

Chapter 4

Producing Categories for Resistance

Introduction

The task of chapter 3 was to address the tenacity of categories for further investigation as identified at the end of chapter 2. This move was made to achieve the overall aim of the thesis, which was to explore whether the perspectives of categories are an effective intervention in the current debates on the expanding roles of state boundaries. While chapter 1 provided general observations about the link between categories and state boundaries, chapter 2 fleshed out this link by reviewing BM scholarship and the works by Agamben and Rancière that generally reflect the theoretical inclination of BM scholarship. Both chapters, in different depths, demonstrated the political significance of categories and translated, so to speak, the current debates on boundaries into the politics of categories. More specifically, chapter 2 revealed that the extant debates examine political significance of categories on state boundaries in terms of control and resistance to such control. Chapter 2 also identified the contradiction, and a lack of attention to this contradiction in the extant debate whereby categories are used to resist control generated by categories.

To interrogate the contradiction identified in chapter 2, the subsequent three chapters are designed to address the following two main questions in the context of migrant activism in Japan. In what context do people resort to category vocabularies? What are the differences and commonalities among

Producing Categories for Resistance

various instances where these category-vocabularies are used in activism?

Chapter 3 was successful in addressing the first question with examples of the government talk and the KCU union activities. In both cases, people use categories, in this case, citizen and foreigner, to achieve two different aims. For some, categories were necessary to appeal to the Japanese public about the overall injustice that migrant workers face in Japan. This aim was accompanied by the second aim. For some people, categories were crucial in making more instrumental gains: having unions pursue their labour disputes. To achieve the first purpose, participants in activism brought the categories of citizen and foreigner into play to identify those who were Japanese and who could speak to them. In this process, some people were identified as citizens who had their claims politically realised. Meanwhile others were identified as foreigners who lacked political voices and were given roles of producing foreignness, through singing foreign songs, so that citizens could increase their authority to represent foreigners.

I argued that, in achieving the second purpose, the tenacity of categories revealed a crack of its own by failing to identify people with labels. To have unions pursue their labour disputes, people attended meetings and demonstrations to exhibit their pretend enthusiasm so that they could leave a positive impression on other participants who would eventually handle their labour disputes. Because displaying fake enthusiasm was the purpose of joining migrant activism, some migrant workers were indifferent to the lack of translation in activism, which confined their agencies to speechlessness. Instead of questioning their voicelessness, these individuals performed the

Producing Categories for Resistance

role of ‘foreigners’ as assigned to them and pretended as if they were ‘foreigners’ whose voices were taken away by the people identified as citizens. On the surface, the category-vocabularies seemed to maintain the ability to identify migrant workers. However, beneath the surface, they revealed the inability to identify people in the foreigner category because these people were merely pretending to be nameable without disclosing who they were.

The previous chapter was successful in addressing how the tenacity of categories appeared in migrant activism. And yet it was unable to address the differences and commonalities among various instances whereby categories were used for activism. Therefore, the aim of the present chapter is to examine other instances where category-vocabularies are used in activism. The example used in the present chapter is the events leading up to the independence of Nambu FWC. As the chapter will unfold, unlike the examples investigated in the previous chapter, the case of the Nambu FWC will demonstrate that the category of foreigner was challenged, rather than tacitly accepted, by the people at the FWC. The FWC questioned the citizens’ monopoly over speech, which eventually led to the establishment of a new independent union called the Tozen. In this way, the examples of the Nambu FWC and the Tozen are similar to Rancière’s observation about categories as generating resistance, which was discussed in chapter 2. Furthermore, the important thread that runs throughout the examples investigated in this chapter is that linguistic boundaries were interwoven with claims made by migrant workers whose voices were to be understood only in Japanese. As I will demonstrate, linguistic boundaries were not limited to

Producing Categories for Resistance

Japanese-speaking union members and non-Japanese speaking members, but also to English and non-English. The importance of the ability to acquire the citizens' tongues to be political reflects what Anzaldúa argues on the link between voices and languages (as tongues). Therefore, the present chapter aims to demonstrate how both Rancière's and Anzaldúa's observations ring true in the context of the Nambu FWC in Japan.

To accomplish this aim, the chapter will analyse several events that took place during the period when FWC members explored the possibility of creating an independent union. The key word arising in these events was democracy with which the FWC members unmade the category of foreigner by challenging the category of foreigner and refusing to be silenced by Japanese union members. The FWC also regarded that the ability to be heard is connected to the ability to be heard in Japanese and emphasised the need to have someone who can speak Japanese when creating a democratic union. In the second section of this chapter, in order to reflect the implication of these events, I will bring in Rancière's observations on resistance together with Anzaldúa's points on the link between linguistic boundaries and categories. I will also argue that the example of the Nambu FWC suggests that both of these thinkers' points are at play. In the final section, I will examine the events that took place after the FWC set up an independent union, the Tozen. I will argue that in the process of unmaking the category of foreigner, migrant workers identified themselves as people being capable of speech and associated the realm of politics to English. In this way, within the Tozen, non-English speaking members were silenced by English-speaking

Producing Categories for Resistance

members, and were excluded from the realm of speech. Therefore, monopolizing the domain of speech reproduced the category of citizen in the Tozen activities. Toward the end of the chapter, I will demonstrate how the process of making citizens generated the gap whereby these non-English speakers identified themselves as being a part of the speaking realm and pretended as if they were citizens.

Challenging the Category of Foreigner

Background information on the Nambu FWC

The Nambu FWC was part of the Nambu labour union, which began accepting migrant workers since the 1970s. As early as 1974, unionized migrant workers who were language instructors at Sony Language Laboratory created the first branch.¹ Since then, the Nambu has continued to attract language instructors as its members. The number of language teachers who joined the Nambu dramatically increased in the late 1990s, when downsizing of language teaching industries accelerated.² This prompted an establishment of a group called Nambu Foreign Worker's Caucus (Nambu FWC) in 2004, which was part of the Nambu. Around the turn of the 21st century, several major language schools such as NOVA and ECC collapsed,³ which further increased the labour disputes brought to the

¹ McLaughlin, John William. (2006) *Communication and Participation in Unions Organizing Foreign Workers in Japan: Towards a Second Language Labor Education for Immigrant Workers*. Ed.D dissertation submitted to the Temple University Graduate Board, Tokyo, May 2006, p.131.

² Interview with Shima, 2 April 2010. The name has been changed.

³ Origuchi, Kimihiko. (1997) 'Eikaiwa Sukuru ga Kaiyaku ni Oujitaku nai Riyu' [Why English Conversation Schools do not Want to Accept Dissolution with Their Customers], *Economist* (Japan edition), Vol.75, No.12, p.51.

Producing Categories for Resistance

Nambu FWC. These language instructors are an easy target for redundancy because they are usually hired on fix-term contracts that have to be renewed annually. Furthermore, poor working conditions of language teachers prompt them to join the union. Unlike their ‘Japanese’ colleagues, the language instructors generally do not receive bonuses and/or social insurance (*shakai hoken*) from their employers.⁴ Thus, the content of labour disputes brought to the Nambu FWC reflects their precarious working conditions. These include unfair dismissals, requests for enrolment of social insurance, and a lack of overtime payment.⁵

The Nambu FWC consisted of a group of different branches set up by migrant workers. Over 50 percent of the Nambu FWC branches were composed of language instructors. These teachers primarily came from North America and Europe.⁶ Additionally, the union branches included University

⁴ Seikatsu to Kenri no tame no Gaikokujin Roudousha Soukoudou Jikkou Iinkai [Committee for Life and Rights of Migrant Workers] and the Solidarity Network with Migrants Japan. (2010) *Roudou Mondai ni Kansuru Youseisho* [*Labor Related Demands*] (in English and Japanese), handout at the negotiation with the government held on 8 March 2010. See especially Part II 1. See also Wilkinson, Jens. (2003) ‘Oubeijin Nihon ni okeru Fukuzatsu na Tachiba’ [Complicated Status of Westerners in Japan], in Hiroshi Komai (ed.) *Tabunka Shakai heno Michi* [*The Road to a Multicultural Society*] (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten), p.366. The poor working conditions also reflect teacher salaries. Since the 1990s, salaries decreased to as little as 15,000 yen, more than two thirds of what language teachers used to earn in the 1970s and 1980s. This is about 10,000 yen below the average salary of people in their early 20s in Japan. Interview with Fujiwara, 13 May 2010 (The name has been changed). Fujiwara has been working in private language schools since the 1970s as well as a labour unionist. Regarding the average annual salary in Japan, see http://nensyu-labo.com/nendai_20.htm [Accessed 1 June 2012].

⁵ The same problems were also reported by migrant workers from Latin America. See Murayama, Satoshi. (2009) ‘Nikkei Gaikokujin Roudousha no Hakengiri to Tatakau Kanagawa City Union’ [Kanagawa City Union fighting against cutting Nikkei foreign workers], *Roudou Undou Kenkyu Fukkan* [*Reissue: Labour Union Movements Research*], Vol.22, No.4, Table 4.

⁶ Many language instructors come to Japan with the visa status of Specialist in Humanities/International Services. People in this category are from the U.S.A. (3rd), the UK (4th), Australia (6th), and France (8th). The number of foreign

Producing Categories for Resistance

Teacher's Union (UTU), made up by teachers at universities; the Assistant Language Teachers branch (ALTs), set up by language instructors who worked at public and private junior and high schools; and other union branches composed of language instructors who worked in private language schools such as Berlitz, Linguaphone and Simul. Aside from language instructors, the Nambu FWC also included journalists who founded the *Japan Times* branch and business persons who joined the union as individual members.

The Nambu FWC obtained a semi-autonomous status within the Nambu, held its own general meetings, and had its own executive committees, which was unlike other branches in the Nambu. Although the FWC had its own executive body to decide the activities of the Nambu FWC, it was not legally registered as an independent union. Additionally, because it was a part of the Nambu, it paid union dues to the Nambu, attended Nambu activities, and some members became Nambu executive members, all of which were allowed to any Nambu branch. Creating the semi-autonomous body of the FWC within the Nambu in 2004 was intended to run the union effectively. For this purpose, some union organisers were specifically assigned to the FWC to oversee their activities and coordinate actions between them and the Nambu.⁷

residents with this visa status is 68,467 out of 2,134,151 and this status is the 7th highest ranking via status of 33. Of the total number of registered foreigners, people from the U.S.A. and the UK are respectively the 5th and 10th largest groups. See Ministry of Justice (2010), *Part 1: Immigration Control in Recent Years*, <<http://www.moj.go.jp/content/000081958.pdf>> [Accessed 6 July 2012], Table 8.

⁷ Interview with Shima, 2 April 2010. Interview with Meguro, 21 May 2010. Shima and Meguro both worked for the Nambu in the 1990s as union organisers

Producing Categories for Resistance

Challenging Speechlessness with the Idea of Democracy

Although it was initially part of the Nambu, the Nambu FWC became independent in 22 April 2010 and created a new union called the Tokyo Zenkoku Ippan (Tozen). This independence was spurred by the growing dissatisfaction among Nambu FWC members that they were perceived as helpless foreigners and were silenced in the Nambu union. At the time that the possibility of independence for the FWC was openly explored, a widely-shared sentiment among FWC members was that they were excluded from the Nambu because they were foreigners. The FWC members argued that, because they were identified as foreigners, they were treated differently from other Japanese union members. The source of this dissatisfaction was the image attached to the category of foreigner that they were weak and helpless, which justified the hierarchical relationship between Nambu union members and FWC members. The following remark, made by one pro-independence FWC member, summarises the sentiments held among the FWC members then:

I don't like to have a mommy and daddy figure [in union activities].⁸

This member argued that, although unions should be blind to nationality, Nambu FWC members were not treated in the same way as

and were in charge of union branches established by migrant workers. Both names have been changed.

⁸ Notes from my attendance at the Great Debate, 30 January 2010.

Producing Categories for Resistance

Japanese members *because* they were foreigners. Another union member similarly pointed out the unequal relationship between Japanese union members and Nambu FWC members. The latter were identified as foreigners and perceived as powerless people who could only seek help. This member somewhat sarcastically described that working on the labour issues of migrant workers remained the Nambu's 'special project' because migrant workers were foreigners who are like 'jewels' for Nambu members.⁹ The 'foreign' union members were like 'pretty ornaments', an extra to Nambu union activities.¹⁰ Therefore, for him, creating a new independent union would show that "we have the power to build a new union".¹¹

Carlet, the union organiser in charge of the Nambu FWC since 2004, who later became the first president of Tozen, shared a similar feeling with other FWC members. Carlet argued that the more vocal and active the Nambu FWC became in union activities, the more threatened Nambu members felt because they imagined that foreigners were supposed to be quiet and passively receive the help offered by Japanese citizens.¹² In 2008, at a workshop where migrant worker union members participated, Carlet raised the following topic for debate among the participants: '[Japanese] Labour unions should not help migrant workers'. His intention was to problematise the victimised image that Japanese union members attached to foreigners.¹³ He also expressed uncomfortable feelings when working with

⁹ Interview with a former Nambu FWC member, 24 June 2010.

¹⁰ Interview with a former Nambu FWC member, 24 June 2010.

¹¹ Notes from my attendance at Great Debate, 30 January 2010.

¹² Informal discussion with Louis Carlet, March 2010.

¹³ Notes from my attendance at the Ijuren Forum, June 2008.

Producing Categories for Resistance

other Nambu union organisers on collective bargaining because some has tried to depict FWC members as victims as a way to make an emotional appeal to employers during collective bargaining.¹⁴ Having being identified as foreigners, FWC members were also considered in need of help from Japanese citizens and unable to speak for themselves.

Interestingly, to challenge the helpless status assigned to them, FWC members used the word, democracy. Two events, the Great Debate and the submission of demands, particularly highlighted how the idea of democracy was used to question the arbitrary distribution of speech between Nambu union members, identified as Japanese (citizens), and FWC members, identified as foreigners. In January 2010, the Nambu FWC organised an event called the 'Great Debate' which was a parliamentary-style debate that was opened for all members of the Nambu.¹⁵ At this event, FWC members debated whether the Nambu FWC should separate itself from the Nambu. The subject of the debate was publicised a couple of weeks prior to the event as follows: 'Members of the FWC should separate from members of the Nambu and form a new labour union'.¹⁶ Four FWC members volunteered to speak about their own positions: two pro and two con positions. After each presented their statements, the floor was opened for questions, which was followed by an informal discussion. At the end of the event, a straw poll was taken to determine which position had received the more support of the union

¹⁴ Informal conversation with Carlet, June 2008.

¹⁵ Although the event was opened to Nambu members, no one from the Nambu came. The debate was broadcast live via the internet, so that anyone could watch it on-line.

¹⁶ Notes from my attendance at the Great Debate, 30 January 2010.

Producing Categories for Resistance

members.

This event was depicted by FWC members as demonstrating how union activities would look if no one was silenced. For this purpose, the Great Debate was made as an occasion where anyone could speak freely and openly about their opinions of the future of the FWC. Prior to that event, statements from the both con and pro sides were circulated to all members via email. The members were encouraged to contact the debaters should they have any inquires about their statements.¹⁷ After the event, Carlet used the word, democracy, to praise the success of the event as follows:

We had a magnificent debate today about Nambu FWC's future. *It was a wonderful working example of democracy, free speech, transparency and solidarity* [...] When it came to the debate over the renamed agendum 'FWC's future', nearly every member spoke her or his opinion pro, con and undecided [...] *The democratic, open, lively debate was quite refreshing—how a union should be.*¹⁸

By organising the Great Debate in a manner that was open to everyone, the Nambu FWC exhibited itself, contra the Nambu, as a democratic group where anyone could speak freely. The Nambu FWC members distinguished themselves from those of the Nambu to argue that their group ran union activities democratically, that is, without excluding and silencing any member. By asserting their democratic nature, FWC members challenged the

¹⁷ Email circulated by Louis Carlet on 27 January 2010.

¹⁸ Email circulated by Louis Carlet on 17 January 2010. Emphasis mine.

Producing Categories for Resistance

speechless status assigned to them. The Great Debate was used as a chance to demonstrate that FWC members were able to speak and that the union should treat them as such regardless of whether they were Japanese or foreigners.

The idea of democracy was also used in handling the 35 demands submitted by the FWC. In February 2010, the Nambu FWC raised a number of issues regarding the union management of the Nambu including whether union dues were collected from all Nambu branches equally, how these dues were used, and whether part-time union staff salaries at the FWC were paid. By submitting formal letters on these issues, the FWC demanded the Nambu to disclose information and meet with FWC members to discuss the issues presented. For FWC members, this action cast themselves as equal speaking partners to other members of the Nambu. Because the FWC was part of the Nambu, FWC members assumed, and displayed the assumption, that they were equal to Nambu members as union members of the same union. As union members, they had the right to know how the union was run. This assumption questioned that the division between FWC members and Nambu members was drawn based on whether they were foreigners or Japanese.

Despite requests made by the FWC, the Nambu remained silent and refused to respond to the 35 demands or meet with FWC members. The lack of response from the Nambu frustrated FWC members and gave them the impression that the Nambu was trying to conceal some information. By concealing information from its members, the Nambu gave FWC members the undemocratic image that *not* everyone was able to participate in union

Producing Categories for Resistance

activities. For instance, one Nambu FWC member explained that the reason why the majority of the Nambu FWC opted for independence was because the Nambu did not run the union in an open democratic manner whereby everyone knew what was going on and had a say about the union activities.¹⁹ Having closely followed events in the Nambu FWC, a former Nambu union organiser similarly pointed out that the lack of response from the Nambu contradicted the image of the union that FWC members wanted it to be, that is, a democratic union.

In the context where many FWC members already felt frustrated about their exclusion from Nambu activities, the Nambu's continuous lack of response was taken as a manifestation of denying FWC members their voices. This frustration on the part of the FWC led to an incident where eight Nambu FWC union members occupied the union office and demanded that Nambu union members talk to them.²⁰ This incident was later described as follows:

We [the Nambu and the Nambu FWC] should be all on the same side, but that is not the reality. Our solidarity is broken. [...]we have done everything possible to resolve things through 'rational discussion' [...]²¹

While the Nambu FWC was depicted as trying to have a 'rational discussion' and, in this way, adhere to democracy, the Nambu was regarded otherwise. Specifically, it refused to have such a discussion and behaved in an

¹⁹ Interview with a former Nambu FWC member, 17 June 2010. Interview with a former Nambu FWC member, 8 May 2010.

²⁰ This incident took place on 5 April 2010.

²¹ Email circulated by Carlet to Nambu FWC members, 6 April 2010.

Producing Categories for Resistance

undemocratic manner. Instead of having a ‘rational discussion’, ‘they hurled invective at us and refused to discuss the points’.²² These expressions recapitulate the contentious issues that underlie the relationship between the FWC and Nambu. For FWC members, the FWC and Nambu ‘should be all on the same side’ because they were both union members, not Japanese and foreigners. However, the FWC was separated from Nambu members as foreigners, which was reflected in the Nambu’s refusal to treat them as equal union members and speak to them so they could ‘resolve things through ‘rational discussion’. By concealing the information that should have been open to all union members, the Nambu was regarded as refusing FWC members’ abilities to be understood and have their claims heard politically.

Thus, with the idea of democracy, Nambu FWC members challenged the role of foreigner that was assigned to them. With the idea of democracy, FWC members argued that they were *not* the recipients of help from the Japanese people and would *not* stay quiet. For them, a democratically-run union should ensure that everyone could speak freely regardless of his or her nationality, and that no one should be silenced. To exercise democracy, disclosing information to union members was a test case for FWC members to see whether union members were allowed to say something and ‘speak to’ Nambu members. By showing that the Nambu FWC was dealing with the process of independence from a democratic perspective, they questioned the Nambu’s ‘undemocratic’ union management that rejected any discussion with Nambu FWC members. Furthermore, by demanding that the Nambu run the union

²² Email circulated by Carlet to Nambu FWC members, 6 April 2010.

Producing Categories for Resistance

democratically, the FWC also demonstrated that they were equal speaking partners to other union members of the Nambu. In this way, the idea of democracy was used to resist the distribution of voices where only citizens, in this case Japanese union members of the Nambu, monopolized the domain of speech while taking voices away from FWC members who were identified as foreigners.

Production of Categories by Social Order and Linguistic Boundaries

The examples of the Nambu FWC demonstrate how Rancière's observations on categories and disruption ring true to the relationship between the FWC and the Nambu. As discussed in chapter 2, Rancière theorised categories with the idea of politics that disrupts social order at its core. For Rancière, social order, which is manifested as categories, is defined through its ambiguity. More precisely, the allocation of speech set up by social order always entails the possibility of disruption that allocation might be questioned, at any moments, by the assumption that speech should not be allocated to being with. The former, what determines the allocation of speech, is called police logic, while the latter, the assumption that everyone has voice, is called egalitarian logic. Rancière's thesis on politics focuses on the moment when previously-invisible people challenge the arbitrariness of social order and become visible based on egalitarian logic. Through this disruption of social order, categories maintained by social order can be changed or re-claimed.

Elsewhere, by drawing on the example of Joseph Jacotot, Rancière

Producing Categories for Resistance

discusses his idea of politics and its implications for categories to offer a radical philosophy on pedagogy. In the book, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Rancière introduces the approach taken by Joseph Jacotot who managed to teach French to Flemish-speaking students although he could not speak Flemish and, hence, could not communicate with his students. I read Rancière and Jacotot by challenging the categories of teachers and students and the allocation of voices that produce and sustain these categories. In usual pedagogical methods, categories of teacher and student are reflective of a particular pedagogical method. The point of teaching is to guide students so that they, too, can obtain speech and the ability to be understood. In other words, pedagogy is preserved by police logic, which is a particular way of distributing voices so that teachers monopolise the domain of speech. Once entering the classroom, one is given a name, a category, as either student or teacher. Based on the name assigned to them, people *become* ‘teachers’ and ‘students’. Jacotot disrupts this police logic by showing that students already have voices. As such, Jacotot and Rancière both argue that there are no pre-determined people called students and teachers, but that social order produces these categories and names people accordingly.

The migrant workers at the Nambu FWC initiate politics into an order that distributed the voices of citizens and silenced others who were identified as foreigners. Drawing on the idea of democracy, Nambu FWC members challenged the category of foreigner that had allocated a voiceless position to them. Among various categories available, such as workers or union members, it was the category of foreigner that appropriated who they were and it was

Producing Categories for Resistance

this category that FWC members resisted. Having been categorised as foreigners, members were allocated to the status where they needed assistance from Japanese (citizens) union members, a help from the 'mommy and daddy' in union activities.

For them, assertion of the idea of democracy was one way to bring the egalitarian logic into the social order that had taken their voices. They attempted to make the Nambu hear what they say and challenge the police logic with egalitarian logic. By bringing egalitarian logic into police logic, FWC members caused what Rancière calls, politics, the moment of disturbing social order. The political moments were exemplified as FWC members who organised the Great Debate, submitted their demands, and called for the Nambu to respond to their inquiries and, in general, to talk to them. By doing so, FWC members unmade the category of foreigner and threatened the monopoly of speech by the Japanese (citizens).

Importantly, as Anzaldúa argues, linguistic boundaries are instrumental to social order. The ability to speak Japanese subtly but surely permeates the production of the category of foreigner. When FWC members were identified as foreigners, what tongues they had in relation to the political community, called Japan, was a crucial determinant in making them foreigners. Most Nambu FWC members could not speak Japanese. The lack of a common language at the Nambu created the linguistic boundary between union members, the boundary which identified Japanese-speaking union members as citizens and non-Japanese speaking members as foreigners.

Unlike the examples examined in chapter 3, the linguistic boundary

Producing Categories for Resistance

drawn in Nambu activities was much more subtle. Carlet, the FWC union organiser, assumed the role of translator in various contexts that ranged from everyday interactions among union members, if necessary, to discussions held at union meetings. He also developed a small network of interpreters, mostly his friends, who served as interpreters for the FWC. As a union organiser working in Japan, Carlet seemed to know from his own experience that the provision of translation was important for FWC members to be active in union activities. Carlet recollected that, when he took up a union organiser post at the Nambu, he was shocked to see that some meetings were specifically designated for migrant workers because of their lack of ability to speak Japanese.²³ Having seen this, Carlet ensured that interpreters simultaneously translated discussions at the general meetings, so that non-Japanese-speaking union members could attend the same meetings with Japanese-speaking union members. In this way, unlike the translation services investigated in the previous chapter, the translations provided during Nambu union activities carried actual important weight for its members.

Conversely, the importance of provisions for translation at meetings also showed that the ability to have their voices heard politically was intertwined with the ability to be understood in Japanese. According to Carlet, after translation was provided properly and thoroughly, more migrant workers spoke up at Nambu meetings because they could, first and foremost, understand what was being discussed and they could make their ideas

²³ Informal conversation with Carlet, March 2010.

Producing Categories for Resistance

understood at meetings where Japanese dominated.²⁴ Providing translators and preparing documents translated into English created an avenue whereby Nambu FWC members started to express their own opinions instead of staying silent during meetings because they had no idea what was being discussed.²⁵

The interconnection between linguistic boundaries and social order, both of which justify distribution of speech, can be also seen in the discussion on the Japanese linguistic abilities held among Nambu FWC members. When the possibility of independence was discussed, the ability to speak Japanese was considered vital in challenging the speechless image of foreigners. At the Great Debate event, one union member who was against independence raised the question: if most FWC members could not even speak Japanese, how could they become actively involved in union activities that included collective bargaining and attending meetings with other unions where Japanese was spoken?²⁶ Another pro-independence union member responded to this point by emphasising the importance of bilingual speakers between Japanese and English in the new union, so that members could actively participate in union activities.²⁷ For both pro and con arguments, the ability to communicate in Japanese, and securing such means of communication, was understood as a crucial element to guarantee their participation in union activities in Japan and realise what they called the 'democratic' spirit of the union. Both

²⁴ Informal discussion with Carlet, March 2010.

²⁵ Informal discussion with Carlet, March 2010.

²⁶ Email circulated by a member of Nambu FWC, 27 January 2010. Emphasis mine.

²⁷ Notes from my attendance at the Great Debate, 30 January 2010.

Producing Categories for Resistance

perceived the Japanese language competency as being crucial to the creation of a democratic union where union members could express their opinions and participate in activities regardless of language barriers.

As we have seen, with the idea of democracy, Nambu FWC members challenged the speechlessness ascribed to them as 'foreigners'. For them, democratically-run unions were embodied as migrant workers being able to speak up in meetings, being informed of what was discussed, and ensuring that union members could exchange their opinions even when they could not speak Japanese. For this reason, having translators at meetings was vital for Nambu FWC members to exercise democracy in union activities. For them, language was not just an embodiment of the boundary of speech drawn between citizens and foreigners, but also a linguistic boundary that made non-Japanese speakers silent and produced the people called 'foreigners'.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, Anzaldúa so acutely observes that the ability to command the tongues, which represent the political community, determines the inclusion in and exclusion from that community. By showing how she was made into an 'illegitimate' being and made silent, she demonstrates that the space that tongues are attached is the space of being 'legitimate' or, in Arendt's work, the space where one can attain the status of the political. In this respect, for migrant workers living in Japan, the ability to be understood in the tongues of Japanese 'citizens' was crucial when they asserted their political status by challenging the category of 'foreigner'. This speechlessness was intertwined with the linguistic boundaries which justified such speechlessness assigned to FWC members. By resorting to the

Producing Categories for Resistance

idea of democracy, Nambu FWC members refused to accept the social order and linguistic boundaries, both of which excluded them from the domain of speech. In this way, they tried to unmake the category of foreigner.

Making Citizens?

Producing the Category of Foreigner

As discussed in chapter 2, the Rancière type of understanding of categories is taken up by BM scholarship to examine the implication of categories for resistance. BM scholarship interrogates how categories not only generate subjects out of the social order and the subjects that challenge this order. I argued that BM scholarship draws on examples that show how people challenge the categories given to them by proposing other categories. For instance, from the category of illegal immigrant to refugees or the category of asylum seekers to human. In the case of the Nambu FWC, its members challenged the category of foreigner to replace it with the category of citizens.

As I will argue in this section, it is through another linguistic boundary, in this case, between English-speaking and non-English-speaking union members that category-vocabularies are once again enacted, this time to produce the category of citizen. At the same time, however, the production of category of citizen was not completed because it also included someone who could not be identified as such. The category of citizen was created to make English-speakers dominate the realm of speech, which embodied the Tozen and the idea for which it stood. Meanwhile, those who could not speak English pretended that they were part of this category of citizen by approving

Producing Categories for Resistance

the idea of the Tozen even though they were excluded from the realm of speech as ‘foreigners’. In this way, the category of citizen included an excess within the category of foreigner.

On 22 April 2010, the Nambu FWC declared its independence from the Nambu and held the first Tozen union convention which about 40 people attended. The straw poll taken at the Great Debate that was held in January showed that the majority of participants voted for independence.²⁸ Therefore, it was not surprising to see that 6 branches of the 11 Nambu FWC branches left the Nambu to join the Tozen. These branches were the Simul Academy International Teachers Union (SAITU), Linguaphone, ALTs, Japan Times, Sophia University International Teachers and Employees Union, and Syndicat des Employés de l’Institut franco-japonais (SEI). As of October 2012, the Tozen had new union branches including the Philippine National Bank (PNB), the University Workers Union, Union des Personnels Locaux du Lycée Franco-Japonais de Tokyo, and the Gaba language school branch.²⁹

Among the Tozen members, the Tozen union was identified as the union born out of the Nambu FWC. To its members, the Tozen was a continuation of the Nambu FWC, another chapter of the Nambu FWC. For instance, the Tozen union emblem says ‘Zenkoku Ippan Tokyo General Union · 1956’ in English and Japanese. 1956 was the year when the community union, *Jonan Chusho Godo Roudoukumiai*, was established and was later developed into

²⁸ Notes from my attendance at the Great Debate. The straw poll showed that 2 people opposed the idea of independence, 13 people were for independence, and 5 people were undecided.

²⁹ See the Tozen website at <<http://tokyogeneralunion.org/>> [Accessed 30 October 2012].

Producing Categories for Resistance

the Nambu. In the description of the Tozen history, both the original local community union and the Nambu are introduced as ‘Tokyo General Union’s predecessor’, suggesting that the Tozen was not created out of nothing, but was established as part of the history that can be traced back to the Nambu and the Nambu FWC.³⁰ The Tozen included several links to organizations including labour unions and NGOs on its website. One link is to the Nambu FWC, which continues to exist in the Nambu even after the majority left for the Tozen. However, clicking the link to the Nambu FWC takes the user directly back to the front page of the Tozen, which shows that the Tozen is identified as a successor of the FWC.

Having identified its origin as the FWC, the Tozen was identified as a democratic union, unlike its predecessor, which assured that everyone have voice and is treated as such. By continuously using the key word, democracy, which originally emerged in the discussion of the independence of the Nambu FWC, the Tozen was regarded as a union which challenged and would continue to challenge, in Rancière’s term, police logic to allocate speech only to those who are identified as citizens. This can be seen by the ways in which the word, democracy, retained its significance in Tozen activities. Throughout the first convention, the word, democracy, was repeatedly used. Before the approval of the union constitution, the Tozen executives who drafted the constitution highlighted parts of the constitution that might directly affect the question of the democratic management of the union.³¹ These parts

³⁰ See Tozen’s website at <<http://tokyogeneralunion.org/about/>> [Accessed 30 October 2012]

³¹ Notes from my attendance at the Tozen convention, 22 April 2010.

Producing Categories for Resistance

included the selection process of Tozen executives, the creation of a committee which monitors executives, the open access to information on records of the union dues, and the disclosure of all records of income and spending of union finances. Later, Carlet, the first president of the Tozen, reported the event as follows:

We adopted a constitution for *the union that demands far greater democracy*, transparency and fairness, including a special constitutional commission to adjudicate disputes, complete financial transparency to all members, and strict rules on *democratic* procedures.³²

The idea of democracy was continuously invoked after the first convention of the Tozen. Before the Tozen's quarterly meetings, Carlet urged its members to attend the meeting and reminded them that the Tozen had been created by the voices of union members and that each member had a voice to contribute to the Tozen.

Please help us improve our attendance and member participation further. *The more members participate, the more democratic and successful will our union be. Help us build a truly democratic, transparent and effective labour union.*³³

At the second quarterly meeting held in September 2010, participants

³² Email circulated by Carlet, 22 April 2010. Emphasis mine.

³³ Email circulated by Carlet, July 2010.

Producing Categories for Resistance

had lively debates about whether the Tozen should accept one migrant worker from another union.³⁴ During these discussions, Tozen members explicitly and implicitly referred to the idea of democracy. For example, several union members argued that, as a ‘democratic’ union, the Tozen should be open to people from other unions. Other members asked what this new member could do for the Tozen and implied that his active participation in Tozen activities was vital for the realisation of its democratic spirit. In this way, the Tozen was characterised as a union that exercised the idea of democracy precisely because this idea was not guaranteed when they belonged to the Nambu where migrant workers were treated as ‘foreigners’. Being identified as foreigners, they were silenced during union activities. Since the Tozen was set up by migrant workers who felt dissatisfied with the speechless role consigned to them, the organisational ethos was identified with the idea of democracy, which guaranteed that everyone had a voice regardless of nationality. The Tozen was identified as a union created by people who challenged the speechless status allocated to them and was thus, a union composed of ‘foreigners’ *with* voices.

The Excess within the Category of Citizen

Crucially, the so-called democratic ideal was not as straightforward as it seemed. Because there was no common language in the Tozen, its ideal of ensuring everyone a voice was inevitably intersected with linguistic boundaries between people who spoke English as their ‘mother’ tongue, the

³⁴ Notes from my attendance at the Tozen second quarterly meeting held in September 2010.

Producing Categories for Resistance

dominant language used in the Tozen, and the others who could not speak English. As I discussed in the previous section, at the Nambu, the ability to command the citizens' tongues, Japanese, was regarded as playing the part in the social order that legitimised the citizens' monopoly of the domain of speech. For people to have their voices heard, they had to secure, usually with the help of translators, the means to ensure that their voices were understood in Japanese. This time, English became the citizens' tongue for Tozen activities. It was exemplified in the lack of provision of translation to non-English speakers, which took voices away from them.

The majority of Tozen members are English-speakers who teach English in Japan. However, they also include union members who speak languages other than English including Japanese, French, and Tagalog. People who are interested in joining the Tozen are assured that it has 'native speakers of Japanese, English, Tagalog, French, Urdu, Cebuano (a dialect in the Philippines), Ilokano (a dialect in the Philippines), Vietnamese and other languages'.³⁵ This attests to multiple languages spoken by Tozen members. For instance, one Tozen branch, SEI, is composed of both Japanese- and French-speaking union members. The PNB members are Filipinos who speak English, Tagalog, and other dialects in the Philippines. The university teachers' union and individual union members include Japanese-speaking members.

Despite multiple languages being spoken by union members, during the time of my observation, the meetings at the Tozen were dominated by English,

³⁵ See Tozen website <<http://tokyogeneralunion.org/>>.

Producing Categories for Resistance

and little, if any, attention was paid to those who could not speak English well. These union members could neither follow the discussions held at the Tozen nor participate in them. Because little translation assistance was offered, non-English speaking union members became more silent throughout the meetings. Meanwhile, the discussions were dominated by English speakers who tried to realise the democratic ethos of the Tozen. In this way, the latter became the 'citizen' who had authentic political voices, while the former were made into 'foreigners' who were excluded from the domain of speech.

This switch in roles was seen in several instances that took place in the Tozen including the first convention of the Tozen that was held on 25 April 2010. For some members, the first convention was a long-awaited event. The room was filled with expectation and enthusiasm. As a union member of the Tozen, I too was excited about the occasion. When the meeting began, some English-speaking Tozen members explained the purposes of the Tozen and the significance to the Japanese labour movement of forming a new union. In the middle of the discussion, one member from the U.S.A. quietly approached me to ask if I could translate the entire discussion and speeches for three Japanese lawyers who were present at the meeting. The meeting lasted for about 4 hours. I was a little surprised to realise that others had not even prepared at least one interpreter to ensure that all Tozen members could follow the discussions. Surely, the organisers of the Tozen convention must have known that there were non-English speaking people in attendance. After all, the SEI, one of the original branches that joined the Tozen, was composed of Japanese and French speakers. When the discussions moved on

Producing Categories for Resistance

and executives repeatedly emphasised the democratic union management of Tozen, I noticed that some Japanese members with the SEI branch were puzzled about the contents of the discussion and a French-speaking union member translated and explained (in French) what was being discussed for them. Later, when I interviewed the same French-speaking union member, he expressed his concern that some Japanese members at his union could not understand English well, and for them, it had been and would continue to be, difficult to follow the discussions held in English at the Tozen.³⁶

The lack of translation arrangement continued in subsequent quarterly meetings. No translation was offered to non-English speaking members during the first quarterly meeting where some Japanese-speaking executive members were present. One Japanese executive was a finance officer who gave a report in Japanese during one quarterly meeting. This report was translated into English by an English-speaker at the Tozen. However, the interpretation stopped immediately after her report. Two union members asked the finance officer questions, one of which was related to the method of collecting dues, while the other was about which members and branches of the Tozen were not paying dues. One question was translated for her by an English-speaker, yet the other was not translated and was instead answered by an English-speaking Tozen executive. The finance officer did not ask for an interpretation. In fact I was unsure whether she even knew that she received two questions. For the rest of the meeting, I wondered how she and another Japanese-speaking union executive could follow discussions that were

³⁶ Interview with a former Nambu FWC member, 8 May 2010.

Producing Categories for Resistance

dominated by native English-speakers. Having known each other since the time of the Nambu FWC, many English-speaking Tozen members knew that their English level was not nearly sufficient to follow discussion held by normal native speakers. In fact, the only time a translation was provided was when these Japanese-speaking executives had to report their designated tasks. Despite the tacit acknowledgement that they could not speak English well, no one seemed to bother to translate the discussion for them. Translation was only provided when these two Japanese executives had to present reports about their designated tasks.

The idea of democracy was continuously used to justify the need to create a new union and, once the Tozen was set up, to symbolise the importance of having voices in union activities. In this respect, the lack of translation for non-English speakers was crucial because it resulted in a situation where some Tozen members could not join in union activities and express their own voices. Just as FWC members had to acquire the citizens' tongue to ensure their voices were heard, non-English speakers at the Tozen were excluded from the domain of speech that was ruled by English speakers.³⁷

³⁷ The similar dynamics between English-speakers and non-English speakers can be seen in the GU in Osaka. The GU has 400 to 450 members who work in the western part of Japan (the *Kansai* region). About 80% of its members are English-speaking people. It also includes Brazilian migrant workers (30 to 50 people), Filipinos (about 20 people), and the remaining are Japanese. Smith, a GU member serving as an executive position at the GU, noticed that, although Brazilian members constituted the second largest group in the GU, they largely remained silent in GU meetings. He also noticed that some members did not even read the documents distributed at meetings, rather, simply threw them away once the meetings finished. Tesolat argued that this was not because they had no interest in union activities, but because they could not understand English. He expressed his surprise when he attended a meeting only for the Brazilian

Producing Categories for Resistance

Despite its persistent emphasis on the idea of democracy and the importance of every union member having a voice, English speakers dominated the discussion while little, if any, translation was provided for non-English speakers. The Tozen is a newly-founded union, just over one-year old. Therefore it is still evolving and seeking its own direction. Considering that my observations of the Tozen were concentrated between April and October 2010, there is no doubt that more time is necessary to examine how the idea of democracy is exercised in Tozen union activities. However, during the initial period when the Tozen was set up, it was hard to ignore the stark contrast between the assertion of the idea of democracy and the lack of attention to non-English speakers.

The lack of translation for non-English speakers suggests the category of citizen reappeared in the Tozen. In this case, those who monopolized the domain of speech were English-speaking union members. As I have argued, the Tozen established its own identity within the struggle between the Nambu FWC and the Nambu. Before its independence, the idea of democracy was used to challenge the identification of Nambu FWC members as foreigners. As such, Nambu FWC members were excluded from union activities because they were treated as speechless and perceived as being only in need of help from Japanese citizens. Since independence, the idea of democracy continuously played a significant role in characterising the Tozen. Specifically, it was used to demonstrate that its members were now assured that their voices were understood politically.

members (held in Portuguese) and saw them actively leading the discussion. Interview with Smith, 21 June 2010. The name has been changed.

Producing Categories for Resistance

Despite such assurance, Tozen members reproduced the categories of citizen and foreigner alongside the linguistic boundaries between citizens' tongues and foreign tongues. By offering little translation to non-English speakers and, in general, paying little attention to translation arrangements, the Tozen generated the message that, if one were to be part of a 'democratic' union where everyone had voice, that voice had to be understood in English. Because some non-English speakers could not follow the discussion, their ability to voice their claims politically, which was supposed to be guaranteed based on the democratic ideals of Tozen, was taken away at union activities where English was used exclusively with no translation. As English-speakers monopolized the domain of speech at the Tozen, they became the 'citizens', which was the same category that took voices away from FWC members. Just as the Japanese monopolized the domain of speech in Nambu, English-speakers monopolized it as belonging to 'citizens' while excluding non-English speakers and relegating the speechless status to them as 'foreigners' in the Tozen.

However, making citizens in the Tozen also indicates that the category of citizen meant including its own opposite, foreigner. As I demonstrated in this section, the democratic spirit was the core identity of Tozen and what united the Tozen. The category of citizen was produced through this domain of speech. Because English-speaking members exclusively monopolized speech, the Tozen became an embodiment of another 'citizen' category that exercised its ability to be heard. However, it is this very same union that non-English speakers identified themselves with and decided to be a part. Regardless of

Producing Categories for Resistance

which languages they spoke, the Tozen included people who sympathized with the need to open the union to anyone. For example, a Japanese-speaking executive had to eventually lose her other union-related jobs because of her membership to the Tozen which was ostracised by other Nambu-related labour unions soon after its establishment.³⁸ Despite this consequence, she decided to continue her membership in the Tozen. For some union members, such as SEI members, joining the Tozen was also not an easy choice because changing the union could affect labour disputes.³⁹ Despite these odds, the non-English speakers approved of the Tozen cause and identified as members of the union that guaranteed everyone a voice. In this way, what equated the democratic ideals of the Tozen to the category of citizen also equated the group of people categorised as foreigners.

In this way, the category of citizen included that of foreigner within itself. Both categories are supposedly the mirror image of what the other lacks or have: what citizens have is what foreigners lack. And yet, in the context where people joined the Tozen specifically to sympathize its democratic ethos, the English-speaking unions, who were categorised as citizens and non-English speakers as foreigners cast the same image of themselves onto the Tozen, which embodied the domain of speech. In this way, non-English speakers within the Tozen became, in a way, nameless. They were not identified as 'citizens' because of the linguistic boundaries drawn between English-speakers and non-English speakers. However, they were

³⁸ Informal conversation with Carlet, March 2010.

³⁹ This was why several unions remained in the Nambu FWC instead of joining the Tozen.

Producing Categories for Resistance

included into the domain of 'citizens' through their participation in the Tozen and because they identified with the Tozen to sympathise the same ideals of democracy that resulted in making citizens.

Chapter Conclusions

The aim of the present chapter was to carry on the investigation on the tenacity of category-vocabularies that started in the previous chapter. In what contexts do people resort to categories of citizen and foreigner? What differences and commonalities exist among various instances where these category-vocabularies are used in activism? This chapter looked at the examples of the Nambu FWC and the Tozen to examine these two questions. Some findings in this chapter correspond to those in the previous chapter, while others do not. What is markedly different from the findings in chapter 3 and the present chapter is that, while chapter 3 demonstrated that people tacitly accepted the category of foreigner that assigned them speechless status, the present chapter demonstrated that Nambu FWC members openly challenged the category of foreigner and questioned the agencies assigned by this category. I argued that Nambu FWC members refused to be accepted as foreigner and resisted the speechless and voicelessness that was imposed on them through the category of foreigner. To challenge the category of foreigner, the Nambu FWC drew on the idea of democracy to demonstrate their ability to speak politically and demanded that they were treated as equal speaking partners to the Japanese (citizen) members.

Drawing the works of Rancière together with Anzaldúa, I argued that

Producing Categories for Resistance

the ways in which people are implicated in the politics of categories is through an intertwined thread between categories and linguistic boundaries. Categories of citizen and foreigner were produced alongside linguistic boundaries. The ability to have one's voice politically heard was linked with the ability to have one's voice understood in the citizens' tongue, in this case, Japanese. This link between categories and language corresponds to the findings of the previous chapter where the categories of citizen and foreigner were produced together with specific linguistic practices.

Another crucial commonality between the previous and present chapters is that, despite different ways in which people engage in the politics of categories, they both pointed to the same political significance whereby categories failed to identify people with names. In the previous chapter, the political significance of categories was that the category of foreigner did not name people who were identified under this name because of pretence. People pretend to be 'foreigners' who are speechless in order to achieve instrumental gains, that is, to solve their own labour disputes.

In the present chapter, the implication of the politics of categories is that the category of citizen is no longer able to identify the people under the same category because it includes an excess. Because the Tozen emerged out of the struggle to challenge the speechless status assigned to the people categorised as foreigner, the category of citizen embodied as English-speaking members, represented the democratic space of the Tozen. Non-English speakers were relegated to the category of foreigner because of the lack in their ability to have their voices understood in English. At the same time, as the members of

Producing Categories for Resistance

Tozen, people identified as foreigner also represented what Tozen stood for. They sympathized with the cause of the Tozen and believed that they were part of the Tozen where everyone's voice was assured. In this way, the category of citizen included the category of foreigner as non-English speakers identified themselves as the Tozen, which embodied the category of citizen.

By using the same phrase I used in the previous chapter, it can be said that non-English speaking union members *pretended* to be 'citizens' to challenge the speechlessness that was attached the category of foreigner by joining the Tozen and identifying themselves as exercising the democratic spirit of the Tozen. Hence, the category of citizen failed to represent everyone under its category because it included the excess, the people called 'foreigners', as its opposite figure. Although the present and previous chapters examined different ways in which people engaged in the parts played by category-vocabularies, one by accepting them and the other by challenging them, both point to the same implication that there are cracks in the categories and that categories fail to represent what they are supposed to represent.