

## Chapter 1

### The Politics of Categories in Migration

*My name is asylum*  
I was born in here  
Here is the detention centre

—Angel Boujbiha<sup>1</sup>

#### *Introduction*

The current debates on the boundary of the state demonstrate that the boundary does not simply draw a line to demarcate the territorial edges of the state but has become diffused in terms of its locations and practices. However, the debates have yet to effectively address what exactly the ‘boundary’ is. What is the image of the boundary if it can no longer be imagined as a line? The lack of an investigation of the image of the boundary leaves the extant debates unresponsive to their own reliance on the image of the boundary-as-a-line. The purpose of the thesis is to make an intervention in the current debates by offering an effective way to address the tenacity of the boundary-as-a-line image in reading the complexity of bordering practices. One way to do so is to take the lined image of the boundary as a starting point to pay ‘far greater attention to what goes on at the boundaries’.<sup>2</sup> The thesis focuses on the process of producing categories as one activity of what boundaries do: to draw a line is to classify people into groups and divide them.

---

<sup>1</sup> The title of the poem is ‘My Name is Asylum’. The full poem is available at the website of Refugee Action Committee at <http://www.refugeeaction.org/rac/poem.htm#top>. Emphasis mine.

<sup>2</sup> Walker, *After the Globe, Before the World* (Oxon: Routledge) p.3.

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

Therefore, by examining categories, it might be possible to investigate closely ‘what goes on’ at the boundaries when bordering is not equivalent to dividing practices any more. If the focus on categories was to be a productive approach, this investigation might then be able to suggest what sorts of images of the boundary the current debates point to.

Following this overall logic of the thesis, chapters 1 and 2 discuss the political significance of categories. They serve to explain how the debates on the boundary can be understood from the angle of category-vocabularies. The thesis is taking a unique approach by bringing the perspective of categories into the analysis of the boundary. Therefore, it is necessary to clear the decks, so to speak, to elucidate my take on category-vocabularies before examining the validity of this approach in the subsequent chapters. For this purpose, the present chapter attempts to address the role of category-vocabularies, including the approach to these vocabularies and the specific aspects of using these categories in relation to migrant activism in Japan. Addressing these questions prepares the ground for analysis where the significance of categories will be used as a focal point of investigation.

The task of the present chapter is interwoven with another important role that it is also designed to play: it addresses the general situation of migration in Japan. The thesis not only engages with academic texts but also draws examples from migrant worker activism in Japan. Using both theory and empirical examples, to draw a crude boundary between theory and practice, reflects the process through which the thesis shaped its focus and developed the arguments. The analysis of the boundary could not have been

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

done without relying on both. However, as the Introduction to the thesis shows, my intention tends far more towards making a theoretical contribution to the debates on boundary and community than enriching the understanding of immigration in Japan. The thesis is primarily, though not exclusively, addressed to an audience interested in the idea of boundary and community. In this respect, it is imperative to acknowledge that the theoretical arguments of the thesis partially stem from the specific contexts of migrant activism in Japan.<sup>3</sup> Since, following Robert Cox, theory is always for someone and for some purposes and, thus, it always derives from specific contexts, providing some background information on migration in Japan is necessary to contextualise the overall theoretical arguments that the thesis intends to put forward.<sup>4</sup> As such, the present chapter also discusses immigration in Japan.

The chapter is structured around the following three questions: what does taxonomic language do? How does the thesis use category-vocabularies for the analysis of the boundary? Are there any specific aspects brought in by looking at category-vocabularies in the context of activism in Japan? In addressing each of these questions, I will argue the following three points in particular. Firstly, although the role of categories will be further elaborated in the subsequent chapters, the preliminary observation will be made in this chapter that categories play a crucial role for the state to identify people and

---

<sup>3</sup> Needless to say, it also partially derives from the academic texts which it engages in. Incorporating the contexts in which these academic texts were written is beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>4</sup> Cox, Robert. (1981) 'Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory', *Millennium Journal of International Studies*, Vol.10, No.2, pp.126-155.

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

make them visible. In order to offer this elementary observation, the chapter turns to selected academic texts which discuss, albeit from different angles and with varying degrees, the implications of what classification does to the state. These texts are limited in number and selected in a fairly arbitrary manner because they do not share the same disciplinary backgrounds. However, read together with the examples of how categories are used elsewhere, they offer a productive entry point in understanding the cardinal function of categories: they identify people by names and make their existence readable to the state.

Secondly, the thesis investigates the ways in which the participants of migrant activism engage in category-vocabularies. Doing so, the thesis uses category-vocabularies not simply as an analytical framework per se, but as a site of investigation itself. Drawing on Homi Bhabha's idea of the pedagogical and the performative, I will argue that the thesis examines the politics of categories: how people engage in the parts played by category-vocabularies in managing people on the move.

Lastly, the chapter will provide the preliminary observation I made of migrant activism in Japan. This observation points toward two important aspects of category-vocabularies. Firstly, the categories of citizen and foreigner were extensively used by the participants in activities for migrant workers. Secondly, these categories were extensively used in a contradictory manner. Although these points will be discussed in greater depth in chapters 3 onwards, the present chapter will explain how these preliminary observations shaped the overall direction of the thesis.

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

### *Category-Vocabularies as the State Language*

In recent years, a growing academic and policy literature has emerged to acknowledge that the movement of people is not as straightforward as it was believed to be. The people involved cannot be neatly classified into categories such as immigrant, refugee and ‘illegal’ migrant. The following story of a Burmese person living in Japan illuminates the complexity of movement across borders:

I am a member of a minority group in Burma. When I was a university student in 1988, I participated in student movements which were taking place on a nation-wide scale. In September the same year, the military began to arrest some leaders of the movements, and my friends and I also faced the danger [of arrest]. In 1990, I sought asylum in Japan, entering there with a tourist visa. The visa expiry date approached, but the situation in Burma did not change, so I could not go back there. I met other Burmese through the church I attended in Japan. We exchanged information about living situations and jobs in Japan, and I lived there quietly.

In 2003, I began to think that I needed to disseminate information about the situation in Burma because my country’s situation had not changed. I realised that nothing would change in Burma until [Burmese] citizens raise their voices and appeal to the international society. That year, I began to learn about the refugee application procedures in Japan, and

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

started preparing for applying for refugee status. In 2004, my husband was detained in an immigration centre for the lack of a valid visa status. The situation in Burma remained the same and we could not go back, so my husband and I applied for refugee status. In 2007, I received a special permission to reside. During this time, I had a baby, and now I am living in Tokyo with my husband and our child.<sup>5</sup>

What should we call this person? Was she a ‘tourist’? She was a tourist *on paper*, because she entered Japan with a temporary visitor status. The Temporary Visitor’s visa is only valid for 90 days. In other words, for a good part of the 20 years she stayed in Japan, she was without visa status, which effectively made her ‘illegal’. Despite her lack of status, she worked, which also made it possible for her to be classified as an immigrant or migrant worker. However, she came to Japan not for economic but *political* reasons, suggesting that she was not an immigrant but a refugee. She left Burma because she felt that her security was about to be jeopardised due to her political activities. She was seeking political asylum in Japan. When she finally decided to apply for refugee status, almost 15 years had passed since she had first arrived in Japan.<sup>6</sup> Once she applied for refugee status, she became an asylum seeker, someone waiting for the result of a refugee application. The legal status she finally obtained in 2007 was special permission to stay. This status means that, although she was allowed to stay

---

<sup>5</sup> My translation. Japan Association for Refugees. (eds.) (2010) *Gaikokujin wo meguru Seikatsu to Iryou [Living Conditions of and Medical Support System for Refugees]* (Tokyo: Gendaijnbn-sha), p.42.

<sup>6</sup> Applying for refugee status after a significant period of time is not rare.

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

in Japan for humanitarian reasons, she was *not* recognised as a refugee. Her story attests to the difficulty of categorising people under labels such as immigrant, refugee, asylum seeker and ‘illegal’ immigrant. Each category fails to accurately mirror her shifting decision about her life in taxonomic language: it fails to capture *the* moment in her life to name her and define exactly what she is. The categories are rendered obsolete because they fail to represent the complex human stories.

Interestingly, the difficulty of classifying people into groups has resulted in the creation of new categories to identify exactly what these ‘un-categorisable’ people can be called. For instance, phrases such as economic refugee, environmental refugee and IDPs have been invented because the category of refugee was considered to have some limitations. According to the 1952 United Nations Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, being a refugee is strictly the result of political upheavals. Yet, political instability is often combined with various factors such as economic volatility or/and natural disasters. Consequently, new categories such as economic refugee and environmental refugee are invented to cover up the limitation of the category of refugee. The category of refugee also exposed its inability to categorise people in the 1990s, facing a number of people who were de facto refugees but could not be categorised as such simply because they could not cross the territorial border of the state. To be classified as a refugee, one has to cross the border. Therefore, the new category, IDPs, has been introduced to address the deficiency in the category of refugee. The limitation of the category of refugee and the invention of new categories are

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

reflected in the expanding roles of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The UNHCR, originally set up to assist people categorised as refugees, has gradually expanded its mandate to respond to the needs of people who are categorised under different names, such as returnees and IDPs.<sup>7</sup> The UNHCR collectively identified the people, other than convention refugees, as ‘Persons of Concern’ (POC), which is yet another example of introduction of a new category.<sup>8</sup>

Other examples are the categories of irregular migrant and undocumented migrant.<sup>9</sup> In United Nations (UN) documents as well as among activists, these categories have become increasingly commonly used to portray people who do not have legal status and thus could be otherwise identified as being ‘illegal’.<sup>10</sup> As the movement of the *Sans Papiers* in France shows, an immigrant can be made to have or not to have status through changes in immigration law and policies. Since the category ‘illegal’ is not only misleading but, more importantly, arbitrary, new labels such as irregular migrant and undocumented migrant are used to substitute for the category of ‘illegal’ migrants.

---

<sup>7</sup> Castles, Stephen and Mark J. Miller. (2009) *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan). Emphasis mine.

<sup>8</sup> UNHCR (Tokyo Office), ‘UNHCR no Kijun ni yoru “Enjo Taishou sha” no Gainen’ [The UNHR Criteria on Persons Eligible to Receive Assistance from the UNHCR], <[http://www.unhcr.or.jp/protect/pdf/040929note\\_j.pdf](http://www.unhcr.or.jp/protect/pdf/040929note_j.pdf)> [Accessed 1 June 2011].

<sup>9</sup> ‘Irregular’ and ‘undocumented’ migrants are not synonyms. Those who opt for the phrase ‘irregular’ argue that having documents can also relegate individuals to the status of ‘irregular’ migrants. See, for example, Komai, Hiroshi. (1999) *Nihon no Gaikokujin Imin [Foreign Migrants in Japan]* (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten), pp.50-51; McNevin, Anne. (2011). *Contesting Citizenship: Irregular Migrants and New Frontiers of the Political* (New York: Columbia University Press), pp.19-20.

<sup>10</sup> The UN General Assembly recommended these phrases to be used as early as 1975.



## The Politics of Categories in Migration

Despite the acknowledgement of the problem with categories, and in some cases because of it, old categories are stubbornly used and new categories are continually being invented to represent people on the move. What does it mean that the movement of people is persistently represented through taxonomic language? Columba Peoples and Nick Vaughan-Williams refer to categorisation as a measure for the state 'to manage global flows of people'. Representing people through categories is 'a significant political activity because individuals are treated very differently according to which group they are put into'.<sup>11</sup> Bridget Anderson, Nandita Sharma and Cynthia Wright take the similar view that category-vocabularies are implicated in activities of the state because categories are always made necessary whenever one crosses the territorial boundaries of the state. As they say: 'One might move thousands of miles or only a few feet, but whether one is seen to be migrating or not ultimately rests on whether one has crossed a nationalized boundary'.<sup>12</sup>

James Scott's works can be a helpful guide to elucidate the crucial suggestion offered by these texts that classification is an essential activity of the state.<sup>13</sup> In examining how the state manages its population and territory, Scott argues that the function of the state is made possible with its obsession with legibility/readability. According to Scott, the state is obsessed with

---

<sup>11</sup> Peoples, Columba and Nick Vaughan-Williams. (2010) *Critical Security Studies: An Introduction* (Oxon: Routledge), p.135.

<sup>12</sup> Anderson, Bridget, Nandita Sharma and Cynthia Wright. (2012) "We are all foreigners": No Borders as a Practical Political Project', in Peter Nyers and Kim Rygiel. (eds.), *Citizenship, Migrant Activism and the Politics of Movement* (Oxon: Routledge), p.75.

<sup>13</sup> Scott, James C. (1988) *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press).

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

making people (and the space where they inhabit) readable to itself so that it can function effectively: 'An illegible society, then, is a hindrance to any effective intervention by the state, whether the purpose of that intervention is plunder or public welfare'.<sup>14</sup> In order to make people readable to itself, the state relies on categories to simplify otherwise complex human activities. It makes people the target of surveys, identifies the names and their family relations via the birth and marriage registration system, finds out the locations of their whereabouts and records them on maps where the space is readily readable, corrects their otherwise disorganised social behaviour through common legal and cultural practices, for instance. By neatly categorising people and their lives in this way, the state deciphers the complexity inherent to the people it governs so that it manages them better. Heterogeneous and ambiguous situations are reduced to facts and numbers through categories, which creates 'a kind of national transparency through the uniformity of codes, identities, statics, regulations, and measures'.<sup>15</sup> People are made into groups so that they can be assessed collectively; once the information is collected, it is documented in the form of aggregate facts, so that it can be a source of statistical information and a reference point.<sup>16</sup> Thus, categorisation becomes the instrumental device for the state to 'read' the population and make them observable to the state. Through categories, the population is made visible and legible to the state.

Reading together with the examples mentioned above, these texts offer

---

<sup>14</sup> Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, p.78.

<sup>15</sup> Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, p.78.

<sup>16</sup> Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, p.80.

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

a good starting point for what categories do. Categories produce nameable people by drawing sharp lines among them to define what they are in relation to the state. The lines can be drawn to identify them depending on whether they are within the domestic national realm or outside of it. The example of the category of refugee and the IDP exemplifies this. The line can also be used to define whether people are forcefully moved to other countries or not. If they are, they are categorised as refugees. If not, their movement is interpreted as voluntary, which immediately puts them in the category of (economic) migrants. The difficulty in simplifying the reasons of movement, and hence, in drawing a clear line between the voluntary and involuntary movement, is, what the then High Commissioner for Refugees Ruud Lubbers called at the UNHCR's fiftieth anniversary, 'the entanglement of migration and asylum'.<sup>17</sup> The category of undocumented and irregular migrants as opposed to that of illegal migrants exemplifies the boundary between legality and illegality.

For the state, drawing these lines is its cardinal activity. The aforementioned Burmese woman would have been otherwise nameless, until she had to find a name, a category, so that, in Scott's term, her existence becomes legible to the state. Depending on different moments in her life, her existence could have been made readable to the state with different categories including tourists, illegal immigrants, migrant workers and refugees. Each category represents her and she embodies the mixture of all these categories

---

<sup>17</sup> The statement was made at the informal meeting of the European Union Ministers for Justice and Ministers for Human Affairs in Stockholm on 8 February 2001. His full statement is available at <<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/search?page=search&docid=3bb3127310&query=global%20migration%20group>>, [Accessed 1 July 2011]. I was guided to this information by the following book: Nyers, Peter. (2006) *Rethinking Refugees: Beyond State of Emergency* (New York: Routledge).

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

as a part of the ‘category’ which is not available in the extant vocabularies, if there were any. Yet the desire to categorise her is persistent. Her otherwise nameless and un-categorisable existence, a mixture of various categories, was defined with the category of special permission to stay by the Japanese government. Resorting to the language available to the state, she was made readable to the state. That she had to acquire a name only to make herself legible to the state (so that she can live in Japan), bluntly shows that categorising is an essential activity of the state. To categorise is to draw a line so that the people are made readable to the state.

In this respect, I argue that categories are the language of the state. Category-vocabularies translate otherwise nameless people in the state language, so that their existence is intelligible to the state. The state language translates un-categorisable, and thus, incomprehensible, existence to the state into a categorisable and comprehensible one. By translating people into category-vocabularies, the state identifies who they are and how they should be treated. If the aforementioned Burmese woman was categorised as an ‘illegal’ immigrant, she would have undergone an entirely different experience with the state. The language of the state is a device for the state to name people and provide the ‘appropriate’ treatments, including detention and deportation, depending on the labels attached to each individual. As the epigram at the beginning of this chapter suggests, it is not that there are some who embody categories in migration. Instead, people are *given names*—or named through categories—which determine how they are

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

to be treated in the political community of the state.<sup>18</sup>

As the state language, categories are products of a particular image of the world where the state is regarded as the most basic unit of political community. As Walker says, the world is imagined with the boundary-as-a-line thinking.

*Modern political life has thrived on the creation of very sharp boundaries, lines that always express both limits and beginnings and work not only to distinguish and separate modern selves and states from other selves and other states, but also the world of modernity itself from all other worlds.*<sup>19</sup>

Categories are tangible manifestations of an image of the world where the line draws the boundary between the inside and outside of the state. In this image of the world, every movement has to be made readable to the state in category-vocabularies, so that the state manages to capture the flow of people. Deleuze and Guattari argue that sovereignty is about the capture and appropriation of movement of any kinds. It is 'a process of capture of flows of all kinds, populations, commodities, or commerce, money or capital'.<sup>20</sup> To identify the movement of people using specific categories is nothing but an example of the phenomenon whereby the sovereignty captures the subject

---

<sup>18</sup> Nandita Sharma probes the process in which the category, 'migrant workers', was created in Canada. Sharma, Nandita. (2006) *Home Economics: Nationalism and the Making of 'Migrant Workers' in Canada* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press).

<sup>19</sup> Walker, *After the Globe, Before the World*, p. 36. Emphasis mine.

<sup>20</sup> Deleuze, Giles and Félix Guattari. (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), p.386.

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

and appropriates its life. It apprehends movements within and beyond its reach.

In order to capture the subject, statist boundaries play the cardinal role. They attempt to make things simple: all the heterogeneity and ambiguity is rendered simplified and made intelligible to the state. This attempt is reflective of 'the state's desire to maintain a unitary political subject',<sup>21</sup> the desire to read the subject only in relation to the state through citizenship. In Balibar's terms, the borderline of the state aims to suppress the multiplicity of people which 'resists absolute unification'.<sup>22</sup> It identifies these movements with specific names, asking questions such as: is this movement a movement of refugees? Is it driven by economic desires? Is it a movement without legal permission? Depending on the answers to questions like these, people are classified into various categories and treated accordingly.

Importantly, Scott suggests that categories are not simply labels to classify people but define how people behave according to these categories. Referring to Benedict Anderson's work on how people adjust their behaviour in accordance with the design of the city, Scott argues: 'Categories that may have begun as the artificial inventions of cadastral surveyors, census takers, judges, or police officers can end *by becoming categories that organize people's daily experience precisely because they are embedded in state-created institutions that structure that experience*'.<sup>23</sup> People are neatly organised

---

<sup>21</sup> Nyers, Peter. (2010) 'Dueling Designs: The Politics of Rescuing Dual Citizens', *Citizenship Studies*, Vol.14, No.1, p.59.

<sup>22</sup> Balibar, Étienne. (2004) *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, trans. James Swenson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), p.140.

<sup>23</sup> Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, p.82-83. See also notes 89 on p.376. Emphasis mine.

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

through categories which make them visible and legible to the state. In this process, people are saturated with the artificial reference points of categories which then mould them. What Scott seems to be saying is that the border, which draws a line among people to create categories, is productive and generative.<sup>24</sup> Boundaries do not simply produce categories but generate a specific type of subject through categories. Bordering people into categories is to put people 'in new types of power relations with others' and 'impart particular kinds of subjectivities'.<sup>25</sup> Categorisation therefore is to border subjects.

Michel Foucault unravels this function of categories in bordering subjects. He does this by discussing the classifying practices in relation to visibility. In order to examine how the society is organised in relation to power, Foucault uses an example of the architectural design of panopticon developed in the late 18th century and argues that the design of the building embodies the ways in which the conduct of individuals is made a target of control and order. In the panoptic prison, the building is designed in a way that inmates are constantly watched by guards in a central tower without it ever being known whether they are actually being watched or not. Foucault argues that the architecture of panopticon is an exemplary form of sovereign power. It functions through a mechanism which 'dissociat[ing] the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central

---

<sup>24</sup> Anderson, Sharma and Wright, "We are all foreigners": No Borders as a Practical Political Project'.

<sup>25</sup> Anderson, Bridget, Nandita Sharma and Cynthia Wright. (2010) 'Editorial: Why No Borders?', *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, Vol.26, No.2, p.6.

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

tower, one sees everything without ever being seen'.<sup>26</sup>

In making things visible, society is ordered and categorised into fixed and manageable units. As he argues:

Disciplines are techniques for assuring the order of human multiplicities...[It] could reduce the inefficiency of mass phenomena: reduce what, in multiplicity, makes it much less manageable than a unity...[it] fixes; ...it clears up confusion;...it establishes calculated distributions...the disciplines use procedures of partitioning and verticality...they introduce, between the different elements at the same level, as solid separations as possible...[through] *continuous registration, perpetual assignment and classification*.<sup>27</sup>

Foucault reads categories as the mechanism of sovereign power, which produces a particular form of subject where people govern their own conducts. It is in this mechanism of sovereign power, through categorisation, that people are made visible and manageable and thus are enmeshed in a specific form of governance. Calling this governance governmentality, Foucault argues that people govern their own conducts in visibility, under the penetrating gaze of sovereignty.<sup>28</sup>

Reading Foucault in this way, I argue that categories are not simply

---

<sup>26</sup> Foucault, Michel. (1999) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin), p.202.

<sup>27</sup> Foucault quoted in Jones, Reece. (2009) 'Categories, Borders and Boundaries', *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol.33, No.2, p.177. Emphasis mine.

<sup>28</sup> Foucault, Michel. (1991) 'Governmentality', in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds.) *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: Chicago University Press).



## The Politics of Categories in Migration

names to identify people. Crucially, they are a device to create worlds, the world of governmentality for instance. This resonates with what Scott suggests when he refers to categories eventually regulating behaviour. Category-vocabularies do not merely reflect worlds where we live with names but create worlds around us. Therefore, the language of the state must be understood not simply as an analytical framework but as a site of investigation itself. Categories are not simply there, waiting to be applied to identify people. They necessarily initiate politics about themselves. People project their own views about the world onto categories as well as making worlds of their own by using categories in specific ways.

### *The Politics of Categories*

In other words, the focus on categories means applying them not simply as an analytic per se, but more crucially as a site of investigation itself. The thesis investigates how people use categories to engage in the part played by category-vocabularies in managing the mobility of people. It does this by employing the perspective of categories within the examination of the image of the boundary. Using categories in this manner, the thesis highlights the political significance of categories. It examines the politics of categories.

To put it differently, to examine the politics of categories assumes the standpoint that the language of the state is not merely imposed by the state but is a product of interaction between the imposition of the language and the performance of it. Category-vocabularies are not simply labels available in the vocabularies of the state, but also, and perhaps more crucially, what

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

people perform: people use categories and take part in the production of categories. Borrowing Homi Bhabha's phrases, the language of the state can be described as being situated between 'the pedagogical' and 'the performative'.<sup>29</sup> Bhabha argues that the nation is narrated in the sense that it does not simply produce the people to make sense of the narrative of the nation, as the 'the historical "object" of a nationalist pedagogy'.<sup>30</sup> The nation is also performed by the people who, by themselves, make sense of the national narratives and their roles in them. The people are, therefore, also the 'the "subject" of signification' which questions the seemingly straightforward connection between the nation and people and exposes the heterogeneity of people in representing the nation.<sup>31</sup> For Bhabha, the nation is written in this split between the pedagogical and the performative which obfuscates the meaning of the nation and hence, produces a space for writing the nation anew.

In the production of the nation as narration there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of *writing the nation*.<sup>32</sup>

Taking up Bhabha's idea in her reading of statecraft, Roxanne Lynn

---

<sup>29</sup> Bhabha, Homi K. (1994) *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge).

<sup>30</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.145.

<sup>31</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.145.

<sup>32</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.145-146. See also p.148.

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

Doty argues that the 'domestic', or what the 'state' is, is a mere signifier, the product of the pedagogical. Meanwhile, the performative exposes a gap between what is signified as the state and what the 'state' actually signifies.

The pedagogical refers to the given-ness of an object, the presumption of its self-evident presence and essential identity (e.g., the state, the domestic community, the inside).[...] the pedagogical is intervened in and contested by the performative (the performative aspect of language). The performative introduces a 'gap' or 'emptiness' to the signifier by casting a shadow between it and the signified.<sup>33</sup>

Investigating how people use the language of the state is to make an intervention to the categories as a mere signifier, a name to identify people. This intervention is intended to expose the gap between what is named in category-vocabularies, such as refugees and citizens, and what these categories actually signify, that is, how people use these categories. In this way, by looking at the politics of categories, the thesis intends to examine the gap between categories as mere referencing points and the ways in which people use these labels.

By examining this gap between what is signified as the state language and what it actually signifies, the thesis goes beyond the narrow scope of the state, as the political organisation, as its target of analysis. By taking the politics of categories as its focus, the thesis postulates that

---

<sup>33</sup> Doty, Roxanne Lynn. (1996) 'Double-Writing of Statecraft: Exploring State Responses to Illegal Immigration', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, p.176.

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

category-vocabularies are not merely produced by the state but used, or performed in Bhabha's term, by heterogeneous groups of people, such as international organisations, NGOs and academics, for instance. In Foucault's words, this position can be described as follows: the language of the state is not simply a mirror through which the world is reflected upon; it also generates the world in which people are inherently thrown into. In this respect, analysis of the politics of categories, that is, how people play their parts in producing and reproducing category-vocabularies, is inevitably an examination into sovereignty. Since, as Walker argues, sovereignty is not simply the state (as political organisation) but 'a principle, institution, and practice that always works both as abstraction and as a material social form', analysis of categories should be necessarily regarded as an examination of the ways in which sovereignty works in classifying people into groups.<sup>34</sup>

### *Categories of Citizen and Foreigner*

The focal group of the people in this thesis is a mixture of different people participating in activities concerning the issues of migrant workers. These issues range from immigration and labour politics to individual labour disputes. The people attending these activities are mainly labour union workers, members of NGOs, union organisers and lawyers. The thesis looks at these people to investigate the ways in which they apply category-vocabularies to activism.

---

<sup>34</sup> Walker, R.B.J. (2004) 'Conclusion: Sovereignties, Exceptions, Worlds', in Jenny Edkins, Veronique Pin-Fat and Michael J. Shapiro (eds.), *Sovereign Lives: Power in Global Politics* (New York: Routledge), p.245. See also p.242-243.

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

There are, of course, other possible approaches, such as how immigration officers understand and use category-vocabularies or how categories are used in academic texts of writing about migrants and their activism. Among other approaches, I specifically selected the participants in migrant activism because of the curiosity which grew out of my participation in and observations on the social movements of migrants in Japan.

Since the spring of 2004, I have participated in advocacy work for migrants, although my academic pursuits have meant that my commitment has been limited at times. Between February 2008 and September 2011, I was a member of the Nanbu Foreign Workers Caucus (Nanbu FWC) which later became the Tozen, one of the few migrant workers' unions in Japan. I attended meetings, often as an interpreter, translated necessary documents for their court cases, participated in their collective bargaining, attended meetings with their lawyers and with other labour unions and NGOs and took part in a number of demonstrations. It was during my participation in the Nanbu FWC and Tozen activities that I was particularly struck by the ubiquity of category-vocabularies. The demonstrations and meetings were abundant in instances where people were represented by means of category-vocabularies, in this case, categories of citizen and foreigner.

When I first joined the Nanbu FWC, I was strongly motivated by the desire to find the authentic voices of the people called migrant workers. I took the categories as a given and looked for occasions where 'migrant workers' *themselves* expressed *their* grievances and claimed *their* own voice. As the thesis unfolds in chapters 3, 4 and 5, I did find the voice of 'migrant workers'

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

during my union activities, but not in the way I had expected. Contrary to my expectations, migrant activism was not simply confined to situations where people called migrant workers publicly expressed their voice, challenged citizens' monopoly of speech and action and, in this way, questioned the line between citizens and foreigners. Rather it entailed a series of representational practices. The categories of foreigner and citizen were frequently used to create groups of people with those labels, and to present their demands and justify their actions through the creation of these categories.

Interestingly, the practice of representation was characterised by two different modes. Firstly, an attempt to categorise people as foreigners was the target of criticism. People deliberately challenged the category-vocabularies of foreigner and citizen, arguing that people were silenced and viewed as being powerless when they were identified as foreigners. In this way, they directly questioned the boundary of the political community that separates foreigners from Japanese to begin with. Challenging the category-vocabularies could also be seen as confusing the categories. Various people were involved every step of the way in creating a unified voice which could be represented as foreigners. As well as people who were called migrant workers, those involved included Japanese lawyers, union organisers, mediators and translators. When these diverse voices were included, the category of foreigner became messy because it contained an excess, which was made up of other categories, within itself. There was a gap between what the category of foreigner was supposed to signify, and what it actually signified.

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

The more ambiguous the authenticity attached to the voice of migrant workers became, the more obscure and confusing were the categories of foreigner and citizen.

Secondly, classifying some as foreigners and others as citizens was instrumental in identifying groups of people as migrant workers and legitimising actions. On some occasions, to be a 'foreigner' qualified one to speak and act. To establish the importance and uniqueness of migrant worker activism, the difference between foreigners and Japanese citizens was strongly emphasised. Some people were represented as foreigners as opposed to Japanese. Others identified themselves as foreigners to differentiate their voices from those of the Japanese. In this way, the boundary that separated foreigners and Japanese simultaneously appeared and disappeared during the demonstrations and meetings surrounding migrant workers. The categories of citizen and foreigner were made obsolete and yet were indispensable at the same time.

Can we assume that the appearance and disappearance of category-vocabularies is a necessary aspect of migrant activism? Doubtless, depending on the purpose of the activism, different strategies are adopted to determine whether foreignness or Japanese-ness should be stressed or suppressed. Furthermore, it is not difficult to imagine that, for practical reasons, organising demonstrations and meetings invited various people to join. For instance, consultation with lawyers and Japanese union organisers is essential in planning actions to yield better results and in checking to ensure that none of the actions infringe Japanese labour laws and regulations.

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

Interpreters and translators play pivotal roles in filling gaps in linguistic fluency among the participants of migrant worker activism and spreading the message to a wider audience.

I was tempted to attribute the inconsistency in the use of category-vocabularies to these practical aspects of migrant activism, but I hesitated. If the voices of people called migrant workers are expressed by means of both the assertion and the denial of category-vocabularies, and if this reflects the practical reality of activism, do we not need to put this contradictory usage of categories and the messiness of activism at the centre of our attention? If category-vocabularies are used in contradictory ways, is this contradiction not a hindrance but, rather, a helpful guide to shed some light on the concept of the boundary which is imagined as a line to divide the movement of people into categories to begin with?

This line of thinking opens up a whole new set of enquiries regarding taxonomic language used in migrant activism. Category-vocabularies are no longer mere names to identify specific groups of people. Instead they are targets of investigation in themselves. In migrant activism, the categories of foreigner and citizen are ubiquitous. Whether they are emphasised or challenged, the category-vocabularies are crucial devices for people to interpret the boundaries of the political community in their own way and, in this way, become involved in boundary-drawing practices. On some occasions, category-vocabularies are utilised to challenge the representational practices where particular groups of people are identified as foreigners. On other occasions, they provide tools to identify some people as foreigners and



## The Politics of Categories in Migration

increase the legitimacy of their actions based on the authenticity attached to the category of foreigner. Looking at the boundaries of political community from the ubiquity of category-vocabularies, the thesis opens up an investigation of representational practices in migrant activism. It examines the ways in which people are implicated in sovereignty through the contradictory usages of category-vocabularies when organising social movements for migrant workers.

To put it differently, to examine the ubiquity of category-vocabularies is to ask to what degree migration disrupts, stabilises *and* escapes the boundary of the political community of the state. As chapters 3, 4 and 5 will show, category-vocabularies are used in migrant activism to both contest and fortify the boundary between foreigners and Japanese citizens. This means that contradictions and inconsistencies characterise the boundary that separates foreigners from Japanese in the first place. How do such contradictions appear in migrant activism? How can we make sense of these contradictions? Asking to what degree the boundary is affected by migration is to examine the ways in which the boundary is simultaneously interrupted, reinforced and made obsolete in migrant activism.

What underlies my investigation of representational practices with reference to category-vocabularies is my attempt to rethink what it means to live in the political community of the state. As I argued, this political community is constituted by a specific understanding – or image – of boundaries that are assumed to function to separate the inside of the political community from the outside, distinguishing those inside as citizens from

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

those outside as foreigners. Our experience of living in a community is based on this specific understanding of boundaries. If these boundary-drawing practices are contradictory, as my thesis implies, the meaning of community and the way we situate ourselves inside or outside a community also changes. Community is simultaneously apprehensible and inapprehensible, logical and contradictory. This does not mean that an attempt to understand community is superfluous. It does mean, however, that we need to rethink the meaning of boundary—the boundary which determines our understanding of community—in terms of its own messiness rather than its neatness. Addressing the messy reality of the boundary demonstrated in migrant activism is to explore what it means to live in the political community of the state. If the boundary is constantly undermined and strengthened as well as losing its meaning, and if such messiness exists together with neatness, we need to rethink what it means to live in such a community and how we might think of a community based on a specific image of boundaries. This is the question which forms the backdrop of my examination of migrant worker activism and will surface as the main topic of investigation in chapter 6.

### *Reading Immigration Policies in Japan through Categories*

Viewed from the perspective of categories, Japanese immigration policies can be said to exemplify how the state takes advantage of the elusiveness of categories. The inability to categorise people provides the government with a vantage point whereby it manoeuvres who can be admitted to Japan while maintaining the official stance of not accepting

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

foreign manual labourers. The foreign population in Japan is on the increase overall. In 2010, about 2.13 million foreigners were registered, constituting 1.67 percent of the total population of Japan.<sup>35</sup> This number is about 1.3 times larger than those registered in 2000 (1,686,444), and about 3 times larger than in 1990 (1,075,317). Among registered foreigners, those with Permanent Resident status make up the largest group, comprising 26.4 percent (565, 089) in 2010. This group is followed by those with Special Permanent Resident status (in 2010, 399,106; 18.7 percent); then College Student (201,511; 9.4 percent), Spouse or Child of Japanese National (196,248; 9.1 percent) and Long-Term Resident (194, 602; 9.1 percent). The largest group of registered foreign nationals are the Chinese (687,156), comprising 32.2 percent in 2010, followed by Koreans (565,989; 26.5 percent), Brazilians (230,552; 10.8 percent), Filipinos (210,181; 9.8 percent) and Peruvians (54,636; 2.6 percent).

These seemingly neat statistics of foreign populations may give the impression that there is a clearly defined category of foreigners which can be separated from the category of Japanese. This impression is misleading since some of these visa categories overlap with the category of Japanese.<sup>36</sup> One

---

<sup>35</sup> Ministry of Justice (2011), *Part 1: Immigration Control in Recent Years*, (English version) <<http://www.moj.go.jp/content/000081971.pdf>> [Accessed 6 July 2012], p.23. Regarding the numbers of foreigner, see p.24, Chart 13. Changes in the number of registered foreign nationals and its percentage of the total population in Japan.

<sup>36</sup> Another example is the Brazilians and Peruvians who come to Japan as Long-Term Residents and Spouses or Children of Japanese. In the 1990 change of immigration policy, the visa category, 'Teijūsha', was introduced to eliminate work restrictions for foreigners who are second and third generation Japanese. This resulted in the Japanese descendants of Brazilians and Peruvians coming to Japan. This visa category obfuscates the category of Japanese and foreigners because the 'foreigners' in this visa category are Japanese descendants. Kajita points out that policy-makers originally expected foreigners from China and the Philippines to come with a Teijūsha visa. Regarding this unexpected policy result, see Kajita, Takamichi.

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

example is the status of Special Permanent Resident (SPR) which was introduced in 1982 for Asian people who had been living in Japan since 1945. The Japanese colonial expansion to Asian countries, especially China, Taiwan and Korea, before and during the Second World War resulted in a sizable number of people from those countries coming to Japan, many of them as forced labourers. After the war, some decided to live in Japan for various reasons. Since they and their descendants continued to live in Japan, the Japanese government decided to treat them all as 'foreigners' instead of giving them the option of selecting Japanese nationality. Consequently, some of the descendants born and brought up in Japan are still categorised as foreigners, the so-called *Zainichi*, under SPR status, while others have obtained Permanent Resident status.<sup>37</sup> As of 2010, 99 percent of people registered with SPR status are Korean (395,234) and this number amounts to 70 percent of the Koreans registered in Japan.

The elusiveness of the categories of foreigner and Japanese is saliently expressed in the frustration expressed by Tei Tai Kin, the child of a Japanese mother who lost her Japanese nationality when she married a Korean during the war.<sup>38</sup>

---

(1994) *Gaikokujin Roudousha to Nihon [Foreign Workers and Japan]* (Tokyo: Nippon Housou Shuppan-ka).

<sup>37</sup> This applies to Chinese people living in Japan, too. These Koreans and Chinese who had been living in Japan prior to 1945 and their descendants are called *Old Comers* in Japanese, while Chinese and Koreans who came to Japan in the 1980s onwards are called *New Comers*. The number of people with a Special Permanent Resident is shrinking. For the research on *Zainichi*, see for example, Tei Tai Kin. (2006) *Zainichi no Taerarenai Karusa [The Unbearable Lightness of Being Zainichi]* (Tokyo: Chuo Kouron Shinsha).

<sup>38</sup> Since his mother was Japanese but his father was Korean, his family was relegated to Korean. Tei eventually decided to become naturalised in Japan.

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

But is it axiomatic that being *Zainichi* means one is a foreigner or a Korean? As I said before, the people from *Cho-sen* [Korean Peninsula] and Taiwan lost Japanese nationality with the 1952 notice by the civil bureau. I was born in 1948. Does this mean that I was Japanese for the first four years of my life?

...

Once I got used to my life a little more, and got used to the bureaucracy, I began to get annoyed with the rituals of my registration as a foreigner and having my fingerprints taken [as *Zainichi*]. It was clear that this feeling was somehow related to the issue of my identity. The stress came from the fact that I was treated as a 'foreigner' even though I did not recognise myself as a 'foreigner.' The stress came from the fact that I was treated as a Korean even though I did not recognise myself as a Korean.<sup>39</sup>

Tei's experience challenges the assumption that the categories of 'Japanese' and 'foreigners' are given, and makes the line between them ambiguous.<sup>40</sup>

The elusiveness of categories is not limited to the separation of Japanese and foreigners, but extends also to work-visa categories. As many have argued, the Japanese government introduced some visa categories ostensibly

---

<sup>39</sup> Tei Tai Kin, *Zainichi no Taerarenai Karusa*, p.190. My translation.

<sup>40</sup> In terms of the ambiguity of the category 'Japanese', see Oguma, Eiji (1998) *'Nihonjin' no Kyoukai [The Boundary of the 'Japanese']* (Tokyo: Shinyo-sha). Based on a rich historical analysis, Oguma argues that the idea that Japan is an ethnically homogeneous country is a constructed one. See also Momose, Hiroshi.(1992) 'Imin Roudousha Mondai to Gendai Nihon no Kokusai Ninshiki' [The Perception about the International Relations in Japan and Migrant Workers], in Hiroshi Momose and Mitsuo Ogura, *Gendai Kokka to Imin Roudousha [The Contemporary World and Migrant Workers]* (Tokyo: Yushindo), pp.225-234.

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

for non-work purposes but, in reality, to secure labour force from abroad.<sup>41</sup> Since the Japanese government does not officially accept manual labourers from abroad and only accepts so-called skilled workers, it is difficult to estimate the total number of migrant workers in Japan.<sup>42</sup> Taking this into account, it is estimated that there are around 920,000 migrant workers among the registered foreign nationals in Japan, which constitutes 1.4 percent of the total workforce in Japan.<sup>43</sup> These migrant workers include people with Skilled Labour status, Long-Term Resident status, Spouses or Children of Japanese National status, interns and trainees (*Kenshusei and Jisshusei*) and foreigners whose visa status has expired, who entered Japan illegally or whose visa status does not allow them to work. These visa categories include Spouses or Children of Japanese National status and visas for interns and trainees, which are not designed for work like other visa statuses such as Skilled Labour status. This strange gap is the result of what Kajita (1994) calls the side-door and back-door policies which characterise Japanese immigration policies. The former indicates that unskilled workers are accepted semi-officially by modifying existing policies, while the latter

---

<sup>41</sup> For example, Kajita, *Gaikokujin Roudousha to Nihon*.

<sup>42</sup> Needless to say, estimating the number becomes even harder since some stay in Japan without legal status and/or enter Japan without legal means.

<sup>43</sup> As I argued above, the Japanese government does not officially accept manual labourers from abroad and only accepts so-called skilled workers. In other words, the official work-visa categories do not cover people who enter Japan with different visa categories to work as manual labourers. Therefore, the number of migrant workers is an estimated one. The figure provided here is from: Hatate, Akira. (2009) 'Gaikokujin Kenshu Seido ni Kansuru Seisaku Ron' [Policies on trainees and internship system], in Gaikokujin Kenshusei Kenri Network (eds), *Gaikokujin Kenshusei Jikyu 300en no Roudousha [Workers Used for 300 Yen Per Hour as Trainees and Interns]* (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten), p.175. Iguchi similarly estimates the number to be '930,000 +  $\alpha$ ' as of 2006. Iguchi, Yasushi. (2008) 'Ugokihajimeta Gaikokujin Seisaku no Kaikaku' [The Reform of Immigration Policies Has Begun], *Jurisuto [Jurist]*, No.1350, Table 1.

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

accepts them unofficially.<sup>44</sup>

These side-door and back-door policies are developed in the context where the Japanese government maintained the official stance of not accepting unskilled labourers from abroad. Migrant workers came to Japan sporadically up to the 1980s, but it was not until the late 1980s that a nation-wide debate began about whether or not Japan should accept migrants. The side-door policies refer to policies which accept foreigners with non-work visa status while using them as de facto labourers. Back-door policies refer, somewhat sarcastically, to non-policies on the situations where people without legal status are kept employed as labourers.

As the Japanese economy flourished, an increasing number of male migrant workers came to Japan from China, Korea, the Philippines, Bangladesh and Iran,<sup>45</sup> and heated debates took place between the *kaikoku* (opening the nation) side and *sakoku* (closing the nation) side. The *kaikoku* side on the whole argued for securing a (cheap and disposable) labour force. Meanwhile, some policy makers from the *sakoku* side referred to the situation in Western Europe at that time where countries were struggling to integrate foreigners who had initially come as unskilled labourers but remained as

---

<sup>44</sup> Kajita, *Gaikokujin Roudousha to Nihon*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>45</sup> Until the 1980s, the number of female migrants exceeded that of male migrants. Ito points out that it was only when the number of males exceeded that of females in 1986 that the topic of immigration became common, suggesting that the image attached to migrant workers is gendered. See Ito, Ruri. (1992) "Japayuki-san" Genshou Saikou' [Rethinking the "Japayuki-san" phenomena], in Takamichi Kajita and Toshio Iyotani (eds.), *Gaikokujin Roudousha Ron [Theories of Foreign Workers]* (Tokyo: Koubundou), pp.47-67. There were a large number of Bangladeshis and Iranians in the 1980s due to the absence of a visa requirement. In the late 1980s, the government restricted the visa category for Bangladeshis and Iranians, which curtailed the number of foreigners from these two countries.

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

residents, even without jobs.<sup>46</sup> The Japanese government failed to reach a consensus. Instead it devised policies which enabled Japan to secure de facto unskilled labour while maintaining the official stance of only accepting skilled workers.

The training and internship programmes exemplify the side-door policies.<sup>47</sup> Based on the skills-training programmes that had existed since the 1960s, the government introduced a new visa status of ‘trainee’—and later ‘intern’—in 1990 and established the Technical Intern Training Program (*Gaikokujin Ginou Jisshū Seido*) in April 1993.<sup>48</sup> Officially, the purpose of this programme is to provide skills-training in Japan for people from so-called developing countries. Yet, as has been widely acknowledged,<sup>49</sup> through the training and internship system Japanese companies are able to accept

---

<sup>46</sup> Kajita, *Gaikokujin Roudousha to Nihon*.

<sup>47</sup> Another example of the side-door policy can be seen in the visa status of Entertainment. With an ‘entertainment’ visa, many Asian women, primarily from the Philippines, Korea, Taiwan and Thailand, come to Japan to work in pubs and the sex industry. The entertainment visa is officially issued to ‘professional’ dancers and singers, which includes those whose work involves dancing and singing in local pubs for instance. As a result, many migrant women with an entertainment visa in Japan work in pubs and the sex industry as ‘entertainers’. This visa status was developed in the 1950s when Japan was still occupied by U.S. troops. The U.S. troops requested the Japanese government to provide English-speaking women, especially Filipinos, who would ‘entertain’ them. Shipper, Apichai. (2008) *Fighting for Foreigners: Immigration and its Impact on Japanese Democracy* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press), p.46.

<sup>48</sup> For detailed information on the development of the training and internship system, see Hatate, Akira. (2001) ‘Gaikokujin kenshu seido no jitsujou to seisaku kadai’ [Situations and policy agendas for training and internship system of foreigners], in NIRA Citizenship Research Group, Tabunka shakai no sentaku [The options available in the multi-cultural society] (Tokyo: Nihon keizai hyoron sha). See also Ito, Masayuki. (2008), *Gaikokujin Kenshusei • jisshusei, ryuugakusei no shomondai* [The issues about trainees, interns and ‘students’], available at <http://www.ndl.go.jp/jp/data/publication/document/2008/20080109.pdf>.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Gaikokujin Kenshusei Kenri Nettowaku [Network to Protect Rights of Trainees and Interns] (eds.), *Gaikokujin Kenshusei Jikyuu 300 Yen no Roudousha* [Trainees and Interns Working With the Salary of 300 Yen per Hour] (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten).



## The Politics of Categories in Migration

trainees and interns and use them as workers under the façade of ‘training’.<sup>50</sup> Because their visa status does not officially allow trainees and interns to work in Japan, the companies are not obliged to treat them as ‘workers’. This ruling results in a situation where migrants work for as long as and often longer than Japanese employees and receive half the minimum wage or less. Some companies confiscate passports from trainees and interns for fear that these migrants may escape. For migrants coming as trainees and interns, too, the system is perceived as a way to work in Japan.<sup>51</sup>

The side-door policies can also be seen in the spouse visa which secures de facto unskilled labourers, mostly women. The late 1980s saw a serious shortage of females in rural areas of Japan, causing marriage problems for male farmers. Without a marriage partner, these farmers would have no prospect of having successors who could take over their family businesses inherited from generation to generation. Fearing the disappearance of local communities, municipal governments took various measures to secure wives for male farmers. One measure was to organise ‘marriage tours’ to East Asian countries. The Japanese male farmers visited these countries to look for women who would marry them. Consequently, women especially from China, Korea and the Philippines ended up marrying Japanese farmers and living in

---

<sup>50</sup> Iguchi, Yasushi. (2008) ‘Ugokihajimeta gaikokujin seisaku no kaikaku’ [The reform of immigration policies has begun], *Jurisuto*, no.1350, pp.4-5, pp.11-12.

<sup>51</sup> See Gu, Mei-Juan (2009), ‘Amakusa no Housei Ginou Jisshu-sei Soshou [Ginou Jisshu-sei no Uttae]’ [The Lawsuit by the Technical Interns Working in a Sewing Factory in Amakusa (Appeal by the technical intern)], in *Gaikokujin Roudousha Mondai to Korekara no Nihon Henshu Iinkai* [The Committee on the Issues on Migrant Workers and the Future of Japan] (ed) (2009) *‘Kenshu-sei’ ooiu Na no Dorei Roudou [The Slaves called ‘Trainees’]* (Tokyo: Kadensha), p.18. This point will be elaborated in chapter 5.

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

rural villages with spouse visas.<sup>52</sup> As Kajita points out, these Asian wives of Japanese farmers are de facto unskilled labourers: they are taken as 'wives' who join their (Japanese) husbands' family businesses (i.e. farming) and become farmers themselves.<sup>53</sup>

These Japanese immigration policies demonstrate the ways in which the state governs which names should be given to people on the move and how they should be treated in the political community they live in. The immigration control works by obfuscating the meaning of categories while taking advantage of what escapes these categories. The state draws boundaries between, for instance, foreigners and Japanese citizens, and workers and non-workers including trainees, interns and wives. It is these boundaries to which people are subjected. However, as I argued in the previous sections, the thesis begins with the assumption that these boundary-drawing practices are not the monopoly of the state. It is not just by the state but crucially by people themselves that the boundaries of the political community are drawn and re-drawn. The people joining migrant activism are instantly subjected to, and themselves engage in, the creation of categories. This means that, in parallel with the boundary-drawing practices of the state, there is the same practice taking place among the people. Through a study of this latter type of practice, the thesis examines how two parallel actions shape the boundaries of political community.

---

<sup>52</sup> The spouse visa can be changed to permanent residency visa (*ejusha*) after 3 years of marriage: some female migrants are naturalised, too. On the topic of Asian wives, see, for example, Suzuki, Nobue. (2000) 'Between Two Shores: Translational Projects and Filipina Wives in/from Japan', *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol.23, No.4, pp.431-444.

<sup>53</sup> Kajita, *Gaikokujin Roudousha to Nihon*, pp.39-40.

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

### *Chapter Conclusions*

The aim of this chapter was to establish the basis of an examination of the image of the boundary from the perspective of categories. This basis allows the exploration of the implications of the tenacity of the boundary-as-a-line image in the current debates on state boundaries. Given that the focus on categories is a unique angle, the present chapter was dedicated to discussing the role of categories: what categories do. Although the next chapter will address the same question, in greater depth, with references to the extant debates on the boundary, the preliminary investigation made in this chapter proved to be fruitful in two regards. It clarified the assumption of the overall thesis as well as the context which shaped the direction of the thesis.

In order to find out what categories do, I mainly reviewed the works of James Scott, Michel Foucault and Homi Bhabha, together with examples of how categories are used among policy-makers as well as ordinary people. I argued that the findings of this examination highlighted that categories seem to have two basic roles. Firstly, categories are a device for making the unnameable to nameable for the state. James Scott's work highlighted an underlying motivation of the state to use categories as a device for this purpose. As Scott argues, the state is infatuated with intelligibility in order to read the population better and control its territory effectively. For this purpose, categories are used to name people with labels, through which data and statistics are collected and documented. Through categories, people are

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

made visible and recognisable to the state and, in this way, skilfully incorporated into the state apparatus.

Such rule of categories seems to correspond to a profusion of taxonomic vocabularies in the field of migration: they include the IDPs, Persons of Concern, protracted refugees, irregular migrants and the undocumented. One after another, these new categories are invented as a response to the limitations of existing categories. These newly invented categories deftly capture the movements previously un-categorisable in the existing vocabularies and decipher them by adding new vocabularies available to the state. Importantly, as the case of the Burmese woman discussed above bluntly shows, classification is made necessary whenever people have to clarify their status in relation to the state. In this way, the movement of people is persistently made transparent to the world which explains it by drawing the statist boundaries to categorise people. Mobility is identified as 'the' movement within the world which is filled with the statist boundaries such as between domestic and international, and voluntary and involuntary. Category-vocabularies are a production of this boundary-drawing practice of the state, and hence, the state language.

The second critical aspect of category-vocabularies seems to be that they are a product of performance. Foucault's work demonstrates that people are not simply organised and ordered by the state but they internalise this organising mechanism within themselves. They become constitutive of such mechanism. Category-vocabularies are, in this respect, a device of naming through which sovereignty operates. The people are not simply named and

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

made legible to the state with categories as a referencing point, but are implicated in the naming practices itself. They participate in the practices where categories are produced and reproduced.

Finding out these two aspects of category-vocabularies was crucial in clarifying the focus of this thesis. The thesis looks at how people use category-vocabularies and are implicated in the naming practice. It examines the politics of categories instead of considering categories as given and using them as an analytical framework. Drawing on Bhabha's work, I argued that the focus on the politics of categories is to assume the position that the state is not an a priori entity but constructed through the interaction between what it imposes and how this imposition is performed, between the state as a signifier and what signifies the state. Looking at politics of categories, the thesis examines this gap between what is signified by category-vocabularies (as labels) and what these category-vocabularies actually signify.

The Japanese immigration policies exemplify how the state intervenes in this gap. Various categories are used both as labels to accept migrants through official channels and as façades to conceal the statist boundaries such as the boundaries between Japanese and foreigners and between manual labourers and skilled workers. The former, the categories as labels, identifies people in the state language such as SPRs, trainees and interns. Meanwhile, the latter, the categories as façades, reveals the inadequacy of the categories. For example, the SPRs are born and brought up in Japan; and trainees and interns are de facto labourers. In this way, the state freely interprets the gap between what is identified as labels and what these labels

## The Politics of Categories in Migration

actually stand for. In light of my preliminary observations on migrant worker activism in Japan, I argued that there is scope to examine this gap further by looking at it from the angle of the politics of categories. By looking at the ways in which people use category-vocabularies, the thesis examines how the participants in migrant activism, not the Japanese government, intervene in this gap.

Clarifying the two significant roles of category-vocabularies, as labels and as products of performance, as well as understanding the context which shapes the focus of the thesis, provide a platform for further investigation of the politics of categories. How are the politics of categories discussed in the extant literature? How can complex bordering practices be addressed through the politics of categories? Animated by these questions, the task of the next chapter is to examine more closely the link between boundaries and categories. By doing so, the next chapter attempts to translate, in a figurative sense, the current debates on the boundary into an analysis of the politics of categories.