsibilities assigned to the migrants in these urban settings, where both men and women worked as manual laborers and often earned a comparable amount of income. The chapter also sheds light on intermarriages between Okinawan-Bolivians and non-Nikkei Bolivians, and between Okinawan-Bolivians and Japanese Naichi-jin. These couples not only faced changing gender roles and codes of behavior in Colonia Okinawa and urban Japan, but also coped with highly racialized and sexualized stereotypes of “Bolivians” held by other Okinawan-Bolivians and of “South Americans” (and, to a lesser extent, “Okinawans”) held by Japanese Naichi-jin in-laws. Their stories reveal how Okinawan-Bolivians’ subject positions were profoundly mediated by the different gendered norms in Colonia Okinawa and urban Japan.

In my conclusion I draw together the data on Okinawan-Bolivians’ contradictory subject positions in Bolivia and Japan in order to theorize the meaning of racialization in a transnational context. The various subject-making of Okinawan-Bolivians—as “Japanese” farm owners in Colonia Okinawa and as “South American” manual laborers in Yokohama, as “good Bolivians of Japanese descent” in educational institutions in Bolivia, and as part of an “Okinawan” diasporic brotherhood and sisterhood across the globe—exemplify a social process of citizenship, conferring individuals with different degrees and modes of belonging in the respective locales. This study reiterates that, in studying and theorizing race, class, and culture in the globally interconnected world today, we can use anthropological techniques to discern the ways in which political, economic, and social institutions and everyday practices of individuals together shape and reshape the meanings and expressions of these concepts.

The quotations from the subjects in this book are from formal interviews,
informal conversations in which I was involved, or observations recorded in my fieldnotes. Throughout the book, the names of individuals are pseudonyms, although the names of official organizations, such as schools and state institutions, are not. Although many individuals I quote or portray will be well known to other members of the community in Colonia Okinawa and Tsurumi, I have tried to conceal their identities as far as possible. Where quotes were originally spoken in Japanese, Spanish, or both, I italicize the words uttered in a language different from that of the rest of the quote. For Japanese names, I maintain the typical order of family name first, given name second (e.g., “Suzuki Taku” instead of “Taku Suzuki”), while for Spanish and English names, I employ given name first, family name second to minimize alteration of actual enunciations.