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Blasian and Proud: Examining Racialized Experiences Amongst Half Black and Half Japanese Youth in Japan

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Examining Racialized Experiences Amongst Half Black and Half Japanese Youth in Japan

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by

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Acknowledgements

"You know what's that doubt? That's white supremacy," my friend, speaker-poet-activist Henry Gonzalez told me during a time of deep self-doubt and stress. Despite being on the verge of tears, I erupted into laughter; because it was true.
 I highlight these moments to acknowledge the hardships because this was no easy process.

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Afro-Dominicana y orgulla.

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Introduction

In 2015, Ariana Miyamoto was crowned the title of Miss Japan and became the first mixed race woman to represent the nation. While some were happy to see Miyamoto become a symbol of Japan's diversity; others were not pleased. Miyamoto identifies as bi-racial, her mother is Asian (e.g. Japanese) and her father is of black ancestry (e.g. African American). The public gaze did not see Miyamoto as 'completely' Japanese; many Japanese believed Miyamoto did not qualify to represent Japan. However, Miyamoto stated in an interview with *Al Jazeera*, "My appearance isn't Asian but I am Japanese very much on the inside."[1] Due to the criticism Miyamoto faced, she became more vocal about Japan's views on race and challenged the normalized image of who qualifies as Japanese. Winning the title became something monumental for Miyamoto; she wanted to become a voice for the *hafu* population of Japan. Hafu defines those who are half Japanese[2] and while some find this term offensive, Miyamoto stated in an interview, "it sounds strange but for us mixed kids we need this word Hafu—it gives us an identity."[3]

Even before the controversy involving Miyamoto's win, Japan's understanding of not only race but also blackness intrigued me. At first, I wanted to explore how Japanese society, as a whole, perceives and understands blackness. The hair-braiding salon I encountered in Kyoto inspired my thesis' idea. I could not help but be surprised by the

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[1] Miss Japan challenges the norm [Video file]. (2015, September 28). Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dXBsFfnCOks

[2] Although it is true that someone cannot be 'half' of anything, it is important to note that in the context of Japanese society, race, ethnicity, and nationalism is molded into one and I will further discuss this history in the following pages.

[3] BBC News. (2015, June 6). "People don't believe I am Japanese" says Miss Japan - BBC News [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-5sHglFbO8&index=4&list=PLcla_n5Ev3QkLkVMKOouKcJYJGhz6gzIi

numerous reminders of black culture in one of Kyoto's shopping districts. I found a variety of stores that sold remnants of black culture; Hip-hop themed clothing stores, Rastafarian shops, hair braiding salons; and with all of these components combined I questioned Japan's understanding of blackness. Is blackness only understood in terms of commodity or as something else? Are connotations of blackness similar to those that exist in the U.S? I decided to navigate these questions of blackness in Japan through the lenses of a specific population—the hafu population of Japan mixed with African ancestry. Examining race relations through a mixed raced population will provide an understanding of blackness from a societal perspective to the narrower beliefs amongst a group. Through my research I found Japan comprehends blackness from a perspective influenced by Western narratives and images. Before I came to this conclusion I decided to read deeper into Miyamoto's life story, understand her upbringing, and see how Miyamoto herself identifies. As I read more articles on Miyamoto's story I started to ask questions about Japanese society, race, and blackness. I first started my research with the question: how do black Japanese youth navigate race and identity in a country that possibly does not emphasize race? How does race function in Japan? In other words, are participants allowed to freely express a cultural side that is not Japanese? Do these places that commodify blackness become a place of retreat for black hafus? Additionally, how does Japanese society perceive blackness? What are the stereotypes in Japan attached to *kokujins* (black people)?

I settled for Tokyo as my place of research because of my connection with a friend who lives in Chiba. This friend, who I will call Sabrina, is also a hafu, and when I told her about my project she expressed interest. Sabrina identifies as a white Japanese

(i.e. white hafu) however, most of her friends are black hafus residing in Tokyo. Through Sabrina I met Dani; who allowed me to access a broader network of black hafus. Throughout my research, I use the term black hafu to describe Japanese youth who are mixed with African ancestry; I use this term to distinct their experiences from other hafus and the rest of Japanese society. I also use the term black hafu to not only acknowledge their race but also their Japanese ethnicity.

Japan uses similar discriminatory rules in addition to stereotypes and narratives used in the West to oppress black populations, therefore, the experiences of my participants are telling of Japan's understanding of blackness and race. It is unfortunate to say Japan's comprehension of blackness does not surprise me considering the universal narrative surrounding blackness. Although Japan does not use a system to the one enacted in the U.S (i.e. Western systematic racism) these images influenced by this system freely circulate through Japanese media, news, advertisements, etc. Examining the narratives of black hafus can provide a good window to see race in Japan and grasping the narratives of other populations silenced by Japanese racial politics. Lastly, I write this project to expose a narrative not widely discussed when the topic of hafus arises. Black hafus are very much part of the conversation on Japan's discrimination against mixed race. Furthermore, I highlight their experiences because they often more difficult due to Japanese' comprehension of blackness.

Japanese Brazilians: Unpacking Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality in Japan

Examining Japan's history will allow us to understand how race, ethnicity, and nationality came to be interchangeable terms within Japanese society. I will first examine the history of Japanese Brazilians then dive into a discussion explaining the historical

events before and after World War II in which prompted these terms to overlap. I would like to acknowledge that race; ethnicity and nationality are all social constructs however these terms are significant to my project and the argument I present. In my discussion of Japanese-Brazilians I classify race as an individual's physical attributes (i.e. phenotype features), ethnicity then becomes the culture practiced (e.g. Brazilian, American, Japanese) or the cultural upbringing of individual, and lastly, the term nationality refer to an individual's place of birth. Although I provide clear-cut definition for these terms, when examined in the Japanese framework the definitions become less clean and more complex. Throughout my interview most of the participants rarely referenced to the terms race, ethnicity, or nationality; instead, they pull from the terms black and Japanese. My participants associate black culture as "material artifacts and personality traits that are associated (primarily) with African Americans and that narrowly construct black culture as youth-oriented, male-dominated, and principally heterosexual" (Russell 1998: 115). For many of my participants, race and ethnicity were interchangeable when discussing black culture. Yet, I would caution that the definition these terms (i.e. black, race, and ethnicity) alter due to the context of the chapter.

The Japanese-Brazilians first came to Japan at a time when the country's global economic dominance was at a pause, and the nation was experiencing a labor shortage. Usually, countries turn to the help of cheap labor provided by immigrant workers as a way to stabilize their economy. Business companies affected by the shortage were now putting pressure on Japanese government to revisit immigration policies (Tsuda 2001:62). For companies, allowing in an immigrant population became the solution to stabilizing their business. The Japanese immigration bureau had come to an agreement with business

companies and created new immigration policies that were more lenient. However there was a catch: the only group benefiting from Japan's new immigration policies were *nikkeijin*, a term used to describe anyone born outside of Japan but of Japanese descent. The *nikkeijin* benefited the most from Japanese immigration laws; they were easily issued visas and given permission to work full-time for an unlimited number of hours (Roth 2003:340). While the majority of the *nikkeijin* population derived from Brazil, small groups of Peruvian Japanese benefited from these new policies. In contemporary Japan, the presence of Japanese-Brazilians brought into question Japan's societal views on ethnicity, race, and nationality.

The government specifically selected *nikkeijin* for the purpose of social coherence and maintaining Japan's ethnic sameness. By using *nikkeijin* as a labor force, the Japanese government does not only appease the business companies' request for cheap labor but also maintains the pre-existing order of 'oneness' in Japanese society. The government also believed non-*nikkeijin* foreigners would have a difficult time adjusting while they assumed those of Japanese descendant will experience no difficulty due to their Japanese lineage (Tsuda 200:59). The government came to the conclusion that Japanese-Brazilians had the capability to relate to Japanese culture because of their Japanese ancestry. Here, the Japanese government bends the definitions of race and nationality while ignoring ethnicity all together. They acknowledged that Japanese-Brazilians share the same race (i.e. Japanese/Asian) however they were quick to assume that Japanese-Brazilian practiced Japanese culture. The *nikkeijin* were expected to partake in Japanese culture because of their ancestry. They were expected to actively practice the Japanese culture, yet the error here is the assumption that *nikkeijin*,

specifically Japanese-Brazilians, were in the presence of Japanese culture in Brazil. The presence of Japanese-Brazilians disrupted the assumption that with the same racial ancestry cultural sameness is bound to exist. Hence, it was expected that Japanese-Brazilians would know Japanese culture and language because of their "Japanese faces", and not surprisingly, many of the nikkeijin failed to live up to this expectation. In this context, to be Japanese does not only mean to have Japanese ancestry but to possess "linguistic and cultural competence." (Ezawa 2005: 1551).

The intentions behind the open immigration policies were to attract the nikkeijin in order to maintain a racially homogenous society. However, the government first disguised their actual motives by making the claim that they were giving those of Japanese descent an opportunity to "explore their ethnic heritage and visit their ancestral homeland" (Tsuda 2000: 63). By asserting the narrative that nikkeijin are being given the opportunity to explore their ancestral roots, the Japanese government posed their political agenda as something innocent when in fact there existed a darker undertone (i.e. racial oneness). The government's decision was undoubtedly racially oriented; however; they argued these changes as emphasizing identity and pilgrimage.[4] By framing their agenda with as "going back to one's homeland narrative," the government's agenda did not look racially motivated (Yamanaka 1996:78).[5]

The general assumption that Brazilian-Japanese would adjust to Japanese society because of their ancestry blurs the line between ethnicity and race. We now understand

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[4] Many of the visas issued by Japanese government were given to second or third nikkeijin, thus, their connection to Japan is distanced by two generations. If nikkeijin were truly returning to Japan to understand their Japanese culture and ancestry, then this trip could be understood from the perspective identity and discovering the self.

[5] Even though the Japanese government tries to create a coherent society it is important to acknowledge that Japan is not as homogenous as it appears to be and there are different ethnic groups that have existed in Japan for years (i.e Ainu, Okinawans).

those who have Japanese features (to possess apparent Asian ancestry) are assumed to

have an understanding of Japanese culture. There was a disregard for nikkeijin's culture

and the number of years each generation of Japanese spent away from Japanese culture;

in spite of these factors, Japanese society still expected this population have a sense

familiarity with Japanese culture. Those who failed to demonstrate knowledge of

Japanese culture were often shunned and not viewed as 'true' Japanese. If possessing

Japanese facial features or Japanese ancestry does not qualify someone as Japanese, then

the question becomes what does it mean to be Japanese in contemporary Japan? Does

someone need more than just Japanese ancestry to qualify as Japanese? There continues

to be no clear distinction between race and nationality in Japan, and we can see this

through the Japanese census. If one takes a look at Japan's census there is no mention of

race. In fact, according to the Japanese census, if one parent is a Japanese citizen then the

child is also Japanese regardless of the child's potential ties with another race or ethnicity.

The census classifies Japanese as "those who have Japanese citizenship,"[6] therefore, it is

possible for a child of multi-race/ethnicity to be recognized as Japanese, and by

classifying the child as just Japanese on record there then exist an illusion of

homogeneity within Japanese society.

The introduction of Japanese-Brazilians was not the first-time lines between race,

nationality, and ethnicity were blurred. During the 1930s, the talk of nationalism was

closely linked to race; there existed no clear distinction between nationality and race

since the Japanese viewed the people of their nation as descendants of a pure race.

Japan's nationalism was greatly influenced by the fact that they were never colonized by

a Western nation. While other countries in Asia experienced Western colonization, Japan

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[6]An Explanation of Terms. http://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/kokusei/index.htm

was excluded from this narrative. Thus, Japan "[developed] an attitude toward weaker peoples and nations as arrogant and contemptuous as the racism of the Westerns," (Dower 1993:271) and understood themselves to be one the Great Powers and the greatest race of Asia (Dower 1993:271). As the leading race, the Japanese government believed it was their responsibility to rule over other Asian countries, a belief that influenced many of the monumental events of World War II.

John Dower suggests in his book, *Japan in Peace and War*, that Japanese racial superiority derived from the idea of elevating the self (1993:272). This elevation of the self comes from the belief that the people of Japan derive from the Yamato line, a race comprised of direct descendants of Jimmu, the grandson of the Sun goddess, giving the Japanese celestial qualities (Dower: 1993:273). While the Western white nations had white supremacy to defend and solidify their claim of superiority, the Japanese used the ideology of pure race to justify their qualification as a leading the race over other Asian countries. The concept of purity became "integral to Japanese thinking [and] peculiar to the Japanese as a race and culture" (Dower 1993:277).

During the 1930s this was known as *shido minzoku*, the belief that Japan was the leading race of Asia because of their connection to the Yamato line, in other words, their connection to pureness. Dower describes Japan's racial beliefs as "blood nationalism of an exceptionally potent," form (1993:273). This internalized narrative became the foundation for Japan's imperialist ideologies during World War II. Japan possessed a patronizing attitude towards other Asian countries, viewing other nations as too childish to govern themselves, and claiming to lead these countries in the right the direction (Dower 1993:279). Interestingly enough, while Japan perceived itself as a global power

many Western nations failed to fathom Japan as an intimidating force. The West, mainly the United States, understood their lack of Western intervention as primitive; thus, it was common for Japan to be viewed as a primitive nation. In American politics, Japanese people were depicted as monkeys in order to emphasize their "backward ways" (Dower 1993:323). Japan in many ways wanted to prove to the West that they too were civilized and worthy of being considered a superpower.

In *Silencing the Past*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot mentions the importance in numbers when certain populations decide to participate in a certain events or celebrations (Trouillot 1995), the bigger the popularity or the following; the more normalized a narrative becomes (Trouillot 1995). Thus, Japan's belief in itself as a pure race, and the leading race of Asia was accepted because of the high numbers of Japanese that perpetuated and celebrated this belief. The Japanese government held this belief with such a strong grip that they attempted to colonize the other nations of Asia (i.e. China, Korea, Taiwan, Okinawa etc.). Trouillot also suggests that the higher number of participants creates a "strong allusion to the multitude of [witnesses]" to a specific historical event (1995:116), in other words, if a set number of people encourage and believe a specific narrative about an historical occurrence as true, they in turn become the set witnesses to that event. The witness in Trouillot's case holds a special place in the significance of certain historical narratives; they establish the former event as real, and without these witnesses this event will cease to exist. While one narrative is elevated, others are ignored and we see this when the Japanese comprehension of racial superiority involves the silencing of others. Japan's ideology on their nation's racial origins purposefully excludes the Ainu, Okinawans, and the other marginalized groups of Japan.

Furthermore, Trouillot argues, "The imposed silence on ignored events is replaced with the power of celebrated narratives (1995:118)." By ignoring the marginalized communities that exist in Japan, the Japanese government can proceed to paint a picture of a racially homogenized nation, while continuing to perpetuate their imagined racial purity.

Japan would once more find itself trying to prove its dominance to the West during the global economy of 1960s. The Japanese government had the intention of being part of the global economy; however, they faced the dilemma of participating in a global economy that was mostly dominated by Western powers. They faced the risk of having to assimilate to Western ideologies in order to have access to the global economy. Japan acknowledged that in order to be part of the global economy it would have to Westernize; however, they wanted to continue to still possess Japanese values (Waswo 1996:101). Thus, the concept of nihonjinron was established in order to preserve Japanese values even in the face of having to adopt components of Western cultures. Its purpose was to "intensify a shift in popular attitudes towards Japan's past, and, by extension, towards its present and future course," (Waswo 1996:99). This pride in the past would greatly influence Japan's comprehension on its own past. Ann Waswo writes, "[during the early 1970s] a flood of books and essays on a wide range of topics related to Japanese culture and Japan's role in the contemporary world," (1996:99), this phenomena of the nihonjinron established points of references in which Japan had a significant role in world history thus, establishing nationalism and enhancing the Japanese-self. In a way, the motive behind nihonjinron was to reassure Japanese of their past greatness, their present greatness, and the path of greatness that awaits them in the future.

Japan successfully entered the economic market and became one of the leading economies during the 1970s up until the 1990s. Japan's reign as a successful economic nation that dominated the global economy established its position as a global superpower. This economic success came to a stop during the 1990s when the country experienced a shortage of labor resulted in the migration of nikkeijin in Japan. Much of Japan's racial understanding is configured around a Western versus Asian binary. In other words, Japan imagines its own lack of superiority in comparison to the West while also imagining its superiority in relation to the rest of Asia. Japan's self-realization of not being white yet, also holding at high value their racial purity over other nations, placed the country in a space of liminality (Turner 1969). The fragments of this racial history exist today in Japanese society but in a subtler manner and one can see this through the experiences of black hafus. Following their experiences in Japan can provide insight on Japan's comprehension of race and blackness. How are participants navigating these spaces? How are they perceived? What challenges do they face within this context? These are questions one should be mindful when reading this my project.

Methods

I stayed in the small neighborhood of *Shin-okubo*, known as Tokyo's little Korean Town, for two and a half weeks between the months of December and January. I divided my time between interviewing participants, exploring the streets of Harajuku, and going to the neighborhoods of Roppongi and Shibuya. I met my participants through my friend, Dani, who took interest in my project and passed my proposal along to her friends whom most were black hafus. Even before my trip to Tokyo, I contacted the majority of my participants and a week before my trip I confirmed six interviews.

At the end of my trip I conducted a total of seven interviews, my participants are all black Japanese or black hafus who have one parent who is racially black identifying and another parent who is ethnically Japanese identifying. Out of all of my participants only two of them were men while the remaining were women. I met my participants in different parts of Tokyo and most of the interviews were conducted in either cafes or restaurants since these places were usually quiet and easy to access. At the end of each interview, participants were responsible for the payment of their meal.

I spent parts of my day going on excursions to the different sections of Tokyo in order to gather firsthand accounts or evidence on how black people were presented in Japanese media, news, and advertisements. The multiple trips I took Takeshita Street, I visited various hip-hop stores and spoke to employees to get a general understanding of the type of crowds attracted to these stores. I also explored the neighborhoods of Shibuya and Roppongi to take note of the small hubs of hip-hop culture that have existed there since the early 1980s.

Overview

In my project, the first chapter focuses on the history of race in Japan and a general overview of the relations between Japanese and those of African descent. Here, I explore post World War II relations to the contemporary. By introducing the brief history between Japanese and African Americans, I want readers to understand how those of African descent ended up in Japan. Following this chapter, each section is focused on the life experiences of one participant and the distinct themes and perspective they give on race and identity in Japan. Chapter 2 dives into Yume's narrative and her encounters as a black hafu in a modeling industry that is influenced by European beauty standards.

Chapter 3, I discuss Cameron's multiethnic identities in order to highlight his experiences as someone who embodies cultures not expected of him. In. Chapter 4 centralizes around Yuki's childhood and her experiences with bullying as a black hafu and the way bullying shaped her identity. Within this chapter I will also take a brief look at the structure of Japanese schools. Chapter 5 introduces Dani's story in order to highlight the complex narrative of interracial couples and the fear of miscegenation in post-World War II Japan. Lastly, Chapter 6 focuses on Jay, a black hafu raised in America, who unpacks his views on Japanese understanding of black people and blackness.

Chapter 1

Japan, Race, and African Americans

I mindlessly scrolled through my Facebook newsfeed when I came across an article that read, *RZA's Edge: The RZA's Guide to Kung-Fu Films*. I shared the article with my friend because it was a combination of his two favorite things; rap and kung-fu films. I could not help but wonder how this particular genre of film had managed to reach an African American audience. During the late 70s, the emergence and popularity of Asian culture amongst African Americans hit a peak. Bruce Lee rose as the most successful figure in kung fu films breaking into the global economy and effectively capturing an international audience with his fighting style and smooth material art moves. Rapper Ghostface-killah, member of the renowned rap group *Wu-Tang Clan*, revealed in an interview with the *New Yorker*, the kung-fu film *Mystery of Chessboxing*[7] inspired his rap name. The film follows Ah Pao, a boy in search of Ghost Face Killer; the man responsible for the murder of his father.[8] The influence of Asian popular culture in black American music did not stop there. In the early 2000s the emergence of anime once again bridged a connection between African Americans and the consumption of Asian popular culture. Where it became common for rappers to reference old kung-fu films from 70s and 80s, it became common for the same phenomena to occur with anime references found in some rap songs from the early 2000s. In Kanye West's' hit song "Touch the Sky*"*, Lupe Fiasco raps "Guess who's on third? /Lupe stealin like Lupin the 3rd," here he makes reference to *Lupin III*, an anime that follows the life of the world's greatest thief,

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[7] Frere-Jones, S. (2006, March 20). *Ghost's World*. Retrieved November 27, 2016, from The New Yorker website: http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/03/20/ ghosts-world

[8] http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0199813/plotsummary?ref_=tt_ov_pl

Lupin. Here, Lupe alludes to his listeners that he is about to steal the home base in a slick and smooth manner like Lupin. In 2011, Kanye West tweeted "There is no way *Spirited Away* is better than *Akira*," he made this tweet in reference to watching a YouTube video discussing the top 10 best anime films.[9] Other rappers such as RZA, Soulja Boy, Lil B, Robb Banks, Chris Brown, and Childish Gambino are just a few who have made anime references.

While African Americans became avid consumers of kung-fu films and anime, there existed a lack of black representation within these genres. Focusing on the genre of anime, characters possessed features closely related to Eurocentric facial features (e.g big round eyes, blond hair, blue eyes, green eyes). While black representation rarely exists in anime and films, one can easily find the different facets of black culture being woven into some animes and films. One of the clearest examples of this influence can be found in *Samurai Champloo*; an anime that mixes remnants of hip-hop, jazz, rhythm and blues (R&B), and break dancing. The two musical forces behind the anime's soundtrack, Nujabes and Force of Nature, both collaborated with rappers from America living in Japan in order to achieve the hip-hop vibes intended for the album.[10] Anthropologist of Asian studies Ian Condry briefly mentions the anime in his book, *Hip Hop Japan*, as an a creative work that challenged Japan's perceived oneness by addressing issues regarding foreigners, outside religious influence, the marginalization of the Ainu, and other often ignored groups in Japan (2006:85). Additionally, if we unpack the title of the anime itself, we find a bold statement being made. The word *Samurai* symbolizes the Japanese

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[9] Milo, J. (2016, July 27). *17 Rappers Who Came Out as Anime Fans*.
Retrieved December 5, 2016, from http://goboiano.com/list/4734-17-rappers-who-came-out-as-anime-fans
[10] The notion of Blackness being synonymous with hip-hop culture is a theme that will arise throughout my paper, however I will further elaborate later.

components found within the anime, while *Champloo,* Okinawan[11] for stew, or an

Okinawan dish mixed with everything (Condry 2006: 85), represents the non-Japanese

elements in the show. *Samurai Champloo* uses Japanese culture and mixes components

of the Other (e.g Okinawan culture, black American culture, etc.) as a way to produce

something Japanese; which is anime. The anime aims to acknowledge the outside

influences that have shaped and continue to shape Japanese identity.

The anime's director, Watanabe Shinichiro, emphasized his desire to show that

Japanese are capable of expressing themselves just like the samurai of Japan's past

(Condry 2006:85). Yet, Shinchiro's decision to pull from hip-hop came from his

understanding that aspects of the Japanese samurai combined perfectly with that of the

hip-hop artist, because, much like the samurai; hip-hop artists has pride in openly

expressing themselves (Condry 2006:84). The hip-hop artist (e.g. the rapper), in the eyes

of Shinichiro, represents the unapologetic and proud; two attributes that he associates

with the samurai. Shinichiro juxtaposes this image of the Japanese in past (e.g. the

samurai) next to the contemporary hip-hop artist to not only show the similarities, but to

also critique the present Japanese as "shy and quiet" (Condry 2006:85). The usage of

different cultures emphasizes Shinichiro's nostalgia for a past Japan that seems to no

longer exist.

The anime's plot, soundtrack, characters and other components all use elements

from outside influences (e.g. hip-hop, Okinawans) in order to craft a more expressive

Japanese identity. This chapter explores when the connections between Japanese and

black identifying people were first established; all of my research pointed to the historical

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[11] When addressing this point, make a point/footnote about the Okinawans and how they were discriminated against. Interesting that they're appropriating such a word

encounters between Japanese and African Americans. Although my project does not only focus on African Americans, but more so on those who are black identifying, I will focus on the history of early Japanese interactions with individuals of African descent. These historical encounters are crucial in understanding contemporary meanings of blackness and race in Japan.

Japan in World War II

Japan first made waves among the African American community when it shook Western nations out of their seats as super powers. In 1904, Japan attacked Russia and started the Russo-Japanese War that lasted for a year with the Japanese emerging as victorious. Japan's war against Russia stirred some discomfort amongst Western powers. Up until that point, the Western nations colonized most of the world and held a strong grip over the politics of many nations. Japan's ability to remain isolated from other nations for so many years during that time and avoiding colonization by a Western power gave this nation a boost of confidence. With the newly gained political influence, Japan became a self-proclaimed superpower and with this new declaration Japan captivated a specific audience. In the U.S, African Americans had developed a great interest in Japan due to their victory in the Japanese-Russo war.

Japan shook one nation in particular—the United States. African Americans' support of Japan did not go unnoticed by white America and created a fair amount of panic. An irrational fear developed amongst white Americans in which they envisioned America would face a great deal of trouble if an alliance between African Americans and Japan were established (Gallicchio 2000:15). For the most part, the American government had remained quiet about Japan's victories out of the fear that African

Americans and Japanese descendants "were forming a racist (anti-white) conspiracy" (Koshiro 2003:184), and this, of course, became America's biggest concern; a unity between African American and Japanese Americans forming within American borders. Once Japan went into war with the West, a new fear of the yellow peril slowly rose as African Americans felt sense of kinship with the Japanese (Gallicchio 2000:14). African Americans did indeed feel a kind of brotherhood with Japan and the feelings were mutual, Marxist Japanese looked towards African Americans "as the vanguard of the world's proletarian movement" (Koshiro 2003:190). Following the end of World War II, Japan's new found interest in African American history and the history of their struggle came as response to U.S occupation that took place shortly after their defeat. One Japanese scholar by the name of Nukina Yoshitaka decided to create the Black Studies Association, he believed that the Japanese could relate with African Americans because of their loss of "nationalistic/racial (minzoku-teki na) pride by America's monopolistic capitalism and imperialism" (Gallicchio 2000:198-199). Race had shattered Japan's isolation and made the nation question their place in Western racial hierarchy. In many ways, Japan's identity and self-understanding came from their interactions with other racial groups (i.e. whiteness, blackness). The sudden interest in African American's history in dealing with white supremacy became a solid example of the Marxist Japanese trying to mold their identity.[12] Thus, the possibility of alliance between the Japanese and African Americans threatened America's democracy because black leaders regarded communism as something positive, rather than negative (Gallicchio 2000). During the early stages of the cold war, African American interest in communism had President Truman scrabbling to

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[12] Marxist Japanese and as the minority populations (e.g Ainu, Okinawans, Burakumin) of Japan looked towards African Americans for inspiration of sparking a revolution. I specifically point out these two types of populations because of

give them "basic rights," for fear that communism would form within America's borders (Koshiro 1999). Marxist Japanese scholars argued that instead of finding a commonality with the white West, there was an overlapping destiny between the Japanese and African Americans (Koshiro 2003). By understanding African Americans who have "[struggled] for freedom and equality against the background of the (white) Western notion of liberty" (Koshiro 2003: 201), the Japanese were better equipped to persist against white supremacy.

Japan's sudden emergence into the world as a new superpower had brought upon a newfound appeal among black Americans. One of the most significant figures of the Black liberation movement, W.E.B Du Bois, perceived Japan as the non-white peoples of the world and even referred to Japan as the "catalyst for liberation of the colored people in the world," as they posed a great challenge to white supremacy (Gallicchio 2000:40).

African Americans were intrigued by the non-white nation and their new position in the world and as well as their capability to not only stir panic within the West, but also the ability to challenge their power. With victory came high expectations and Japan was now seen as a new possible advocate for racial equality and as a possible advocate for the equity of all races. African Americans viewed Japan as the inspiration needed for people of color to pursue their freedom and successfully overthrow white supremacy. For some time, Japan made actual efforts to establish racial equity in the world, even going as far as to assure "delegates secure absolute guarantees that the league would contain a provision recognizing racial equality" (Gallicchio 2000:21). Black America connected with Japan because of their beliefs of anti-whiteness, anti-imperialism, and anti-colonization narratives that were greatly supported by many African Americans.

However, Japan struggled with its own insecurity caused by the lack of acknowledgement from Western nations that were skeptical of Japan's ability to be a super power. During World War II, Japan struggled to be taken seriously by the U.S and the depictions of the Japanese in political cartoons demonstrate how racism was used as a tool to belittle the nation. It was common for Japan to be often depicted of a smaller stature or being little yellow people who had little to no accomplishment in comparison to the West (Dower 1993:288), this depiction of Japan was not only common in America, but in other Western nations as well (Dower 1993). Racism persisted towards the Japanese; this in turn caused great difficulty for them to establish themselves as a serious nation amongst Western powers. In other words, racism made it easy for Western countries to minimize Japan. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the image of Japan as a passive weak country turned shifted to one of an aggressor who must be stopped. This shift becomes clear when many American political cartoonists no longer depicted Japanese soldiers as "yellow little men" (Dower 1993) but instead as apes (Dower 1993:288), shifting from a narrative of passivity to aggression.

Much like the West, Japan had circulated its own depictions of the U.S and England. Japan's isolation of many years created a fear towards outsiders and a rejection of anything non-Japanese. Thus, Japan illustrated images of the West as demonic representing the nation as "[being] threatened, the victim, never the threat," (Dower 1993: 276). Consequently, Japan established their passivity and innocence through these illustration and narratives. Both sides depicted each other in ways that dehumanized the other and Dower highlights the act of dehumanizing the enemy (regardless if it is through

a depiction of a demon, ape, or vermin) as a means to normalize the killing of the enemy (1993:276).

While white Americans were not taking Japan seriously black America saw much potential in the nation. Black leaders in America viewed Japan as a strong ally in the fight for racial equality. In fact, some black leaders became such devoted loyalists to Japan that they were willing to overlook many of Japan's imperialistic actions. This created a great divide between black Americans who believed Japan should not be viewed as an ally when their imperialistic motives were not much different from those upheld by European nations. The growing conflict between China and Japan was becoming more of a predominant problem, however, most black leaders hoped Japan and China would overcome their differences, unite, and fight together against white supremacy. Du Bois believed Japan to be an important figure in establishing racial unity; thus, he overlooked Japan's imperialism and believed the Chinese were better off being ruled by a non-white nation (Gallicchio 2000:74). But what exactly caused some African Americans to continue with their loyalty for Japan even after discovering their imperialistic objectives?

Most of African Americans' support derived from the belief in Japan's ability, as a non-white nation, to "[destroy] the myth of white superiority" (Gallicchio 2000:31) and to encourage the "American government to alter its racial policies or face race war in the Pacific" (Gallicchio 2000:31). Yet many African Americans made the mistake of not digging deeper into Japan's racial ideologies. Gallicchio writes, "[Black writers and other commenters] would have encountered ideas about race relations that were bound to leave them uneasy," (2000:60). Gallicchio refers to the self-acclaimed narrative in which the Japanese are a superior race, and the leading race at that. Japan had founded their

nationality and identity on the idea of being pure race positioned to lead other races. This belief became the pioneering motive behind Japan's conquest of other Asian nations. Japan's racial ideologies did not only become a danger to surrounding countries, but also a danger to the minority ethnic populations of Japan (e.g. Ainu, Okinawans, Japanese Korean, etc.) that faced great difficulties due to the country's ideologies.

Although Japan held their own racial ideologies, it did not take long for Japan to adopt the Western racial hierarchy and use it as a means to reaffirm their own sense of superiority. The Japanese viewed themselves in a liminal space; they were better than other non-white races; however, they were still inferior to whites. Koshiro suggests that Japan wanted to be viewed as a colonial power by both Asians and Westerners (2003:186), furthermore, she argues that Japan's adoption of Western racial ideology came from a desire to be like the West (1999:32). The general attitude towards the West was a mixture of envy, jealousy, and admiration (Koshiro 1999:32); Japan resented the West because of a hidden desire to be its equal. Additionally, Japan's rhetoric for racial equality had come from the belief that it was time for the West to view the country as an equal. Thus, Japan slowly started to align itself with the West and the alliance between African Americans and Japan became a facade (Koshiro 2003:189).

The adoption of the Western racial hierarchy forced Japan to develop a dependency on the West in order to be validated and aligning itself with a western racial ideology did effectively retrenched Western superiority over Japan. Much of the Japanese identity, national pride, and race ideology depended on the validation from the West (Koshiro 1999). Their adoption of not only Western racial ideologies but also Western imperial tactics had many black leaders wonder why some African Americans remained

loyal to Japan when the nation committed war crimes against other people of color within their own boarders As Japan's crimes against other Asian countries came into light, many black writers came to the understanding that the populations being oppressed by Japan had more in common with African Americans than the Japanese themselves. The treatment of Koreans at the hands of Japanese was similar to the treatment of African Americans in the U.S. (Koshiro 2003: 194); thus, some black leaders believed it was hypocritical of African Americans to support Japan's imperialistic motives. Although Japan had demanded that it should be viewed as white by the West, it was decided by Nazi Germany the best title to be given to the Japanese was the label of being an "honorary white" a title that was both patronizing however, it became significant for creating Japan's imperialistic identity (Koshiro 1999:189).

Conclusion

The concept of Japan's racial purity had been established long before the country's interaction with other nations and races. Japan's years of isolation and their ability to remain uncolonized had given them reasons to see themselves as superior. Yet, Japan's interaction with Western nations had raised many questions of superiority. Previously, Japan understood themselves as higher than other races and ethnic groups in Asia, however white Western nations challenged Japan's self-acclaimed superiority. The West made loud claims of their accomplishments and through the usage racism mocked Japan's lack of achievement. Thus, to reach the West's level of greatness, Japan believed the best option was to accept Western racial hierarchy and accept their inferiority. With the acceptance of inferiority to the West came needing validation from the West in order for Japan to establish their status as an honorary white nation. Overall, the interaction

between both black and white populations had pushed the nation to change their ideologies on race and expand revisit the definition of certain terms (i.e. race, ethnicity, and nationality). Understanding Japan's complex history with race within its own borders and beyond can help us understand contemporary racial ideologies within the country. Are these contemporary ideologies of race drawing from old ideologies? How much have views on race changed in Japan? These are questions that we can understand by having a better grasp of Japanese history, and in addition to the narratives of my participants; we can interpret how much of these histories influence their current lives and their identity.

Chapter 2

***Japanese Beauty Standards*: Dreams and Aspirations of a Model** | *Y u m e ' s   S t o r y.*

Trains in Japan stop running close to midnight but that did not dull the nightlife in Shibuya, the Hachiko statue was crowded by tourists and hundreds of people crossing the famous Shibuya crosswalk. This Tuesday night crowds of young people gathered around every corner, some of them holding cans of *chu-hi*, an alcoholic drink found in every *konbini* in Japan. In the middle of Shibuya's buzzing nightlife, I met Yume after her work shift inside the Starbucks across the train station. I assumed because of her school uniform and youthful face that she was a high school student. When I asked her whether this was the case, however, she told me "Oh, I don't go to school. This is just my work outfit." Since Yume was hungry we decided to walk over to Burger King and the conduct the interview there. Over a meal of burger and fries I asked Yume how her parents first met each other, and she told me her parents met at a party in Hawaii and that her mother is Japanese while her father is African American. "I was born in Hawaii in 1991 in the island of O'ahu we were there for three years before we moved straight to Japan. I have no memory of living in Hawaii but all I know is that I was born there. I grew up in a Japanese household with my mother, my grandparents, and my little brother. He was actually born here and went to school in Japan; I went to an international school. He went to a Japanese school so he doesn't speak English but he understands some of it." The only thing she mentioned of her father other than his race was that he divorced her mother and moved back to the States

The components of American culture are often taught through the father, who tends to be the foreign parent. In households where the fathers return to the states, the opportunity for the child to learn English is decreases. Although Yume's father left Japan she still learned English through her mother, "She went to a university in America, so she speaks English. And she actually teaches at an international school right now, so we often have conversations in Japanese and English." Due to her mother's education Yume grew up in a bi-lingual household. Furthermore, Yume attended international schools her whole life and in this setting she had opportunities to advance her English skills.

When I asked Yume to tell me about her experiences growing up hafu in Japan, Yume took a minute and responded, "It's about my hair." She further elaborated, "My hair—for a long time I was never comfortable with my hair. Since I was three years old I went to a Japanese classical ballet institute and everyone there was Japanese so they had straight hair. My teacher would get upset with me for having the biggest hair bun and I was like, I can't do anything about it! I remember as a child, my mother would take me to the hair salon to cut it, and for a long time I was very uncomfortable and always wanted my hair straight. My mother has very straight long hair and so I thought one day I'll get a perm[13]. But till this day I have never gotten a perm!" She exclaimed proudly, and I cheered her on for not giving into the normalized beauty standards. I understood Yume's struggle with her hair since I also went through a similar experience and damaged my hair as a child. It was not until she left Japan for her studies in London did she make friends with people who looked similar to her, Yume was inspired by her friend's curls

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[13] Here, Yume is referring to hair relaxers however colloquially known as perms. These products are mostly amongst women in the African American community who conform to white beauty standards. The chemicals in hair relaxers are known to cause years of damage to natural hair.

and decided to take better care of her hair, "I went on YouTube and looked up hair care videos because I wanted hair like my friends [black friends]." Through her study abroad travels Yume had the opportunity to escape Japanese societal pressures and cultivate enough confidence to accept her natural features.

She further unpacked her experiences as black hafu through her experiences as a model, "I've been in the industry since I was three so people know me very well." She told me about her involvement in the modeling industry as a child and currently, she is not as active and occasionally takes up some jobs. In explaining her experiences as a black hafu, Yume reflect on the times she faced discrimination in the Japanese fashion industry as a black model.

Yume's childhood incident with her ballet teacher would not be the first encounter with discrimination, "As a model I'm always looking for new agencies." Yume explained that looking for new modeling agents is the best way to gain new opportunities in the modeling industry, "I would get call backs from agencies telling me they don't take Black models. They didn't even look at my pictures," she exclaimed, "It's not about career anymore, but on skin color" she said, disheartened.

Yume reflected on another incident that occurred three years ago in which she was booked for a commercial only to be cut out from the final product. "It was six models in total and the commercial was really short, and I was thinking to myself —how are they going to fill all of these models? I saw the final product and I wasn't in it." Feeling confused about the situation, Yume called her agent to inquire why she was removed from the commercial and her agent explained the commercial was too long and

they needed to remove someone out; that person happened to be Yume. "The rest of them were white girls you know like blonde, brunette. Ever since then I felt like there is some racial discrimination that needs to be addressed," she continued to unpack her frustrations, "Like Miss Japan, I really support her because people still think she is not Japanese enough. She was part of this debate in which she addressed this other Japanese model, who is Japanese and Italian, and this model was part of an advertisement that said 'This is Japan.' Ariana argued 'Why is she [the Italian and Japanese model] considered Japanese and I'm not', and she has a point!" Yume's support of Miyamoto reflects her support for changing the discourse around who is allowed to be Japanese. Yume recognizes if Japan could be accepting of white hafus, why are black hafus not given the same acceptance?

Russell writes, "Black celebrities are almost always employed to endorse Japanese products that exploit their celebrity in spheres of activity (music, sports, entertainment) in which black prominence is internationally recognized. Despite the popularity of blacks in Japan, advertisements seldom depict them interacting socially with Japanese" (1998: 152), we see this happening with Yume's career in which she is not given as much opportunities as her white peers. Although black models (both Japanese and non-Japanese) are found throughout Japanese advertisement they are boxed to represent only blackness and not given the same privilege to explore and be part of other narratives. Blackness in Japan is understood through the lenses of hip-hop, a subject I will further discuss in Chapter 6. Due to her physical features Yume was often seen just to model for black products, images, and narratives. However, she does not want to be suited for only one narrative and wishes to expand her modeling career. Therefore, it is

not difficult to speculate that Yume was removed from the commercial because she did not fit the normalized beauty standards however her experiences are not unique but instead highlights the preferred beauty features in Japan.

"I would be on a shoot and Japanese staff would tell the Caucasian girls on set that they are the most beautiful girls and I'm just like why do you have to say that in front of everyone," The staff's attitude is a reflection of the accepted beauty standards in Japan, and the nation's acceptance of European beauty standards. However, it should be understood that the preference for whiteness existed in Japan long before their first European encounter. Anthropologist Nina Jablonski (2014) asserts that Japan's preference for whiteness dates back to ancient Japanese society. During this time, the color white was considered symbolic of Japanese traditions and religious values; however, she argues that contact with Europe only further emphasized whiteness as the ideal. Even then with these religious implications, Japanese understood whiteness as a positive aspect. Joanne Rondilla writes, "Japanese artists usually depicted the [Europeans] as white or off-white, the same color they used for upper-class Japanese" (2007:3). The preference for lighter skin had taken full force in the twenty first century with the circulation of images and ideas, which made lighter skin preferable (Jablonski 2014).

Gilman writes, "The fascination with skin lightening, nose lengthening, and eye reshaping in Japan and Vietnam today reflects the globalization of standards of beauty in Euro American stereotypes. In the case of the youth in Japan and Vietnam, the ideal is not to be "too Asian" (2003:108) and the models used in advertisement can also reflect the globalized influence of Eurocentric beauty standards. Yume unpacked her frustrations

with the Japanese modeling industry for using the type of models (half white), "There are a quite few of us [black hafus] that work in the industry but we are not famous! We are not booking jobs like Rola." When Yume first mentioned Rola, I thought she was referring to another model by the name of Kiko Mizuhara. Mizuhara is another famous model in Japan who is also multiracial, but because her parents are not Japanese citizens, she is not considered a hafu like Yume. Regardless of citizenship, however, Mizuhara grew up in Japan and in her early twenties became one of Japan's most recognizable models. Now, she is recognizable amongst many Japanese and her face can be seen on many advertisements. However, Yume referred to another model who is also a hafu, "She is like the most famous model no one ever uses someone different and I'm like what's going on, you know! Give us a chance, we are professional we can do really well."

The emphasis on European features resulted in the popularity of double eyelid surgery and other body reconstructions as a means to appear less Asian. Russell argues Japanese people technically do consider themselves white however certain physical traits (i.e. height, facial features) distinguish them from white people (Russell 1998). The perpetuation of beauty and the surgery industry turned Japan into a society focused on physical appearance, Gilman further unpacks this by describing cosmetic surgeries "increase one's income or marriageability by looking more Western and thus to ensure 'personal happiness'" (Gilman 2003: 106-107).

Although Japan adopted Western beauty standards, it could also be argued that they created their own unique standard of beauty. According to Rondilla, many patients are not trying to look more Western but trying to "refine" their Asian features (Rondilla 2009). While Rondilla does not give specific examples of what exactly constitutes a

refined look, I would argue that the features possessed by white hafus could be the defined look in which Rondilla references. Furthermore, Gilman emphasizes, Japanese youth try not to look too Asian (2003:108) all the while, maintaining a balance of their Asian features to remain socially accepted. Thus, the models Yume refers to (i.e. Rola) in a way embody a look partially white while still remaining socially accepted by society. The not too Asian look is close to a half white hafu, possessing the right amount of Asian and Western features. This societal acceptance can be seen through the continuous representation of whiteness in the modeling industry and the use of white or white hafu models.

Furthermore, there exist YouTube videos that give Japanese women instructions how to look more hafu. These videos are often titled ハーフ顔メイク, translating to to *half face make-up* video (See Fig. 1 in Appendix). These YouTubers are Japanese women, and within these tutorials they teach their audience how to paint and design their face to look like a more half white. Their tools they use to accomplish this effect consist of blond wigs, blue eye contacts, and in some instances, they use tape to make their eyes appear bigger. In other words, these make-up videos show Japanese women how to pass for a white hafu. I even encountered a video overtly titled 'How to look Mixed Blood.' The purpose of these videos is to provide women with a half look and these women who desire to look half white feed into European features being the standard of beauty. Some would say the *Ganguro* girls, Japanese women who tan hair skin and frizz their hair, are trying to adapt black culture. Anthropologist of Africana studies, Dawn Elissa Fischer, argues these women's "attempts to embody what they perceive as Black culture is read by interviewees in some cases as indicative of their rejection of White culture"

(2013:145). Therefore, Ganguro are not trying to pass for half black necessarily, but more so just non-Japanese. However, my nightlife trips to Shibuya I did encounter instance in which Japanese women modified their looks in order to pass for a black hafus. Some of these women worse corn rows, tanned their skin, wore curly hair, etc. just to pass for half black and not surprisingly, these women attracted the attention of black American service men. On one hand, we see blackness being used as a way to appreciate blackness (Cornyetz 1994).

Preconceived notions of blackness could be another reason why models like Yume are not given as many opportunities as their lighter-skinned peers. Darker skin was commonly associated with outside labor and consequently, lower class status (Gilman 2014). These negative connotations of darker skin complexion prevent models like Yume from being featured in advertisements other than hip hop. For this reason, Yume is determined to establish her own magazine and represent all types of Japanese women. "The main thing that really frustrates me is that people do not have an open mind and they only stick to what is comfortable to them. I want to have my own magazine, I want to photo shoot real girls and do something really different and unique," she further continued, "I really want to change it [Japan's beauty standards] I'm trying to be more fit to eventually start a more serious modeling career. I want to show the world that black is beautiful. All of the things I see in the magazine are so upsetting because they only present Caucasian models, you never see color in magazines in Japan—I want to change that. I want to show people the alternative, I want to open doors for others girls like

Dani—she is beautiful!" [14] Since Japanese society will not provide Yume the proper platform for models like her, she is determined to create it herself.

Like all of my participants, I asked Yume if she identified with one identity more than the other. "Not anymore" she told me, "I grew up here and I really felt like I was Japanese but ever since I grew older and I realized my American side. When you get older you build your own personality and you get comfortable in yourself. Somehow I have gained more confidence, I'm more comfortable now with my identity." I asked her what she identifies with and she told me, "Both," Due to her grandparent's upbringing, Yume expressed that she struggled identifying with her American side (i.e. blackness) because she grew up in a strict Japanese household (ethnically strict). Even though Yume still lives with her grandparents and holds a close relationship with them and still identifies with her Japanese side, her personal life experiences made her come into terms with her other racial identity (i.e. black).

Conclusion

In discussing Yume's experiences from her youth and the modeling industry we comprehend the beauty standards and ideologies within Japanese society. Furthermore, Yume's experiences highlight the upheld racial ideologies by using the Japanese beauty industry as a window to look into Japanese racial ideologies. We also gain insight on a problem which does not only affect Japan but other Asian countries as well. Furthermore, Japan's acceptance of white beauty standards demonstrates their openness to certain non-Japanese things. Since Yume's appearance boxes her in a category of hip-hop, in which

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[14] Dani is another participant I will introduce in Chapter 5.

many Japanese assume to be black culture (Chapter 6). Therefore, opportunities to represent something outside of hip-hop are rarely given to Yume because of Japan's perceived notions of blackness.

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Chapter 3

***Okinawa, Japan and Blackness*: Standing at an Intersection** | *C a m e r o n' s   S t o r y*

I use Cameron's story to demonstrate the cultural implications placed on those who possess non-Japanese features. In Cameron's story, we follow his experiences as a black hafu, a person who possesses more Afro features than Asian ones and thus causes many to speculate on his cultural practices. However, these assumptions do not waiver his confidence in his Okinawan and Japanese identity and his race. Within this chapter, Cameron uses Japanese and Okinawan interchangeably since he experienced a multiethnic household in which components of both cultures were practiced.

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I sat across from Cameron in a cowboy-themed restaurant in Minato Mirai; this eating-place was located next to the boardwalk giving customers a beautiful view of the Cosmo Clock 21 Ferris wheel   reflecting off the water. The mildly strong winds did not take away from the bright and sunny day. People sported light vests and hoodies as they took midday strolls. Inside this restaurant, Cameron took a quick look at the menu before calling the waiter over. He ordered a *Hambagu* (this name might evoke the image of a burger patty in between two slices of bread; however this Japanese dish consists of a large beef patty covered with a sweet dark sauce). Also unlike an American burger, this dish requires the use of a fork and knife; customers are given the option to stuff the *Hambagu* with cheese, sauce, mushrooms, vegetables and other condiments. After Cameron placed his order he turned to me and disclosed the story about his parents: "My dad went to the states to learn English, and my aunt introduced my mom to him." He

continued, "My dad likes foreign ladies, I mean he has twelve kids most with different women. I actually have a half-Japanese and Mexican sister. I do have two siblings, who share the same mother, and they are half white...but the rest have different moms. You can tell he is really into foreign women."

Cameron's father having twelve children by all different women, some Japanese and some not, solidifies his masculinity and goes against a societal image which presents the Japanese man as weak and lacking masculinity (Kelsky 2006). After his parents separated, Cameron moved to Japan to live with his grandparents and[15] grew up in an Okinawan household: "I did not grow up in a mixed household, I grew up Okinawan." Here, he went to learn and love the Okinawan culture he holds so close to his identity. Many often mistake Okinawan culture to be the same as Japanese. However, believing this assumption erases Okinawan history and removes responsibility from Japan for its actions during World War II. The general publics inside and outside Japanese boarders are oblivious to the minority groups in Japan, and Okinawans are one of them. In the following paragraphs, I will give a brief history of Japan's relations with Okinawa and where these politics stand now. I highlight these events in order to provide readers with historical accounts that the Japanese government tries to silence and erase. I acknowledge that historically there are other minority groups in Japan (e.g. Ainu, Burakumin, Japanese Koreans, etc.) who are also silenced; however, for Cameron's narrative, I will only focus on the narrative of the Okinawans.

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[15] Amongst my participants it was a pattern for those who were raised in Japan to be mostly raised by their grandparents. In the case of Cameron, his father and his grandparents raised him.

An Overview of the History between Okinawa and Japan History

During World War II, China and Korea were not the only nations under Japan's imperialistic agenda; Japanese colonization silently engulfed the Ryukyu Kingdom chipping away at the nation's sovereignty. The kingdom's long rich history involved strong ties with the entrepot trade and its economic relations with other nations of Asia, specifically its favorable relation with China (Egami 1994: 828). In 1895, when the kingdom came under attack by Japan, the Qing Dynasty came to the nation's aid in hopes of defending their sovereignty; sadly, Japan's victory over China altered the kingdom's fate forever. Following Chinese defeat, the Ryukyu kingdom underwent colonization followed by assimilation, a process described by historian Hayashi Hirofumi as "Japanization" (2013). Under the process of Japanization the nation was stripped of the name Ryukyu, and forced to take the name of Okinawa[16]. The name Ryukyu, given by Sui Dynasty, connects the nation's history with China while mainland Japanese renamed them Okinawans (Inoue 2007:49). By changing the nation's name to Okinawa Japanese officials attempted to remove its Chinese influences and plunge the nation into Japanese culture. Continuing its imperialistic agenda, the Japanese government continued Japanization by forbidding the use of the native Okinawan language and enforcing the Okinawan children to learn the Japanese language (Hirofumi 2013).

Political economist Koji Taira (2003) writes that World War II racial ideologies (i.e. a desire for racial homogeneity and purity) perpetuated the narrative of the Other. The ideology was that the Japanese were descendants of the Yamato line (a pure and celestial race) while non-Japanese descended from the *Jomon* line, a race of people

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[16]Moving forward, I will use the term Okinawa to continue to explain past and contemporary relations between Okinawan citizen and Japanese government

inferior to the Japanese (Taira 2003:76). These racial ideologies justified the colonization

of non-Japanese populations inside and outside Japan's boarders (Okinawans, Ainu,

Chinese, Koreans, etc.). Ethnic groups that experienced colonization within Japanese

boarders were branded the title of minority groups.

Anthropologist Masamichi Inoue argues one can comprehend Japan's strive for

colonization as a means to be at the same level as other Western nations. He writes, "The

integration of Okinawa can also be seen as an incipient expression of Meiji Japan's desire

to stand up to the western imperial centers, a desire that ultimately resulted in Japan's

colonial expansion into Asian in the twentieth century." (2007:53).

The permanency of these racial ideologies resulted in the senseless death of

thousands of Okinawans during World War II era (Hirofumi 2013). Japanese soldiers

influenced Okinawans to commit mass suicides in order to force Okinawans to prove

their loyalty to the Japanese emperor. Inoue provides the historical account of one

survivor recounting,

> "Families form circles and, with the grenades distributed by the military,
> killed themselves [In other circumstances,] husbands killed their wives,
> parents, children, brothers, and sisters by using sickles and razors to cut
> their wrists and necks, cudgels and stones to smash their heads, and cords
> to suffocate them…I was sixteen-years-and-one-month old. When I,
> together with my brother, killed my mother who had given birth to us, I
> wept bitterly out of unbearable grief." (Inoue 2007:60).

Trouillot suggests that celebrated narratives often replace ignored historical

realities; here, the historical reality being Okinawans voluntarily committed suicide to

prove their loyalty to the Japanese emperor. This loyalty towards the emperor was first

established in schools through the introduction of *Kominka Kyoiku,* wartime education

encouraged civilians to die for the emperor if captured by the enemy (Hirofumi 2013:81).

It was within the classroom in which Okinawans experienced assimilation and were exposed to the notion of kominka kyoiku. However, Hirofumi argues these mass suicides were not a result of kominka kyoiku, but instead due to coercion by Japanese soldiers. Hirofumi asserts that villages that had higher concentration of Japanese soldiers tended also to have high rates of mass suicides amongst Okinawans.

The Japanese government using Okinawan bodies in a senseless way shows how Japan's racial ideology dehumanized Okinawans. Young Okinawan men were usually given two grenades: one they were expected to use on the enemy, and the other for themselves if they were to face capture, since it was more honorable to commit suicide than face capture. The mass suicides of Okinawans were regarded as honorable killings by "mainland rightists and the Japanese government [who believed] that these Okinawans were honorable heroes" (Hirofumi 2013).

In 1945, when American soldiers landed on the shores of Okinawa Japanese soldiers spread rumors about American soldiers in order to prevent their defeat in the war. Japanese soldiers told Okinawans that if captured by American soldiers they would face torture, cruelty, and humiliation. However, these were false accounts and instead, American soldiers offered food and aid to Okinawans who surrendered (Hirofumi 2013). If Okinawans surrendered and sided with America this would result in Japan's loss in the war, thus, the Japanese government crafted these false stories in order to prevent defeat. The lives of 150,000 Okinawans were lost as a result of the war (Hirofumi 2013:76) yet, the end of the war did not mean a close to the tensions between Japan and Okinawa. After the war, Japan underwent U.S occupation leading to the establishment of military bases throughout Okinawa. Residents lost their homes to U.S military base construction

(Hirofumi 2013) and with the development of these bases came a wave of incidents involving Okinawan locals and American servicemen, which furthered Okinawan animosity toward Japan.[17]

In 1972, the U.S ended Japanese occupation and Okinawans hoped for the removal of military bases. Okinawans expected Japanese government to consider removing the bases; however, they soon realized that sovereignty was only granted to Japan, and the people of Okinawa now faced uncertainty as they were under indefinite U.S control (Inoue 2007:42). With the Korean War picking up momentum the U.S kept its military bases in Okinawa (Egima 1994). When Japan did not remove the bases and continued to lease land to the American government, Okinawans felt betrayed by Japan and came to the realization they were used by Japan for its political gain and interest.

As Okinawans came to the realization that Japan did not value their political opinion they found empowerment in rearticulating their traditional Okinawan culture and customs (Hirofumi 2013). The Okinawan customs repressed by the pre-war Japanese government now became now tools of disobedience.

Cameron: Okinawan and Japanese

There is an assumption that possessing Japanese features is synonymous with the practice of Japanese culture. Cameron challenges this notion. Looking towards history we

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[17] There were a number of incidents involving American military and the local people of Okinawa however the most infamous case being the rape of a twelve-year-old Okinawan girl at the hands of three American service men. Previous incidents include a military airplane crashing into three home resulting in six causalities; another airplane crashing into an elementary school; the rape and murder of Okinawan women at the hands of American servicemen; and Okinawans being shot and killed by American soldiers, (Inoue 2007:45). Until this day, Okinawan communities actively protest the presence of U.S. military bases.

see this conflict occurred with the presence of Japanese-Brazilians in Japan; Takeyuki Tsuda references Japanese-Brazilians to challenge the notion of ethnic sameness. Cameron, under society's gaze, does not look Japanese however practices and participates in this culture like other Japanese citizens. "I do a lot of Japanese culture things and a lot of people that don't know that I'm Japanese they ask, 'Oh why you look like that? [black], and I tell them it's cause I'm Black and Japanese," Cameron revealed he does not identify with black culture because it is not his to claim to have grown up in Japan and raised in an Okinawan household. He understands his ethnicities as being Japanese and Okinawan—not black. "I'm not the type of person to do other stuff, that's not me, I don't feel right to practice something that's not my culture [black culture]." By not claiming black culture Cameron highlights an interesting point of tension because he claims a culture not many would associate with his phenotypic features. Here, Cameron asserting his identity as a black Japanese man expands the conversation on who can claim their Japanese ethnicity. Further into our conversation, when I mistakenly asked Cameron if he identified with his Japanese culture more, he corrected me and said, "Japanese and Okinawan."

Cameron spent most of his childhood in Okinawa before moving to California to live with his mother. Even in a different setting he continued to practice Japanese and Okinawan culture by integrating himself in the Japanese community in California: "I had Japanese friends and worked in Japanese restaurants. I joined the Okinawa kendo branch out there." Even away from Japan Cameron fostered his ethnic connection to both cultures. In California, Cameron picked up a job at a Japanese restaurant, he told me his boss applauded him for having a Japanese mind, saying "My boss liked that about me.

Everyone else complained and made excuses but I did the work. There's a famous Japanese term for hard worker, that's me. American people…not so much they talk a lot and don't focus on their work. In my location, a lot of my co-workers were American and they complain and make excuses. Sometimes I took the blame for their mistakes."

The concept of working hard is popular amongst many Japanese, it is an upheld motto amongst Japan's salary men, and many internalize this narrative and work themselves to death. Cameron's internalization of the concept of working hard, working in teams, and being a member of a community is one of the key ideologies of Japanese society and identity. The encouragement of community membership and group inclusion also emphasizes the notion of conformity. Cameron takes accountability for the mistakes of co-workers to stay true to the Japanese ideologies and values he learned through his Japanese upbringing. Cameron deciding to take the blame for his co-workers demonstrates how he ascribes to Japanese hegemony (Gramsci 1971). In bits of our conversation, Cameron further revealed that even in the states he found himself still practicing his Japanese culture, "My mind, everything I did was very Japanese." Cameron's mannerisms, actions, and beliefs are a product of Japanese hegemony and being raised in a Japanese environment. Cameron adapted to American culture but found himself missing Japan and yearning to go back. Eventually he moved back to Japan to live with his sister in Saitama. He lived with her for a few years before moving out to Yokosuka to work on the military base.

Many doubt Cameron's cultural competency because people mistake him for foreigner (i.e. non-Japanese). Thus, it has become a regular occurrence for Cameron to be questioned on his knowledge in Japanese and Okinawan culture. When people would

ask Cameron, questions regarding hip hop culture, but he found himself not connecting with it as much since he is not familiar with the culture. "People would tell me, 'Oh you're black and you don't know that, and I had to defend myself and say I grew up in Okinawa." His grandparents raised him in an Okinawan-only household; he emphasized, "I grew up *really* Okinawan." Thus, when people speculate on Cameron's ethnicity as black he fails to live up to this expectation because of his upbringing in a Japanese Okinawan household. Cameron does not identify with one ethnicity more than other but stresses both and places equal importance on his Japanese and Okinawan side, yet that does not prevent people from assuming otherwise.

Upon looking at Cameron's darker skin complexion many Japanese people would assume English as his first and/or only language, "I didn't speak much English growing up. I ate a lot of Okinawa and Japanese food and you know, I did Okinawan things and Japanese things. A lot of people assume that I don't know traditional things." He discussed an incident that occurred in a funeral in which he finished paying his respects and someone approached him afterwards, "They asked me, 'How do you know that?' and I said I grew up in Japan." Again, Cameron shows that Japanese people have yet to grasp the population of hafus that are ethnically Japanese thus, he finds himself defending his ethnicity and cultural upbringing.

"I'm Blasian but I still say my heart is Okinawan, I'm Okinawan. If outside Okinawa we meet Okinawan people, even if they're half it doesn't matter, if you're Okinawan, you're Okinawan. So I feel my heart is Okinawan because that's how I grew up." Throughout our conversation it becomes clear that Cameron openly identifies with his Okinawan culture emphasizing its importance to his identity. Regardless of outside

assumptions placed on him and stereotypes presumed of him Cameron proudly practices both Okinawan and Japanese culture.

Blasian, Okinawan, and Japanese

Cameron acknowledges he is ethnically Japanese and Okinawan while showing awareness of his blackness. "Being here I embrace the black culture more, I mean it's not like I wasn't proud before being in Japan makes me proud. When I was a kid I wanted to be Japanese so bad but now, nah." As a child, Cameron struggled to grow comfortable with his bi-racial identity because of his experiences as a black hafu in Japan: "When you live here and you don't look like them...that really affects you. People would always make fun of you, 'why is your skin so dark? You have a Japanese parent but why do you look so different?' As kids they don't really understand, as a kid you get made fun of but when you grow up everything changes." Cameron refers to his confidence in his blackness when he refers to these changes. Reflecting on his child Cameron expressed that the childhood of black hafu children tends to be tougher than that of their white peers: "It's harder for us because our skin is darker, our hair different...so I think it's worst." He also revealed whenever he made a mistake in his adolescent years, Japanese people would place blame on his American side: "My friend and I joked how we were American if we weren't born in America" After unpacking his frustrations he then told me, "but that's how Japanese people are and I tried to do everything good—now, I don't care."

While Cameron proudly claims Japanese culture as his own, he did not share the same sentiments towards black culture: "I don't even know what black culture is, I mean I do know the food and music that's about it." Cameron accessed his understanding of

blackness through Japanese media; however, these narratives surrounding blackness are heavily influenced by Western racism (Russell 1998). Cameron told me he does not feel that 'black,' (not having a connection to what he presumed black culture) but recognizes that he his difference (aware of his phenotypic features). He expressed that he feels a bit out of place when interacts with black Americans since he recognizes he is ethnically different from them.

Cameron identifies with two cultures and comprehends his racial identity within Japanese society. As I have shown, Cameron speaks about both identities interchangeblely while also including aspects of his Okinawan identity. Cameron's story creates dialogue centered on Japanese ethnicity and whom are the individuals embodying it. He acknowledges his features are more African American (i.e. black) than Japanese (i.e. Asian) however that does not stop him from proudly claiming his Okinawan and Japanese identity.

Conclusion

"I'm just me," he told me towards the end of our interview, "I'm not Japanese. I'm not American. I am me." He made these revelations towards the end of our interview and I was puzzled.

Cameron makes these claims not to reject his cultural upbringing but instead declines the expectation placed on from both sides. From his American side, he is expected to be more ethnically black while his Japanese side expects him uphold Japanese mannerism and ideologies. "Japanese people are not perfect, and they're not nice or happy all of the time so why should I try to be like them?" Furthermore, Japanese society expects Cameron to look more racially Japanese; an expectation he cannot physically fulfill because of phenotypic features nor are these features he wishes to alter. He said, "That's

why I stopped caring, especially being blasian, because I have to be who I want to be, and I don't look like them. I'm Japanese but I'm not Japanese"

"Being half, that's who I am." Cameron claiming to be half situates Cameron in a liminal space (Turner 1969) in which he does not have to lay claim to one side but can equally identify both. Cameron embodies a marginalized identity that has been suppressed by Japanese politics and history all the while possessing facial features another marginalized group in and outside of Japan (those of black people). Although Okinawans are an oppressed group within Japan, Cameron's life experiences are due to his phenotype features than his repressed Okinawan culture. In conversation, Cameron does not disregard his Okinawan culture because his frustration stemmed from his experience being a black hafu in Japan. Furthermore, Cameron only claims his Japanese identity in settings in which his ethnicity is being questioned. However, Cameron's declaration of his hafu identity is a way to acknowledge and embody all of his identities while disregarding the expectations attached to each identity.

Chapter 4

"Why is your skin black?": **Ijime and black hafus |** *Y u k i ' s   S t o r y.*

Over a hot latte and an iced *matcha* latte, I met Yuki in a small Italian themed coffee shop in located a few blocks away from the JR train station in the small suburbs of Gotanda. Yuki took a small sip of her drink before she began revealing the story of her parents, "My mom is Japanese and my father is originally from Jamaica but he has an American citizenship and he joined the American military. I think he was part of the Navy?" She expressed with bit confusion, "But that's how he got to Japan and met my mom and they had a baby about twenty two years ago and I was born, *yay*!" After her parent's separation, Yuki's mother decided to move back in with her parents. Within this household Yuki's grandparents raised her ethnically Japanese for eighteen years, "I grew up around Japanese people my whole life, you know? My mother is Japanese and I was raised by my mother's side of the family, I was only familiar with Japanese people and I was confused by my identity. I think I'm Japanese and all of my friends are Japanese, my family is Japanese but when I looked in the mirror I looked different." Racially mixed hafus like Yuki are allowed to participate in Japanese society and adopt Japanese culture; however, they are not allowed access to the same opportunities as non-hafu Japanese therefore, closed off to the opportunities granting them economic and social mobility and access (Burkhardt 1983). Yuki grappled with belonging in Japanese society since she understood she looked racially different from the rest of her peers.

"Just like I said I was raised in Japan and I went to regular Japanese kindergarten to high school; my entire education is Japanese."

"Like Japanese public school?" I questioned,

"Yeah."

Within these educational spaces Yuki's peers forced her to acknowledge her difference, "I was scared to go to English classes. My mother placed me in English classes, *juku* (cram school), and I didn't want to go and I was crying so much. I remember the other kids telling me *Nan De?!,* like 'Why are you here?!" Yuki's experiences of being bullied by her peers is an example of ijime. Scholars Motoko Akiba, Kazuhiko Shimizu, and Yue-Lin Zhuang classify ijime as the, "physical and verbal abuse, and exclusion from fellow peers" (Akiba, Shimizu and Zhuang 2010: 370). Yuki experienced exclusion (a form of ijime) from her peers because they assumed she would be fluent in English (a similar theme explored in Chapter 2). Some cases of ijime can reach a level of severity, which causes victims of bullying to resolve to suicide as a means of escape (Morita, Smith, and Tomoyuki 2006). In an interview with *Al Jazeera*, Ariana Miyamoto unpacked her experiences with ijime and spoke about the exclusion she experienced as a child from her peers because of her racial features. Miyamoto reflected on her experiences dealing with verbal abuse from her peers and revealed her peers would shout, "*kurumbo*" at her, a Japanese derogatory term for black people. As the interview went on, she detailed the story of a close high school friend who committed suicide to end the torment he received from his peers at school for being a hafu. My first participant, Yume (Chapter 2), did not experience ijime first hand, however she was witness to the impacts of it. She revealed her younger brother self-harmed in elementary school as a means to cope with the pain caused by the ijime he experienced. It is safe to theorize that Yuki's classmates targeted her because of racial characteristics (i.e. skin complexion, hair texture); however, examining the structures within Japanese schools and

further unpacking ijime we get a fuller understanding as to why Yuki continuously

experienced bullying.

Understanding *Ijime*

Unfortunately, bullying can be found in most learning environments however,

ijime specifically involves a group of people against one. Acts such as exclusion, assault,

verbal abuse, hiding, stealing or destroying one's property all classify as ijime (Akiba

2004). It is important to keep in mind that each act of bullying occurs rarely in groups.

Cases of ijime commonly ijime involves group bullying. Motoko Akiba (2004) argues

that through an emphasis on unity and teamwork, Japanese schools create

interdependence and emotional dependency amongst students. In order to create inclusion

and emotional dependency, students are placed in a homeroom with thirty other students

for a whole academic year and homeroom teachers are held accountable for establishing

the classroom dynamic (Yoneyama 2008). In contrast to Western schools (i.e Europe, the

U.S), educators do not have the responsibility to educate students on empathy or be

inclusive of everyone in the classroom. Japanese teachers place greater emphasis on peer

and emotional development than on learning and discipline. Sociologist Kaori Okano

writes,

> "Japanese teachers assume a greater extent of roles and responsibilities
> than their Western counterparts, including fostering children's emotional,
> social and physical development. Further, teachers often refer to 'kizuna'
> (an intimate interpersonal relationship that fosters empathy and shared
> feelings of trust and inclusiveness between teachers and students), which
> they believe is central to teaching" (2009: 102).

Okano also argues that students comprehend the teacher's authority through

various encounters and interactions, in other words, teachers who successfully establish

empathic relationships with their students establish mutual respect. Thus, Japanese

teachers do not need to assert their authority per se, since students already treat them with respect since itis part of the emotional relationship between teacher and student (Okano 2009). Teachers are given the role of educating students on emotional competence and sustaining group inclusion, thus, when ijime occurs teachers do not necessarily punish the student; since it will disrupt the community, instead they find ways to incorporate the student more into the classroom (Akiba 2004). Scholars argue the method of inclusion clashes with solving the problems of ijime since the bully is not addressed or called out for their actions, furthermore, victims of ijime are silenced (Yoneyama 2008).

Yuki and Ijime

Yuki hated going to English classes because of her peer's constant harassment, however why was Yuki a continuous victim of this bullying? First, understanding the Japanese classroom will provide a bigger picture of Yuki's life as a black hafu in a Japanese school system. Japanese schools morph students into the ideal citizen through an emphasis on conformity. The ideological state apparatus (Althusser 1972) attempts to shape Japanese students into suitable citizens arguably. The language of inclusion emphasized in Japanese school disguises the invisible process of conformity. Yoneyama and Naito (2013) further investigate the connection between the ideal citizen and schools, declaring,

> "Heighten conformity through effective group management has functioned as the fundamental principle of school education. Thus, the importance of being' the same as others in the cohesive group' has been the central theme of socialization in Japanese schools. The content of the sameness has been prescribed by school rules and regulations" (324-323).

Furthermore, the overemphasis on conformity transforms Japanese classrooms into small hubs in which students can easily cultivate and perpetuate ijime. Yuki's

classmates assumed she was already knowledgeable in English when she in fact had no previous knowledge of the language. Yuki's peers presumed her identity based on her racial features. Because of her foreign looks, (Afro features) they understood her to practice a non-Japanese culture.

In her research focusing on Japanese middle schools, Akiba concluded (2004) students often bullied others who displayed clear "characteristics different from what was considered normal among the students," (2004: 228), thus, the physical characteristics Yuki cannot conceal (i.e. skin complexion, hair texture) mark her as a victim. Akiba further emphasizes that in a society that prioritizes group inclusion, Japan also uses *group exclusion* as a means of punishment, she writes, "In a collective society like Japan where group membership is crucial for survival, the ostracism inflicted by the shikato (complete exclusion) style of bullying represents a particularly mean and cruel form of punishment" (2004: 217). Those who are punished display characteristics not approved by their peers, in other words, ijime in a twisted way, ensures the conformity within the classroom (Yoneyama & Naito 2003). Thus, Yuki was punished for two reasons; disrupting the classroom's unity and not fulfilling her peer's expectations.

Scholars of Japanese pedagogy would argue the strong expectation for students to obey rules, establish relationships with their classmates, and conforming to ideologies of Japanese schools are other factors that create ijime in classrooms (Akiba 2004, Inoue 1998, Yoneyama & Naito 2003, Yoneyama 2008). However, the actions of Yuki's peers were not to struggle against the education system but instead their actions perpetuated classroom conformity (Yoneyama 2008).

Conclusion

For a long time, Yuki's experiences in the classroom led her to view her blackness negatively, "It was hard to accept [her phenotype features], why did I look like this? And then people would ask me why 'Is your skin so black? And you know...it is just a simple question but when kids asked me that question their parent would tell them, 'That is a bad thing to ask or it's a rude thing to ask.' And I thought having black skin was a really bad thing." Now in her early twenties, Yuki finds pride and confidence in the physical features that she struggled to accept as a child. She also reflected on her childhood tormentors in a different light, "Now I feel like those things don't bother me they just didn't know any better. They have never met black people nor have they met half black people [referring to black hafus]. But I look back at those moments and I think it was a good opportunity for them to meet someone different. When they see another half black Japanese baby or person, they would say 'Oh, I think I met Yuki, she was black and Japanese, I remember her! And they wouldn't say any bad things to them [the black hafus] because they already met somebody [referring to herself]" Here, Yuki hopes for a future in which hafus will not face discrimination from Japanese people and there will be more acceptance. Akiba (2004) argues in a restricting educational environment which emphasizes conformity, children find even the smallest qualities to target each other as victims. However, in a setting in which all of the students are closely related in physical feature, Yuki's enters the place and is automatically marked as a target because of her skin complexion and curly hair, two attributes that stand her apart.

Chapter 5

***The Best of Both Worlds*: Experiencing Japanese and African American Culture |** *D a n i ' s   S t o r y .*

      Dani and I decided to meet in Shinjuku station only two train stops away from my Airbnb in Shin-Okubo. Shinjuku did not disappoint. One of Tokyo's popular shopping districts, the city has name brand advertisements decorated the sides of tall buildings. The neighborhood buzzed with people rushing to catch the train while some took pictures of the colorful Christmas lights used to illuminate the streets. Dani and I did not decide on a specific meeting point; therefore it was by sheer luck that we found each other in one of Tokyo's busiest train stations. Before I could get a word out, Dani apologized for her lateness, adding that she had an audition in Shibuya. This peaked my interest and, not giving it much thought, I asked her what it was for. She described the audition for a possible commercial, "They just had me dance and that was it," she explained casually. The small commercial turned out to be something much bigger; on New Year's Eve Dani danced on one of Japan's popular television shows. Most recently, Dani modeled for Rihanna's clothing brand, *Fenxty x Puma*.

      It was nearing evening time; we decided that a restaurant would be the best place to hold our interview. This was my first time in the streets of Shinjuku therefore, I let Dani decide where we would eat. I followed her into an eight-floor shopping mall with a two-floored food court. We took quick glances at each restaurant's *sampurus* (plastic food samples). Dani decided on a restaurant specializing in *omurice*, a Japanese dish that consists of an omelette stuffed with rice. After being seated by the waiter, and Dani situated herself, I took a minute before I asked about her parents. "My dad was stationed here [in Japan] and they actually met at a club in Yokosuka. She was with her group of

friends and my dad was with his group of friends. He approached her and they exchanged contact information and things went from there." I told Dani that other black hafus shared a similar narrative, "I think it is the easiest way for Japanese people to meet African American guys in the military or white people in general. Like if they want to get with a foreigner they would go to a club."

Anthropologist Karen Kelsky (2006) engages with this theme when she discusses yellow cabs, a term used to describe Japanese women desiring short-term sexual relations with foreign men. I discuss yellow cabs in order to explain the presence of Japanese women in the clubs of Roppongi and Shibuya. Most importantly, I want to emphasize I'm not applying the narrative of yellow cabs to Dani's parents. I mention yellow cabs to highlight the hypersexualized and fetishized narrative that surround black men and explore the lingering World War II sentiments in contemporary Japan. Intimate relations between Japanese women and foreign men reinforced the narrative of Japan as the weaker nation in comparison to the U.S., Kelsky further explains, "Japanese-female-American male romance almost instantly emerged as the symbol of the relationship between a grateful gracious, and feminized Japan in thrall to the American military men who had liberated her," (2006:170).

For this reason, Japanese women were regarded as race traitors for engaging in relationships with foreign men. The population of Japan that still upheld views on racial purity developed a fear of miscegenation. Dani disclosed to me that her grandparents initially did not approve of her mother's marriage to an American man, "My grandfather was completely against it! He told my mother, 'If you're going to marry this guy I will never speak to you again. They did not talk for a few years until I was born." When she

told me this, I was not surprised due to the likelihood that Dani's grandparents

unconsciously upheld past nationalistic ideals. Furthermore, these relationships were

discouraged for the reason that it threatened to shatter Japan's perceived homogeneity.

Historian Yukiko Koshiro writes, "the differences in skin color and physical

appearance—and intellect—of mixed-race babies constituted a major threat to the whole-

some of Japanese society (1999:164). Racially-mixed babies often faced rejection by

Japanese society for not being 'racially pure.' Mothers of hafu children were ostracized,

disowned by families, and perceived as sexually immoral by society (Burkhardt 1983:

529). For this reason, many of these women abounded their children.

The abandonment of these children sparked the interest of Pearl Buck, a famous

American writer and novelist who spent half of her life focusing on philanthropic work

and advocating for marginalized voices. Buck established two organizations in order to

encourage the adoption of these rejected mixed race children. Buck's *Welcome Home*

foundation specifically aimed to place black hafus with black families in America Cheng

2014:188). In a 1967 issue of *Ebony* magazine, the photo of a young boy described to be

'mixed blood' (See Fig. 2 in Appendix) is followed by a small description,

> "*Adoption now can save this appealing nine-year-old from fate of
> countless part-Negro teen-age war babies facing hopeless future in Japan
> today. He and two other mixed-blood[18] boys, both 11, can be adopted
> within six months time.*" (Ebony Magazine Pg. 54)

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[18] In literature by Burkhardt, Koshiro, Kelsky, and other scholars who have written on this phenomenon we see terms such as mixed blood, konketsuji, etc. all use the term mixed blood to describe children of Japanese women and foreign men. I have interpreted the term to be the same as hafu therefore; I will be using the term hafu instead of mixed blood. I want to acknowledge that writers like Koshiro and Burkhardt use *mixed blood* in order to describe this specific population. I will continue to use the term hafu as an interchangeable term. I would also like to unpack the term itself; a term coined by the Japanese government to describe these hafu children already implies something problematic.

Since most of these children were abandoned they often did not have citizenship. Hafu children could only obtain Japanese citizenship if the father were also Japanese citizen or if their mothers registered them through the Japanese government. The process to obtain American citizenship was a bit more challenging since it required American fathers to register their children with American consulate (Cheng 2014:195), however in cases in which the child is abandoned by both parents they face statelessness. Buck believed although these "Amerasians might be located spatially outside the United States, their status as children of military service men made them the collective responsibility of Americans" (Cheng 2014:187).

Despite negative attitude towards mixed children some viewed them as symbols of hope and change between U.S and Japanese. Sawada Miki (See Figure 3 in appendix), granddaughter of the founder of Mitsubishi industries, invested her money in educating these children in English and Japanese. Her philanthropic work focused on the belief that educating these half children will create "future links" between Japan and the U.S. She dedicated her time to her philanthropic work on the basis that these children will grow up to be "future links" between the nations (Koshiro 1999:163).

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Dani was born and raised in Japan until her last year in middle school her family decided to move to San Diego. After a few years in San Diego, Dani returned to Japan to pursue her undergraduate studies but took a year off to return back to Texas in hopes of getting closer to her father's family. Compared to the rest of my participants, Dani's life experiences provide a distinct narrative because her parents are still married and present

in her life. Unlike my other participants, Yuki and Yume, whose parents divorced and fathers returned to America, Dani was raised in a bi-lingual and multi ethnic household.

Most of Dani's friends attended Japanese public schools whereas, she attended an American military school for most of her life. The high school Dani attended followed a similar structure to American schools therefore, her education is completely separate from the Japanese school structure. Before putting a piece of *omurice* in her mouth, Dani told me she acknowledges her life would be similar to her friends if she attended Japanese public school, "But I was lucky enough to go to school on base." The military base school became a hub of exposure for different culture, the school catered to the children of American servicemen therefore Dani found herself surrounded by others like herself. "I hear my friends' stories and I feel lucky. Hearing how they were bullied in Japanese school because they were different. They would say, 'I had to get use to being the outcast because I couldn't fit in with everyone else,' and that's because they're half black and Japanese."

She once again referred to luck when discussing her multi-ethnic upbringing, "I always felt like I was lucky to be half. Even when I went to an American school, most of my friends couldn't speak Japanese even though they were half Japanese; they only knew one culture. I feel lucky to be able to speak two languages, I feel lucky to know what the Japanese culture is and what American culture is. I've always felt like it was always cool [being mixed/hafu] but, for some people that went to Japanese school they might feel differently because of the way they were treated. As they grow older they understand that they are blessed to be this way and start to see it from this perspective. Also meeting

other hafus makes them more comfortable with themselves, they're thinking I'm not the only one like this or I'm not the only one in this situation."

Dani's narrative highlights Dr. Kimie Oshima's (2016) argument on the hafu experience three stages in their lives before forming their own identity. The first stage occurs in the early childhood years usually between the ages of 6 and 7 in which they are aware of their differences and the way society perceives them (2016:31). The second occurs during the early stages of education (i.e. kindergarten to twelfth grade) in which hafus struggle to cope with their difference. Oshima classifies this stage as the '*Just let me be Japanese,*' in which hafus face recurring situations of their Japanese identity being questioned (see Chapter 3 & 4). In the final stage, mixed race Japanese mold their own identity and come to accept their hafu identity (2016:31). Within the same stage, hafus "find their own ways to cope with how people and society treat them, and some are even able to enjoy the fact, while others learn to take advantage of it [hafu/mixed race identity]" (2016:31). Although Dani did not necessarily experience the first two stages within her upbringing she does show evidence of the final stage as Oshima describes.

When I asked Dani if she identified more Japanese than Black, "Honestly, I feel like I'm more Japanese because I was born and raised here and I've lived here for most of my life. I can't really speak Japanese more than English because I was educated in English my whole life. As far as food, mannerisms, and they way that I think…it's more Japanese than American. Of course, the American culture has influenced parts of me but I would definitely say I identify more with my Japanese side." Dani identifying herself as more Japanese highlights Burkhardt's argument that hafus are not excluded from dominant cultural discourse and allowed to participate. While Burkhardt emphasizes

mixed race, Japanese people experience this "general adaptability" to Japanese culture (1983:539) he also argues hafus "culturally, but not structurally, assimilated and socially, not culturally, marginal" (1983:535).

Dani detailed the unjust story of her friend, who is also a black hafu. She wanted to pursue a career in banking and after finishing her degree in that area she went job searching. Being all too aware of the beauty standards and racial bias that exist in Japan, Dani's friend straightened her hair and used skin lighteners in effort to appear more Japanese. "But she didn't get any jobs working for the bank due to her physical appearance. She went to school and she got a degree, but because she is half black and did not look Japanese she did not get the job." Dani recounting the story of her friend reveals Japan's discrimination against hafus, specifically black hafus, who experience challenges because of their physical features. Burkhardt emphasizes (1983) that Japanese society allows hafus to participate in the hegemonic culture (i.e. become ethnically Japanese) however, they are not given access to the same opportunities as their Japanese peers. Dani mentioned her friend only spoke Japanese, and was familiar with Japanese culture therefore, more than qualified to work in a Japanese bank. However, the pre-determined notions of who classifies as Japanese hindered Dani's friend from pursuing her career since she did not physically appear Japanese. In Japan's cultural hegemony (Gramsci 1971) values and ideologies are established to prescribe who can identify as Japanese and even more, the bourgeois class within society create these principles. Additionally, Japan's bourgeois class involves those considered 'racially pure' and some case, white hafu.

<u>Conclusion</u>

With all of the societal and systematic rejection black hafus face within Japan, is there ever a time where their identity is in doubt? Do black hafus have a difficult time identifying as Japanese? Dani reflected a bit on the questions I posed and answered, "I don't think it's hard for them to identify themselves [black hafus] as Japanese, but it will be hard for other people." Even though society might have a hard time accepting the presence of these individuals, Dani affirms they are confident in their identity and consider themselves very much Japanese. However, she does acknowledge that the identity of black hafus are constantly being challenged, "Well for me, I don't give a fuck. It doesn't matter what the next person is thinking about me. I feel like Japanese people tend to judge people too often. They are so set in their thinking; if it's not the Japanese way it's not the right way. If you don't look Japanese, then you're not Japanese...that's not true. It is being challenged all of the time for any black Japanese. It's not a threat to me at all…I don't really care it doesn't affect me...they're not paying my bills." Dani's frustration with the challenges black hafus face are similar to Yume (Chapter 1), who also believed it was unjust black hafus are not seen as Japanese. Furthermore, Dani not caring what the general Japanese population thinks of her reminded me of the similar sentiments Cameron (Chapter 2) shared when claiming to be hafu and not American or Japanese

Chapter 6

Blackness = Hip-Hop Culture in Japan: The Commodification of Blackness in Japan | *J a y ' s S t o r y.*

On the day I met with Yuki, I ended up meeting an extra person who ended up being a new participant for my research. I was under the impression that I was only meeting Yuki; therefore, when I first met Jay I was surprised but nonetheless excited to meet him. As I was interviewing Yuki, I directed the same questions at Jay in order to get snippets of his life, which followed a similar path to my other interlocutors. Jay was born in Tokyo but his parents originally met in Okinawa, "My mom is Japanese and my dad is black, she was one of the head nurses and my dad was in the Air Force." Shortly after Jay was born, his parents decided to move to America. However, when Jay was seven his parents separated - "I stayed with my dad in America but my mom came back to Japan". In 2012, Jay decided to travel to Japan for two reasons, to visit with his grandfather and pursue his basketball career.

Living in North Carolina with his father, Jay only had exposure to African American culture and few opportunities to encounter Japanese culture. "In the town I grew up in they had Asians but they were Chinese" thus, the demographic composition of Jay's hometown made it impossible for Jay to ever learn or practice Japanese culture. Although Jay's father was stationed in Okinawa his father never learned Japanese since American servicemen tend to stay on base. Additionally, towns and places of business located near these military bases cater to an English-speaking audience, thus, most of these men find no reason to learn Japanese.

I recognize Jay's story as the most compelling amongst all of my participants because of his firsthand accounts of American systematic racism. His encounters with the police made him all too aware of the type of racial system present in America. "My dad, my family, my friends they made sure I was black"; in addition to his cultural upbringing, Jay's personal experiences in navigating American racism made him quite aware of his black identity. I could not find a system existing within Japanese society that functions similarly to systematic American racism, although Japanese people still discriminates and holds prejudice against black people. Anthropologist John G. Russell argues Japan's views of black people are heavily influenced by remnants of colonization (Russell 1998). Furthermore, Russell counters that the Japanese comprehend blackness in terms of "athleticism (*undo shinkei*), primitiveness (*genshi-tekisa*), wildness (*yasei-tekisa*)," though these images and narratives of blackness are often regarded as positive qualities by Japanese media (1998:116-117).

Jay's experiences on the basketball court are an example of *undo shinkei*: "On the basketball scene they come towards me, they think black people are good at basketball it's a good discrimination I get the good side of that." He also referenced the few times his Japanese teammates called him gorilla and while they meant it as a compliment to Jay's strength and body durability, one cannot ignore the scientific racism and eugenic origins invoked when comparing black bodies to apes. Jay reassured me that the comment was made in reference to his height and while I do not deny this claim, I'm sure Jay's teammates and other Japanese people who make off-handed comments like that are not intending to be malicious in spite of the implications of their words. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge the presence of these narratives in Japanese society and inspect

how these tropes of blackness reached a Japanese audience. Russell (1998) argues

Japanese lack of participation in the slave trade and the colonization of Africa allowed

the Japan the capacity to freely use images of blackness and not suffer the consequences

of the usage of these images (Russell 1998).

The exaggerated usage of black sports athletes used in Adidas, Nike, and other

popular brands associates black bodies with athleticism. Furthermore, these

advertisements encourage a belief that the black body is the ideal body. Consequently,

black people, particularly black men, are minimized to their body and their athletic

performance, stripping away all forms of agency. Furthermore, these images of blackness

circulate through media, which allows blackness to be easily commodified. Some

Japanese regard these problematic stereotypes as positive attributes; thus, they are

genuinely surprised when black people take offense to these stereotypes (Russell 1998:

116-117).

Additionally, Japanese people understand blackness through the lenses of hip-

hop; this claim was supported by Jay's account when he revealed that the only image of

black people used in Japan is one of hip-hop. He also emphasized the fact that black

people are stereotyped as comedians in Japan.[19] He mentions comedian Bobby Ologun as

one of the prime examples of these stereotypes in Japan.

Jay:"As far as entertainment it's all hip-hop or comedian, you either gotta dance or be

funny."

Me:"In Japan?"

Jay:"That's what I see!"

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[19] Yuki mentioned in our interview that Eddie Murphy is a known figure in Japan.

As anthropologist Dawn-Elissa Fischer emphasizes, "hip-hop in Japan [is] part of imagined Black cultural practice, with Hip-hop serving as a trope for Blackness" (2013: 140). Shortly after the Japan's defeat in World War II, the U.S. made a decision to occupy the nation. With the new occupation, the U.S decided to set up military bases throughout Japan, most of them concentrated in Okinawa (See Chapter 3).

"In Japan, it's easy to drop out of school." Jay took a sip of his water before he continued, "It's easier to drop out and Black and Japanese kids [black hafus] feel like it's a big city and they have a natural swag to them, they can use their black culture to get into these [hip-hop] clubs and companies. If you have to be educated to play sports because there are requirements. There are a lot of halfs right now who have dropped out of school. So I can see why they would take the route of hip-hop. For one, this is Tokyo, one of the biggest cities in the world and you have a lot of clubs. It's easy access for kids sixteen, seventeen to go to the clubs. They don't do it because it's easy, they do it because at a certain age they need to decide if they're going to work at a Japanese company or try to make it in the club world. And a lot of guys decide they don't want to make it in the Japanese world, they rather make it for promotional companies for clubs. A lot of my friends that are halfs do a lot of club stuff. My other friends (also black) who are not part of the corporate world, they are more hip-hop black."

In our conversation Jay raised important points and critiques the commodification of blackness. Throughout my conversation with Jay it became clear that hip-hop was used as a tool of self-expression amongst black hafus and non-black hafus alike (i.e. Japanese-white hafus, other populations) adopt the culture of hip-hop as a mean to find their identity.

Russell writes, "urban black youth as fashionable rebels and as engaged in a lifestyle at odds with mainstream Japanese values provided Japanese youth with a vehicle to express their discontent with their lives and identities as Japanese" (1998:126-127). In other words, hip-hop became a mechanism used to display displeasure with Japanese society. However, when Jay criticizes black hafus for not having knowledge on black scholars or black liberation movement, he fails to also critique Japanese hegemony, which allowed little space for the exploration of this topic. For many of these black hafus their fathers went back to the U.S, consequently leaving them with their Japanese mothers, only having exposure to Japanese culture and being raised in an ethnically Japanese household.

It can be inferred that black hafus who decide to pursue a career in hip-hop are seen more legitimate due to their physical features (i.e. darker skin complexion, curly hair). Thus, black hafu rappers are granted the space and freedom to be perceived as more legitimate in the Japanese hip-hop community because of their status as mixed race. As Jay mentioned, most of these black hafus do not know English since they were raised in culturally Japanese households (i.e Yuki, Yume, and Cameron). These black hafus faced rejection from Japanese society for not looking Japanese and therefore, it is possible black hafus found a sense of identity through hip-hop.

Blackness Commodified

As previously explored, black hafus use hip-hop as a way of finding a sense of self and discovering aspects of an unexplored cultural identity even if it is at a surface level (i.e. hip-hop, sports, entertainment). That said, how does breaking away from Japanese hegemony look like amongst a Japanese population? Cornyetz states that hip-

hop does not only provide an image of blackness that is appealing and alluring, but also "provides a context for a difference in self-identification" (1994:120). Fisher (2013) also argues that hip-hop culture becomes a source of identity for those who find themselves in a marginalized position in Japanese society.

It can be inferred that the Japanese rejected from society turn to hip-hop because it offer, as Fischer discusses, "Something that youth who are politically marked as 'other' couldn't find in government policy, national media or popular culture. Hip-hop offered them a starting point for a conversation about pride, acceptance, humanity, harmony, and unity" (2013:146). Thus, hip-hop is a way for rejected youth (i.e., Japanese and non-Japanese people) to find acceptance.

The spike in black culture in Japan is classified as the 'black boom'; however, the black boom excludes black literature and scholarship (Russell 1998). "They [black hafus] don't even know what 'nigga' means, and they say 'nigga nigga nigga'. I know one guy who says it all of the time. I don't really care if you say it," Jay told me across the table, "but what I try to tell them that if they don't know the history of why people do not like that word then…" Jay did not finish his sentence, but he was clearly critic of black hafus. He later elaborated that many black hafus depend on the fragments of black culture they know- "They don't know anything about Malcolm X all they know is hip-hop." Jay critiqued his peers who only participate in one facet of black culture but did not bother to learn about black scholars and black history. Russell also possesses a similar critique, writing, "Postmodern Japan, *burakku pawa* (black power) does not so much signify black political and economic empowerment as the perceived black domination of the athletic, entertainment, and sexual landscape" (1998:121). In contrast to the black power in

America, which uplifts black authors, theorists, and the rights of black people, the exclusion of black scholars and literature seen in the black power movement in Japan removes the politics behind black culture. Russell further argues, "Japanese contemporary discourse on blackness not only contextualizes blackness but depoliticizes it" (1998:120). Thus, when blackness is only understood in the context of hip-hop, the political origins of hip-hop are then forgotten.

Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996) would argue when black hafus practice hip-hop culture they are accessing a lost world; this culture becomes a "warehouse of cultural scenarios" (1996: 30), in which they can partake in elements of this culture with no prior recollection of it. Furthermore, the invention of technology creates a pathway in which different image can travel at greater speeds and reach a bigger audience. Appadurai would classify this as the *technoscape;* this is exemplified by the images of black people being spread throughout Japan. Images of black people as athletes, sexual beings, savages, primitive, etc. travel through Japan's technoscape while also navigating through the country's *mediascape* (Appadurai 1996). The images of blackness allowed access to the technoscape (Appadurai 1996) are influenced by Western racism (Russell 1998). In the mediascape, the uses of technology (i.e. cell phones, television, etc.) "allow images to enter the world of commodities," (Appadurai 1996:35) eliminating existing boundaries between cultures and for this reason, black hafus found it easy to identify with hip-hop culture.

Desired Blackness

In our interview, Yuki mentioned burapan girls, a term given to women who seek sex with black men. I asked Yuki where the term burapan originally comes from and she

replied "the name comes from the sound of having sex like *pam pam,*" clapping her hands when she said this. She elaborated that in Japan, women who are attracted to black men will change their features in order to pass for half black. Shortly after Yuki's comment Jay spoke up, "I think all of the things she [Yuki] mentioned of women trying to act black that's true but guys also do the same thing. Let me tell you why they are doing it. They're doing it to get relationships. Girls do it because they want a black guy and there's nothing wrong with that people have their type." In Japan, the presence of blackness, specifically the presence of black men, is synonymous with sexual desire and consumption (Russell 1998:118). The hyper-sexualization of black men created by Japanese women specifically occurred during the 1990s yellow cab era (See Chapter 5).

Japanese men who try to pass for black or black hafus to enhance their masculinity do it to have a higher chance of obtaining a relationship. Due to the historical events of World War II, Japanese were stripped of their masculinity and not seen as sexually attractive by Japanese women. Kelsky (2006) writes Japanese men were a reminder of Japan's failure and defeat. Japanese men wear hip-hop clothes and embody hip-hop culture as a solution to the stripping of their masculinity by Japanese women. Russell further emphasizes this point and writes, "Feelings of sexual and personal inadequacy may also explain the allure of commodified black culture among Japanese males," (1998:160). The narrative of Japanese men being viewed as weak and lacking masculinity heavily influences this feeling of inadequacy. Following the U.S occupation, Japanese women were seeking relationships with American servicemen because they embodied the masculine archetype (Kelsky 2006). *Gaijin* (foreigners, i.e. non-Japanese) were sexually desired by Japanese women not only for their anatomy but also for their

kind and gentle personality - i.e chivalry (Kelsky 2006:138). However, black men

possessed a different narrative through which they were hypersexualized for their bodies

(i.e penis size). Karen Kelsky interviewed Japanese women for her book *Women on the*

Verge: Japanese Women, Western Dreams, who described their sexual encounters with

black men as "a sexual awakening" (Kelsky 2006).

Arguably, the hyper-masculinization of black men can also occur through

Japanese sports. Jay mentioned how there is a popular black hafu part of the Japanese

track and field team and a few names popped in my mind. I thought of Asuka Cambridge,

a black hafu who recently won the silver medal in 2016 Rio De Janeiro Olympics; or

Julian Walsh another popular runner making waves in Japanese sports news and expected

to participate in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. *The Japan Time* published an article titled

"Celebrating Japan's multicultural Olympians" and most of the athletes were black hafus.

"There's a couple of them but they are starting to notice half bodies, they are starting to

realize that our bodies are different." Jay emphasized that the recognition of half bodies

has peaked the interest of Japanese society. Furthermore, this attention placed on the

body of the black hafu attest to Russell's point (1998) on commodification of bodies

through athleticism.

With this glamorized image of blackness in Japan exists a concealed dark truth

about commodification, Jay told me that the presentation of black people in Japan's news

outlets is not much different from the one in America - "They show it over here they

show it like the black kid did something wrong". Although blackness is idolized and

perceived as *kakkoii* (i.e. cool, stylish, etc.) it does not eliminate the racist rhetoric

attached to black people. As Russell (1998) claims, Japan did not participate in the

enslavement of Africans nor did they create the systematic racism oppressing black people. However, the images presented in the Japanese mediascape and technoscape (Appadurai 1996) stem from narratives rooted in racism.

Jay disclosed to me a conversation he had with a Japanese woman in regards to the police brutality occurring in America. "She tells me, 'Black people are too aggressive,' and I did not flip out on her. I'm not mad at her because her education is coming from the TV. But that's the image that they are showing in the news, that we deserve to get our ass beat." Much like the U.S, Japan is producing images of black people that are heavily laced with demonizations of blackness. Even with the celebration of difference, racist perceptions of black people are not exclusive in the Japanese context. Japanese media celebrates and applauds blackness all the while promoting racist imagery that gets black people killed every day. Russell declares that Japanese people do not interact with black people and that ultimately their exposure is "limited to black popular culture as filtered through white media, displayed in the transnational marketplace, and repackaged in Japan" (1998:126). The hyper-masculinization of black men leads to their dehumanization and thus, images in hip-hop, which present black men as aggressive and overly masculine, also justify acts of violence against black bodies.

Conclusion

Jay went on to elaborate, "Most of these kids aren't presented opportunities. They are to find opportunity and they don't realize that they are one in a million kids trying to find this same opportunity in hip-hop." In our interview, Jay seemed to not mind that black hafus decide to go on the route of hip-hop as a career path, but his frustration stemmed from the fact black hafus do not know much about hip-hop culture. In a way,

many of these black hafus themselves commodify their own blackness. However, is it commodification when some would say they have some claim to it? In a society that encourages sameness, many Japanese youth feel suffocated and need a way to get out. Hence, we see hip-hop becoming one of those tools used to go against the pressures and expectations set by Japanese society.

Although Jay never disclosed his own personal career goals or engagement with the commodification of blackness, it was clear that Jay seemed frustrated with Japan's current understanding of blackness and the popularity of black culture amongst half-black youth. "Japan is not big in hip-hop that's the wrong road to go to. Here, there's not much hip-hop. These guys trying to get into hip-hop here is damn nearly impossible, most of these guys don't even know English! So they not gonna listen to you if you try to rap English and then if you try to rap Japanese."

Conclusion

Currently, black hafus still remain excluded from the conversation of discrimination against hafus. Although Jane Yamashiro (2017) unpacks the the experiences of Japanese-American hafus in Japan she does not include the lived narratives of black hafus. Yamashiro does mention black hafus briefly to say that they are a separate discussion, but why not present this discussion within the research? Indeed, black hafus navigate Japan differently than white hafus but that does not mean they are not part of the discussion on Japanese Americans and their experience in Japan. Looking back at Jay's much of his story presents him as ethnically African American but he is still classified as Japanese-American but he also goes under *black hafu.* Thus, I critique Yamashiro's omission of this population and their experiences in a country that often does not value them in their society (i.e. phenotypic features, black Afro-features).

Examining the narratives of black hafus will open discussions on Japan's ethnic and racial politics while also examining the silenced minority groups within Japan (i.e Ainu, Okinawan, Japanese Korean etc.). Before I explored the experiences of my participants I needed to discuss Japan's historical past thus, examining their relation with non-Japanese groups. Even though each of my participants classified as a black half, each of them told of a different experience in coming to terms with their race and identity within and outside a Japanese context. Therefore, to fully unpack Japan's racial politics and discuss other group identities in Japan it is important to examine the narratives of black hafus. Each chapter details the unique lived life experiences of my participants further highlighting the intersectionality that exists within each issue presented.

Outside of the Japanese community that idolizes hip hop culture, black hafus are not accepted as Japanese. As Jay mentioned, black hafus explore hip-hop as a career path in order to gain the acceptance they cannot find within their own society. Scholars should discuss the experiences of black hafus in their studies of hafus since they very much embody Japanese culture. However, Japanese society struggles to open its category of *Japanese* to those who do not fit the standard. Furthermore, Japan must acknowledge its past history of discrimination towards its own minority groups, such as the Ainu and the Burakumin. If Japanese society were more accepting of different types of Japanese then black hafus would feel comfortable in claiming Japanese identity, however their upbringing and experiences push them away from their Japanese culture. It is due to this societal rejection that hafu gravitate towards hip hop culture. Although all of my participants openly claimed their Japanese identity they also recognized their blackness.

Most of my participants (with the exception of Jay and Dani) could only Japanese culture in their youth. However, in their young adult life many participants became accepting of their other component (i.e. blackness, black culture, American culture) which amplified their confidence and molded their identity.

There is new discussion surrounding Japan's mixed population. Although there has gradually been critical literature written on this topic and much attention has been emphasized on this topic, a common theme is the lack of discussion in terms of black hafus. Time after time, the discussions and conversations surrounding hafus in Japan does not extend to black hafus. They are often a forgotten narrative overshadowed by that of the more popular hip hop culture. Of course, I can only speculate why black hafus decide

to explore hip hop as a career choice however examining this decision and their life experiences provides a deeper understanding of race in Japan.

 I hope that this study highlight a broader range for hafus so that they can encounter other forms of black identity that are not centralized in hip hop.

Appendix
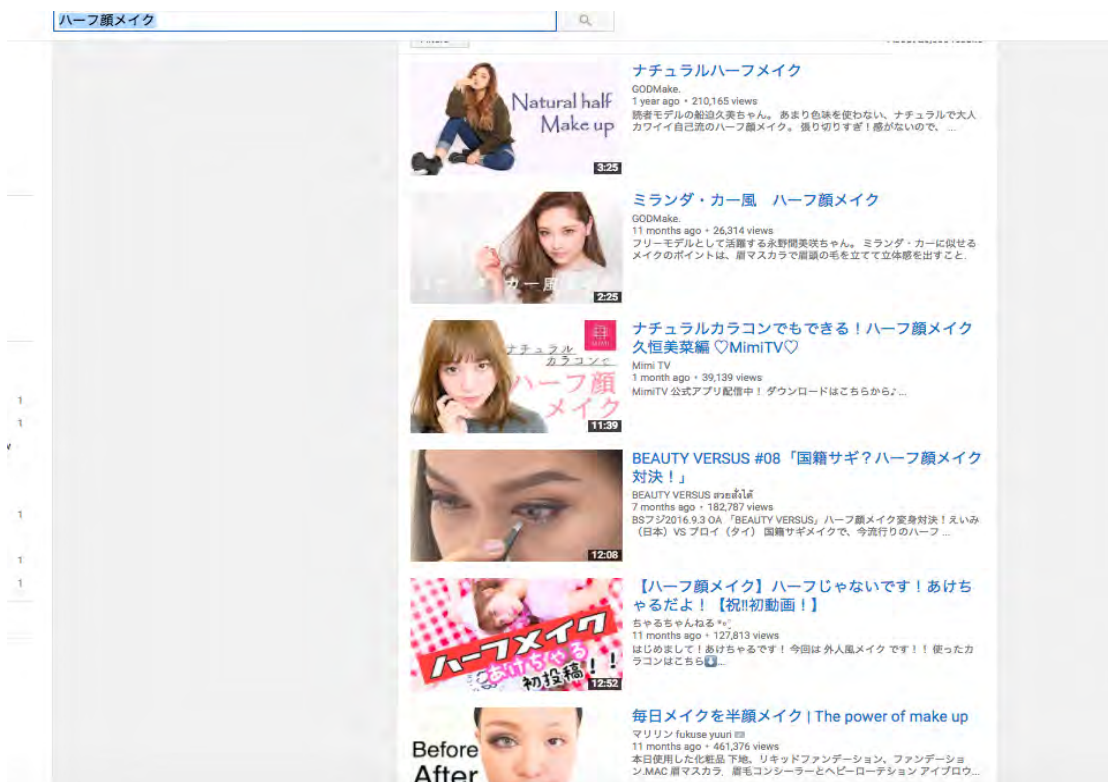
(Fig. 1 Make-up tutorials on YouTube showing women how to look half white)

(Fig. 2. Advertisement for the adoption of a black hafu seen *Ebony* Magazine in Source: Ebony Magazine pg. 54)

(Fig 3. Sawada Miki alongside two black hafus whom are part of her orphange Source: Ebony Magazine pg. 44)
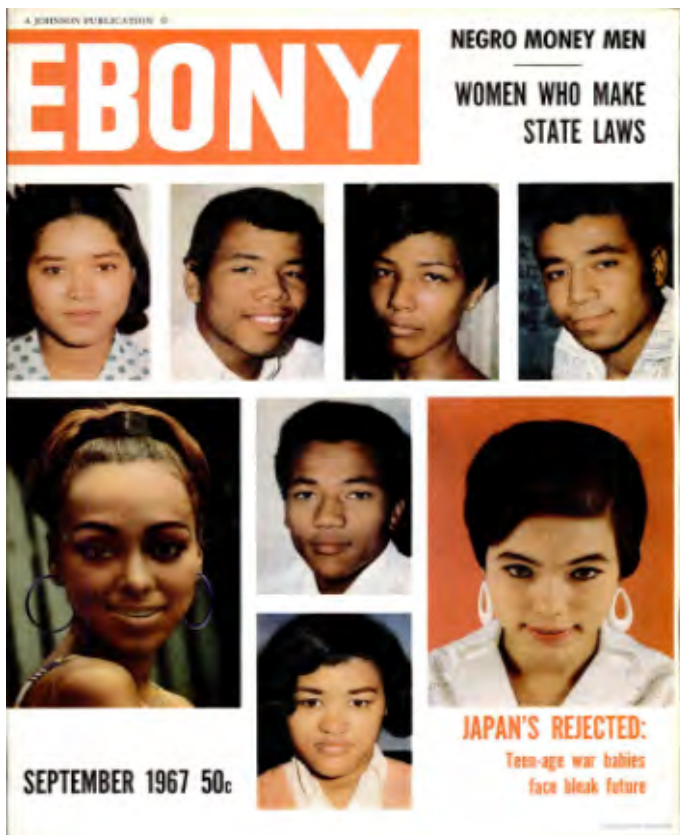
(Fig. 4. Cover of Ebony Magazine September 1967 issue titled '*JAPAN'S REJECTED: Teenage war babies face bleak future*' features racially mixed Japanese, most of whom are black hafus Source: Ebony Magazine)

(Fig 5. Advertisement for home realtor agency targeted foreigners in Shin-Okubo station Source: Myself)

(Fig. 6. Michiko Aoyama, a black hafu wearing a *yukuta* Source: Ebony Magazine pg. 43)

(Fig. 6. Tina Nozawa, a black hafu featured in 'JAPAN'S REJECTED', the article follows Nozawa's desired to be a model however she was considered 'too dark' by Japanese agencies Source: Ebony Magazine pg. 43)

(Fig. 6. Hip-hop store located in Takeshita Street, Harajuku Source: Myself)

(Fig. 7. *PRIVELGE* store next to *Billionaire Boys Club*, I point out these stores to show examples of commodified black culture Source: Myself)

(Fig. 8. Japanese woman wearing box braids giving money to one of the dancers at club HARLEM in Shibuya. Source: Myself)

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