

Balancing Ethnic Identity: The Life History of a Filipino-Japanese Woman

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Abstract: The author interviewed a 23 year-old woman who is ethnically “mixed” with Filipino and Japanese heritage. Given that she has been a student and worker both in the Philippines and in Japan, she faces the dilemma of choosing the country in which she feels comfortable enough to settle and call home. In the interview, she expressed her candid opinion about her experiences in the two countries, and her complex feelings in psychologically choosing the place she considers “home.” This study offers an analysis about her life history, and discusses the implications of what it means to be identified as “mixed.” The discussion is based on the ideas of Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995), a Jewish philosopher, who has offered a unique postmodern view about the interpersonal relationship and society.

Keywords: Life history, ethnic identity, the Philippines, Japan, Levinas

1. Introduction

This is a story of inner conflict and resolution in a young woman, who is biologically related to multiple ethnicities. If ethnicity is primary among various types of identities, as Phinney and Rotheram (1987) contend, then what is the identity of such an individual? Is it a compound of opposing multiple identities?

In the present study, the life history of a young woman is described and discussed. The discussion is based on the ideas from *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* by Emmanuel Levinas (1961), unless otherwise specified. Most of Levinas’ ideas about the self can be found in this early work.

Levinas (1961) uses the term “the I” to explain his conceptualization of the self. The I is absolute and separate from “the Other.” The Other is compared to “the Stranger” in that it is from another world that the I can never reach. In psychology, identity is considered relatively stable. It can be represented by such a notation as “Today’s I am the same person as I was yesterday” (cf. Erikson, 1959). Levinas (1961) explains that “the world, foreign and hostile, should, in good logic, alter the I,” that is, the I is an unstable being that is always subject to change:

The I is not a being that always remains the same, but is the being whose existing consists in identifying itself, in recovering its identity throughout all that happens to it. It is the primal identity, the primordial work of identification. (p.36)

The I is also settled in that the I is confined “at home” against the world. “The way of the I

against the other of the world consists in sojourning, in identifying oneself by existing here at home with oneself" (p. 37). The I is maintained by "sojourning" in the world, confined "at home," though the I seeks for a different view from where it sojourns. The I is a form of "the same," or the subjective view that is experienced only by the self. Levinas combines the term "the I" with "egoism." The I and the Other are not compatible. The I can never be the Other, and the Other is not another "I."

The relationship between individuals is built through the symbolic interaction of a language. The language is not the world itself but a symbol that represents the world. In a sense, the language works to distance the individuals. The individuals and the world are apart and can never be "the same." Levinas (1961) describes "To be in relationship while absolving oneself from this relation is to speak" (p. 215). Here "to speak" is equivalent to the language. However, the I holds the Desire for the Other. Hence, the face-to-face relation between the I and the Other. At least two individuals are required to engage in the act of communication. The I cannot help changing through the face-to-face interaction. Such a relationship is the basis of "ethics," which is formed through the interaction of people. The I exists in relation to the Other, but the I and the Other are separate to the end.

As a Jewish philosopher who was once kept in confinement during World War II, Levinas often implies the violence due to cultural conflict. But he seems to avoid the use of the term "culture," which is difficult to define and tends to be ambiguous. "Culture" is often a convenient construct or invention (Strauss & Quinn, 1997). Instead, Levinas focusses on the relationship and interaction of individuals. His unique ideas may shed fresh light on the discussion to explore the meaning of identity.

The present study adds another example to Kamada (2009), which presents interviews with adolescent women in Japan who are so called "half," "double," or "mixed." Kamada supports Bhabha's view (2004) that the world is in the process toward hybridity, which leads to a new stage called "third space." The present study explores the meaning of "third space," though this discussion is limited to the case of a single individual.

2. Method

The author interviewed a twenty-three year-old woman named Sachi (a pseudonym). Sachi's mother tongue is Tagalog, and she also uses English and Japanese. Her mother is Filipino and her father is Japanese. She considers herself as ethnically "half" or "double," although she is also distantly related to the Spanish. In mutual agreement, the interview was conducted in Japanese between August 23rd and September 1st, 2011, excluding the weekend. Sachi talked about her life as she remembered.

When the author had interviews with Sachi, she was a language assistant for a high school. The author was a temporary language teacher at the same school. This fact may have influenced the interviews: Sachi focused on the languages and ethnic differences, which are the common interests for both the interviewee and the interviewer. On the other hand, when interviewed, she was "having a pleasant time" expressing herself. It seems that these themes or topics are actually crucial for her and what she wanted to talk about.

The interviewer/author loosely followed the interview strategy of narrative counseling (cf.

Monk, Winslade, Crocket & Epston, 1997). Because the relationship between the counselor and the client is equal, this approach is often used for multicultural counseling sessions. The author believes that the power relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee has been resolved to a sufficient level for a research study.

According to Atkinson (1998), a “life history” means a reconstruction of the life story as told by an interviewee. On the other hand, a “life story” refers to a word by word transcription of an interviewee’s narrative. The description in the present paper is a “life history,” in that the story has been arranged and reconstructed. The total duration of the interviews with Sachi was over six hours. Because the whole interview was too long to present as it was, the descriptions were reconstructed by the author, omitting trivial talk and content that is not related directly to her life, such as general information about Filipino society. The topics that were repeatedly brought up in the interviews were also omitted. Sachi’s life history is described in the following section from a first person perspective.

3. Results: Sachi’s Life History

3.1. Parents

My father is ethnically Japanese, and his first language is Japanese. My mother is ethnically Filipino whose first language is Tagalog. When my mother talks to my father, she uses Japanese. When my mother talks to her children, she mainly uses Tagalog, with the occasional use of Japanese. My father, when at home, uses Japanese most of the time. My father tries to use Japanese as much as possible. He has made us learn Japanese by assigning drills of the Japanese letters and other study materials. Later on, I learned that my father’s intention is to make his children learn decent Japanese so that they can lead happy lives in Japan. I have two sisters (21 and 20 years old each) and a younger brother (nine years old) in the family.

My father is an earnest believer in one of the largest denominations of Mahayana Buddhism developed in Japan. My mother and staff members from my father’s firm have converted to Buddhism under the influence of my father. The children, including me, believe in the same faith.

My father used to be a jazz trumpet player. He has appeared on TV programs, but he injured his fingers in an accident, and gave up his career in music. Then he established a construction firm in the Philippines. When my father started the new business, the whole family moved to Manila, the Philippines. I was three years old then.

One of the crucial events in my life happened in the Philippines. One day, one of my relatives who works in a military visited my father in our house and consumed alcoholic drinks. The man got drunk and left his rifle at our house for his security. Some staff members from my father’s firm, with some malicious intention, informed the police of the existence of an unauthorized gun in my house. In the workers’ eyes, my father had been too strict, which made some staff members angry. My father’s success and affluence also made them envious. Eventually, more than five police officers, with a search and arrest warrant, came to our house to search for the hidden weapon. They pretended to search our house, but confiscated several valuables that had nothing to do with the gun. They actually stole our property. My father

was bailed out of jail, but the lawyer and the policemen did away with the money my mother gave them, and the case took a long time to resolve. We later found out that the workers who betrayed my father connived with the police.

Considering such a situation in the Philippines, my father decided to go back to Japan, seeking for the family's safety and comfortable life. Only my mother, who was expecting a baby at that time, stayed in the Philippines to support the staff members who stayed so that they would not lose their jobs. The children, including me, all wanted to be with our kind mother, but I had to move to Japan. I was twelve.

3.2. School life

I attended a middle school in Japan. At first, many students gathered around me out of curiosity. I was a rare person from another culture they were not familiar with. Gradually, though, they found that I was a dull person who spoke Japanese in a funny way. I looked like a Japanese individual, but was linguistically retarded.

I studied the Japanese language intensively to go to a high school. There was an evening class taught by volunteers, and I studied there twice or three times a week. The class was from six p.m. to eight p.m., but often it was extended to nine o'clock. I applied for various speech and essay contests, which became a part of my Japanese study. I actually resisted my father who had kept criticizing me about my capability. I wanted to show him my real ability. Once I wrote about my life history and it was awarded and published in a small booklet. As a result, it made my father happy.

In a high school class, my essay was applauded by the Japanese teacher. Then I was confident in my ability of the Japanese language. I made a good model to my sisters who were also learning Japanese. I studied even harder, spending much time in the school library and a public library.

When I was in high school, I worked to save the tuition fee for college. For two years, I worked for a cosmetic company. I was an assembly line worker and worked for eight hours a day, on Saturdays and Sundays. Then I started another job at a hamburger restaurant. The two jobs kept me very busy, especially on weekend, when I worked over twelve hours a day.

I studied at a two-year college with a low tuition fee that I could afford. There I was given an English teacher's license. I was elected president of the student council. At first, I was not confident as president because of my limited Japanese ability. I needed to make speeches, negotiate plans, and persuade other students to carry out the plans, all in Japanese. I worked hard to improve my Japanese, although I concealed it from others. I made every effort to make good grades at college. After all, it turned out that I was a successful president.

After graduating from college, I got a real job at a company that delivers packages to the Philippines. However, I was not very interested in this work, because I had wanted to get a job related to interpersonal services. I also wanted to prove that I can do more than what people would normally expect. The job was not that challenging. I took an entrance exam to a university in the Philippines, and I passed.

I decided to study education and became a student again. During my second year though, my financial situation wasn't stable. So I had to suspend my studies. I tried to work in the

Philippines, but I found the salary too low. I applied for the part-time English teacher's position for Japanese schools. However, I did not have a telephone at my Japanese home, so I could not take the telephone interview with them. Knowing my situation, a Japanese volunteer teacher informed me for an assistant teacher's job at a high school in Japan. In that school, I helped teach Japanese to students of foreign nationalities and facilitated their communication. In the meantime, I was still enlisted as a university student in the Philippines. I took some credits through correspondence classes.

3.3. Bullying

In the Philippines, students commute to schools by school buses, or parents drive children to school. I found it strange that, in Japan, students walk to schools even on rainy days. I thought this could mean that Japan is a very safe place. I used a school bus in the Philippines. I was transferred to another elementary school immediately after my home was invaded by the police there. My family was afraid that former staff from my father's company would kidnap me or my siblings as revenge against being fired. They might demand ransom. We were suspicious that like the previous incident, the employee might conspire with the police.

In the Philippines, at mealtime, we always dine with somebody else. In a school, too, nobody eats alone. On the contrary, in Japan, I sometimes ate lunch alone at school. The classroom was noisy, so I ate quickly and went to the library. I hid myself in an area of the library where nobody could find me, and spent the rest of the lunch time there. Particularly, in the high school, I learned to feel comfortable being alone. My friends and I were not very friendly to each other. Most of the time, I missed my family left behind in the Philippines, and I felt out of this world.

In the Philippines, children like enjoying their freedom and having fun. Children are like children, and they are enjoying their childhood. Children in Japan do not seem to enjoy their lives. It seems that they are just eager to be adults, and they do not enjoy being children. Many Japanese children are closed to people, that is, withdrawn. When I talk to a Japanese child now, they may respond: "Leave me alone." I doubt they are comfortable with other people and society.

In Japan, the family bond seems to be weak. As a result, it is not easy for an individual to have the feeling of being loved. The lack of love in general may be related to *ijime* or bullying at school. Weak children are attacked by bullies. There is no clear acknowledged reason for bullying. However, it happens when somebody does not behave like others, when somebody looks like they are showing off, when somebody is happy, when somebody is liked by teachers, or when somebody is good at anything. This somebody may be the target of bullying.

As for myself, I am Japanese in my looks, but cannot pronounce Japanese like other Japanese. Instead, I spoke English, which made other students feel I am showing off. Some students started to bully me. I intentionally did not behave like other Japanese. I did not apologize because I did not think I had to, on the contrary to the Japanese custom. A reserved girl, whom I once considered as a true friend said "Die!" behind my back because of jealousy. When another girl told me about it, I felt very sad to hear it. I got depressed and felt that I lost my trust in people.

In the Philippines, of course there were fights and arguments. However, I did not think I was a victim of bullying. I would have fought back against bullies if I was in the Philippines. In Japan, there was a problem of language for me. I could not talk back to the bullies and I just showed my feelings only through my conduct. Even if I expressed my feelings verbally, the reaction from the others might have been like “How strange your Japanese pronunciation is!” So I remained silent. In the Philippines, I was in a popular group. In Japan, I was alone.

That was a hard time for me, psychologically. However, now I think I can think positively. I have realized that there are really some good natured people. Even the bullies had a positive effect on me by teaching me how to stand my ground and to be firm. I cried but I didn't give up.

3.4. Customs

In the Philippines, people call others by saying “psst.” This is not used for teachers but used for somebody who is close to you like a friend. Adults call children with this expression. My father thinks we should not use this, saying this is only for dogs and cats. My father also suggests we should use “kayo,” a polite expression to call somebody, instead of “ikaw.” My father does not like anybody to enter his home with their shoes on. It is a Japanese custom, but we asked the others to follow it. At first, Filipino visitors were not accustomed to such a custom, but gradually, they have accepted it.

My father is old-fashioned. According to him, you cannot be too careful when you choose your boyfriend, that is, your future husband. Filipinos, in general, think that you can marry anybody if you love him or her. My father thinks that Filipinos are too easy-going. Actually Filipinos are open, and do not hide that they are in a relationship.

The people in the Philippines are generally not precise in doing things, but they are creative. The Filipino expression “Bathala na” means “God has decided.” Everything depends on God, and you can trust God, without being too serious. In contrast, Japanese are perfectionists and have a strong sense of responsibility. Although the life is harder in the Philippines, there are more suicide cases in Japan. My father, who is definitely Japanese, is serious in doing things; even more serious than other Japanese.

3.5. Father and Mother

My father is quite hard-headed or stubborn. I inherited this personality trait. My father and I sometimes argue about things and neither of us ever give up. Both of us were born in the year of the dragon, which means we are fiery and determined. My father is typically Japanese, in his personality. He hates doing what should not be done. He keeps manners, such as table manners.

My father made fun of my mother, saying that she was from a primitive tribe, meaning she was “behind” and “unclean.” My father thought he was in a higher position, because he went to a university and my mother just got a high school education. However, deep in his mind, I think he respects his wife. When he gets angry about her, he is expecting too much from her. That may be the way he expresses his tender feelings toward her. A Japanese man does not show his love toward somebody directly, and even couples do not need to show their love because they know they actually do love each other.

My mother was born to a poor farmer. She has ten siblings including herself. She appeared on some contests, and came to Japan as a singer to make a living for her family. She met my father for the first time in Japan. When my parents got married, my grandmother on my father's side purchased a house for them in the Philippines.

My mother is a typical Filipina. For her, the family is the primary concern. My mother is cheerful and easy to talk to. She is permissive. Sometimes, my father complains to my mother, saying, "Don't keep your mouth open during the meal," "Don't be slow in doing things," and so on. My mother is "small but terrible," meaning she is small physically, but she has power. On the other hand, she is always worrying about something. She says, "Don't wash your face immediately after you get home." She believes in "pasma," or folk illness, and believes that your eyes will be damaged if you do so.

3.6. Siblings

When my father's business was going well in the Philippines, my sisters and I were treated like princesses. We had maids at home. My father would say to us, "We have indulged you." I was inconsiderate then. I did not feel sorry for the street children. I was cold, I think. I just ignored them. I just thought they were unclean. I was told that they were abandoned, but I did not feel sorry. Now I think that teaching would be my way of helping those children. In the Philippines, there is a clear distinction between the rich and the poor.

I have come to behave timidly in Japan. Even when I am having fun, I am reserved. Since we came to Japan, I started to thank the staff of my father's firm. I used to be impertinent to the staff, telling them, "You can eat because of us." Probably I was angry at something else, and my anger made me talk like that. The staff would confide to my mother what I said, and tell her how much they were hurt. I now feel sorry about it. Now, I feel sorry about it and I started to be grateful to them for not just helping in my father's business, but also for taking care of our home even when we are not around. They support my family, who supported me during my stay in Japan, so they are a big help.

When one of my younger sisters graduated from the same two-year college that I attended, she said she wanted to stay in Japan. She likes it for economic reasons because she thinks she can earn more money there. She is into the "in" kind of things so she would spend money on fashionable and expensive clothes and bags. Her character is different from mine. She likes socializing and likes to hang out with friends. Although she visits the Philippines occasionally, she has spent most of her life in Japan. It was when I went to university that we became separated for a time.

My other sister is now twenty years old. She is cheerful. She works hard, and gave away her earnings when her sisters experienced economic hardships. Our family has helped each other, and she does not complain about the fact that she is the only person working when we were busy with our studies. She is strict, especially to my little brother who resembles our father.

My brother is nine years old. He barely remembers Tagalog. He did not get accustomed to the school in Japan, and he kept doing things that teachers did not want him to do. He does not have many friends of his age group. In the Philippines, he had many friends. According to

the Japanese school, my brother is under too much stress. Now, though, my brother is more accustomed to the life in Japan than he used to be. He often goes fishing with my father. My father wants him to play the trumpet in the school band, but my brother does not like it. He played hooky without our father's permission. He prefers karate rather than music. Then I talked with the school personnel, and found that he was dealing with stress.

His academic record is getting better, yet he often plays alone, which makes me feel sorry for him. I sometimes buy him gifts. When I was in Japan, he was friendly to me at first, but later he became rude to me. I was angry at him. Then I realized that he just wanted to play with me, and I changed my attitude toward him. I now know that a child can get stressed, like adults. A child cannot express him / herself in an appropriate way. My brother is a little unique, so he is sometimes bullied by other children. Children need somebody who understands them.

3.7. The Philippines and Japan

My father would often say that the Philippines are unpleasant, but I think he actually likes the country. If he really had hated the Philippines, he would have abandoned the staff members. Yet, he would have never been so serious in educating the people in the Philippines, and he would not have recommended them to convert to Buddhism.

In answering the question, "Which word will you use, 'come' or 'go,' when you move to the Philippines?" I would "go" to the Philippines when I was in Japan. I would "go" to talk with my father. But sometimes I use "come" to the Philippines. When I was in the Philippines, I would say "I come back to Japan." I rarely use "I go to Japan." I may use both "come" and "go." I cannot tell which home is my real home. I feel at home if my family is there. Japan is where I was born, and "home" may be Japan. This is my starting point. But the Philippines are my country. It suits me. When I am in Japan, I can call myself "Japanese," which is easy. In the Philippines, I can be a foreigner, saying that I am Japanese. I can change my standpoint. I used to feel like a stranger in Japan, feeling that I am different. In the Philippines, I do not feel different. There I am just unique and special. Now when I am back in Japan, I do not feel strange like I used to. This does not mean that I never feel strange 100 per cent of the time. I've just come to be able to accept myself. However, I still dislike Japan a little. If I do not take money into consideration, I prefer another country other than Japan. But I do not want strongly to escape to another country. I am grown up now, and I am in the situation that I can go and come to the two countries whenever I want. I have somebody that I can count on both in the Philippines and in Japan.

What is important for me is the relationship, particularly with my families. My boyfriend is not a bad person. I am satisfied with the relationship. I can work hard, thinking of my family.

I have compared the two countries, thinking of the bad things and good things. The evaluation of Japan is higher, in general. But I do not have a preference. Each country has its own bad things and good things. Both countries have assets. This thought makes me happy. It is a gift for me that I have these two identities. If I only had one side, either Filipino or Japanese, I would be different. I can see varieties of things, from the both sides. Then my choice in life becomes enormous. I cannot choose one, though. I am thinking of myself, and sometimes I feel lost. I am trying to gaze at myself. I think of myself, with my own words. Now I am taking

an interview with you, and I am thinking of myself. I am discovering myself. I am having a pleasant time expressing myself, but sometimes I cannot find the right words. I don't feel I am expressing everything in the right way. I am trying to express my true feelings, though I cannot do so perfectly. I cannot express myself correctly with words.

I feel pain when I hurt somebody. I do not want to cheat others. These bad things return to me. In my next life, I want to be in a good state of life. I can think like this because I am Japanese. This kind of thought is the strong point in the Japanese society. Sometimes I am doubtful about how intense my belief is, but I was born to believe in religion and raised to be a Buddhist. I want to convey this thought to my future children. I have a belief, so I have a guide in my life.

4. Discussion

4.1. Family Theme

Roughly speaking, there are two major themes in Sachi's life history told by Sachi herself. The first and main theme is her family, particularly her relationship with her father and mother. Due to the difference of ethnicity between the two parents, Sachi's ethnic identity fluctuates. The second theme is her experience as a student in Japan. She recognizes that her problems as a student are mostly related to her use of language. In addition to these themes, because of her economic situation, she had to work hard for long hours to maintain the quality of her life. However, an economic context may not need to be emphasized because she is not from a poor family either from a Filipino or Japanese standard.

Sachi was born in Japan. She found herself "half" at some point later in her life, though she may think that she knew it from the first place. The actuality is that she "became" half between Japanese and Filipina. The fact that she has been half from her birth — the cause — followed the consequence that Sachi discovered the fact. "Memory recaptures and reverses and suspends what is already accomplished in birth" (Levinas, 1961, p.56). That is, "the After or the Effect conditions the Before or the Cause" (p. 54). This seemingly reversed order is the way she encountered the I of herself.

Obviously, Sachi's father represents the Japanese-ness, and her mother the Filipino-ness. The father married the mother who is from the Philippines, but he does not seem fond of the Philippines. He always talks of the Filipino society as uncivilized and unsophisticated. Sachi thinks that she has inherited her father's personality. The I is supposed to invite the Other in "at home," and the father *is* the Other. The Other, on the other hand, cannot be explained as an alter ego, but can be what Levinas calls "alterity." In fact, she thinks she feels distant from her father. Sachi says that she is closer in relationship to her mother rather than to her father. Sachi, as her father's resemblance, has a closer relationship with her mother, the father's wife. Through this triangular relationship, she is involved in the two conditions of the Filipino-ness and the Japanese-ness.

Levinas (1961, 1998, 2001) says that the Other has the power and freedom, and escapes from the I's search. The distant relationship between the Other and the I is the "ethical" relationship. However, Levinas contends that the relationship between a parent and a child is special in that

the child is the “fecundity” and the future or the infinity. The relationship between Mother and Daughter is closed against the Other. In fact, Sachi is psychologically close to her mother. This puts the Father to the outside of the relationship to make the Other. The Other, however, talks to Sachi (the I), and Sachi responds to it. The Other holds power over the I. When Sachi hears the voice of the Other, it appears in front of her as “the face.” The face as Sachi sees it represents her “sensibility.” Levinas (1961) explains that “sensibility constitutes the very egoism of the I” (p. 59). The relationship with her father is based on the “ethics” and the father rules over Sachi as a caregiver. Sachi inherits a part of Father’s personality, as if the father’s power influenced her. The father, on the other hand, finds himself in the child (Levinas, 1961, p. 267).

The father does not like the Filipino society, saying that it is not safe. Sachi herself also saw the poor children in the Philippines negatively. This negativity is not the total negation of the Filipino-ness; the existence of the mother mitigates the negative feelings. Sachi is confined in the mother-daughter relationship of the Filipino-ness.

4.2. Society as Violence

For Sachi, the others, except her family and close friends, are described with a concept of violence that threatens her existence. “Existence” is to be in the world as a human with dignity. The others bully her when she cannot handle the second language, which makes her strongly conscious about her ethnicity. She looks like a Japanese but cannot express herself well in Japanese. The Levinasian term “murder” is the ultimate means to expel the Other, which has an enormous power over the I. As Freud (1919) says, there is an unconscious desire to annihilate somebody you know. The bullies are the Other, who declare freedom against the I. The “face” of the Other “rends the sensible” (Levinas, 1961, p. 198). Sachi is sensible about her ethnic identity, which is connected to her language problem and bullying.

The episode of investigation by the police officers is another example of violence. It represents the Filipino-ness, while the bullying at school represents the Japanese-ness. According to Sachi, this disastrous experience in the Philippines occurred because her father is Japanese. Japanese, particularly if they are rich, are prone to be targets of malicious intent. In her experiences, the Japanese-ness is violence of bullies and the Filipino-ness is violence of deceit and theft.

Here the Japanese-ness and the Filipino-ness fall under the common category of violence. In other words, the Japanese-ness and the Filipino-ness are grasped by Sachi through violence. The manifestation of violence “destroys the identity of the same” (Levinas, 1961, p. 21). On the other hand, the Filipino-ness as violence is combined with friendliness of the Filipinos. The Japanese-ness as violence is combined with richness of the Japanese society. What Sachi said was “Each country has its own good things and bad things.” The common divisor is that a society has two sides, which makes it hard for Sachi to decide which to choose as “better.” Such an ambivalent feeling forms Sachi’s fluctuating identity.

Sachi puts parentheses on her father’s negative comments about the Philippines. Sachi said that her father is always complaining about the customs of Filipinos, adding that it is because he expects them to lead better lives. Sachi said her mother is not precise in doing things, but her friendliness must be evaluated over her shortcomings. To put parentheses on what is said

once, negate it, and then offer another opinion, like a dialectic discussion, is a Levinasian way of discussion. Toward the end of the interviews, Sachi admits that both societies have positive sides, and to have experiences in both countries is good. Here, by acknowledging the societies, Sachi affirms her life.

Sachi “desires” the societies, which can never be satisfied. “The same” is absolutely separate from “the other.” In other words, the Strangers or the others belong to different societies from those of the I, despite ethnicity. The I desires the other, and “absolves” itself from the relation, according to Levinas. Although Sachi has been conscious about her ethnic identity, she is not connected to, or owned by, the ethnicity.

4.3. Religion as Desire

Religion is another Desire. It seems that religion plays an important role in binding Sachi’s family together. Religion is the ultimate structure that combines the same and the other. According to Levinas (1961), “Society must be a fraternal community,” and “monotheism signifies this human kinship” (p. 214). This “monotheism” or “religion” can be interpreted as any religion. In Sachi’s family, not only the family members but the staff members have converted to a denomination of Buddhism which the father believes in. The family and the staff are put into a “fraternity” system to form a religious community.

In the common use of the language, Sachi may be called “half” or “mixed.” However, from another aspect, she is not a mixture of the Japanese-ness and the Filipino-ness. The father is an alterity and the mother is an alterity. At the moment a person is born, he or she does not *own* an ethnicity. One’s ethnicity is aspired to and sought after, but it escapes from the seeker as “the other.” The relationship is distant. However, “the I disengages itself from the relationship, but does so within relationship with a being absolutely separated” (Levinas, 1961, p. 215). The relationship between the other and the same is not oppositional: the other is not the non-same. Separation is a relationship in which the other and the same relate to each other.

Levinas (2001) explains that “there takes place an incomparable event, prior to the participation in existence, an event of birth” (p. 8). Sachi was born neither as a Japanese nor as a Filipina. Both Japanese-ness and Filipino-ness are distant. Sachi may be conscious about her double ethnicity, but the two ethnicities are resolved into one, in that “both cultures have good and bad sides” and there are no differences in this sense. After the interviews, Sachi decided to complete her bachelor’s degree in the Philippines. Through her experience in Japan as an assistant teacher, she realized her ambition to be a teacher. Her job experience in Japan also led her to notice what she really wants to do. These experiences in Japan have connected her to the Philippines. The experiences in Japan *are* the experiences in the Philippines.

As mentioned earlier, Sachi found herself “mixed” some point after her birth. It will be better to say that she was born to be herself rather than she was born “mixed.” Although she is conscious of the ethnicity, she “desires” to escape from the societies of violence. These societies may hold the relationship with Sachi’s life, but at the same time, they are separate from the I. Sachi wishes to dwell in a home beyond “violence.” It is filled with the mother’s friendliness and the father’s diligence. It is “a home,” a single home but not two homes. In this sense, Sachi is neither “half” nor “mixed,” but is herself. Filipino-ness and Japanese-ness are

not two opposites. They are to be integrated into one in Sachi.

5. Conclusion

The I, as Levinas calls it, is a changing agent. The change of the I through the interaction with the Other eventually leads to the formation of a culture. After the inner conflicts due to the double ethnicities Sachi has inherited were resolved, she seems to be moving towards a new stage that is different from “transnational,” “diaspora,” or “internal colony” (cf. Smith & Leavy, 2009). In such a stage, socially constructed concepts as “half,” “double,” and “mixed” may be nullified.

During the interviews, the interviewer tried to grasp the interviewee’s life story as narrative. Expressing one’s life story as a narrative is known to have a healing effect (Monk, Winslade, Crocket & Epston, 1997). The interviewee of the present study seemed willing to talk about her life, and seemed to find some meaning in it. However, the present study focusses only on the philosophical meaning at the point when the interview was conducted. Further and more detailed research and analysis may help one’s real life become more meaningful.

In the interviews, the interviewee talked about several customs, events, and things related to the Philippines and Japan. These talks were discarded. These topics may have a deep meaning for the interviewee, but they have not been discussed in the present paper. This is one of the limitations of the present study.

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