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Mixed Speak: Towards a Re-Poetics of Race and Self

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Abstract

This paper tells the stories of mixed-race Japanese people. I engage in a re-poetics, positing storytelling as an essential tool into complicating our understandings of race and self. I examine the relationship between language and race, exploring how subjects existing within a space of mixedness navigate identity-formation and racial belonging. Operating under a socio-constructivist lens, I begin with a brief re-telling of the history of race in Japan, re-framing mythologies of race throughout literature, legislation, and into national and colonial projects. While popular discourse alleges Japan was and is a country of racial homogeneity, I argue that this falsifies colonial legacies and denies contemporary realities. I contextualize racial formation in Japan as a convergence of pre-existing language surrounding blood and purity with a racialist Western worldview. The second half of this paper transitions towards instances of identity formation. Through a brief linguistic case study, I illustrate the way televisual media reproduces Japaneseness discourse, and the way racialized *hāfu* people must negotiate their identities within its discursive rules, speaking to the embodied tensions of mixedness. Using a combination of interview and autoethnographic material, I center our voices to produce a comprehensive (though not omniscient) view of lived experiences within, through, and between racial lines. Finally, I explore the implications of undoing racial language and consider racial futurities.

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Introduction

I believe the critical point being overlooked has to do with the right of the "insider" to define and conceptualize his or her own experience, and then develop a perspective which reflects this. This is not to say the insider's point of view is necessarily the most accurate or "truthful" (whatever the truth may be). My point is that—as a person of biracial, bicultural ancestry—I have to develop a way of looking at and understanding myself that fits my reality and needs.

- Lane Ryo Hirabayashi, "On Being 'Hapa': Inside Versus Outside Views"

The recent bag of re-poetics (recuperate, rewrite, transport, transform and so forth) proffers the opportunity to confront many of the assumptions and confusions of identity I feel compelled to "reconfigure." The site of this poetics for me, and many other multi-racial and multi-cultural writers, is the hyphen, that marked (or unmarked) space that both binds and divides…a crucial location for working out the ambivalences of hybridity….In order to actualize this hybridity…the hybrid writer must necessarily develop instruments of disturbance, dislocation and displacement.

- Fred Wah, "Half-Bred Poetics"

In kindergarten, my parents were asked to bring in food for one of those cultural initiatives that private schools seem to enjoy. My mother brought in a plate full of onigiri: rice balls, shaped into triangles, speckled with furikake and wrapped with sheets of nori. She had chosen two flavors, salmon and ume, which colored the rice in pink and purple flecks. My friend Sophia and I munched on them happily, our tongues sour with the tang of plum and salty with the sea. No one else touched them.

When I was seven or so, I was playing in a park with my friend Owen. We were with his mother, who was white, and my father, also white. Hands wrapped around the cool metal of playground equipment and feet planted in mulch, Owen and I stood side by side. A girl walked up to us, eyes curious. She immediately asked me: "Are you adopted? Where are you from?" I don't remember what I told her.

Throughout all of elementary school, this boy in my class would come up to me, put his palms together in prayer, bend robotically to 45 degrees at his waist, and then whip up violently the way children do. He would walk away with a laugh, his perpetually chapped lips cracking into a painful-looking grin. I remember complaining to my mother about his ritual. "Japanese people don't even do that," she told me, "that's a Thai thing." I didn't think too much more about it, settled with the affirmation that James (said boy) was just stupid.

I sat in the car next to my neighborhood friend Haley as we pulled into her grandmother's driveway. I opened the car door, greeted by her grandma's exclamation: "Suzuki, right?" My confused face garnered a roar of laughter. "I'm just joking with you. That's the car brand." She was a stranger, so I didn't say anything.

In the middle of barre, our ballet teacher Ms. Mao paused to let us practice pirouettes. I spinned around a couple times, losing my balance. "Mizuki, stop squinting your eyes when you spot!" she interrupted, scolding me, pulling her eyes with her fingers and miming a horrific spin. Quiet chatter enveloped the room, a wave punctuated by giggles that rolled into silence. We resumed drilling our pirouettes. The scuffs of our leather soles echoed in the quiet. I didn't like Ms. Mao. But I couldn't help but think this was strange coming from her. I wasn't the only one that thought so. Sophie, a Korean girl in my class, confided to me later in the changing room: "What's Ms. Mao talking about? She's Chinese. And her eyes are smaller than yours." She laughed, incredulous. I laughed, still confused, and embarrassed, but mostly angry. "Yeah, I don't know."

Leticia, another ballet teacher, whom I had more of a liking to, walked around the room correcting our form. We were all on the floor, in splits, pushing our chests as close to the ground as we could. She arrived at my spot, made a few adjustments to my hips and pushed me further

to the ground."See you're flexible! It must be because you're Japanese," she laughed. I smiled, happy at her compliment. My mother would come to observation days and chastise me for my lack of progress. "You need to stretch more. Olivia's much more flexible than you," she would say. I didn't have the back-breaking flexibility like the Japanese dancers I saw online. My pliés were never deep enough and my arches were not quite high enough, unlike those of my classmates. But maybe I'd improved. I'd take a compliment, I didn't get them often.

There was a Thai restaurant right next to my ballet studio, so it became a regular take-out spot for my family. My dad and I usually went together, and we'd talk with the lady who worked the front. One day, my mother took me instead. "Oh! You look a lot more like your dad, huh?" the front lady remarked, glancing at me, and then to my mom. I smiled and stayed silent.

I met once every couple weeks to check-in with my college counselor. He was still trying to get a sense of who I was—or what I had to show for myself—but our conversations were punctuated with awkward silences I was unable to fill with small talk. One meeting, he told me: "I think, you know, your quiet side is like your Japanese side." I didn't argue with him. Teachers always complained that I never talked. I didn't know what to say.

I've tried to recollect my earliest instance of racial self-awareness, of racial becoming, a moment where I clearly understood myself in the way others perceived me. Despite several years of attempting to fish out some sort of clarity, I only have this collection of mismatched moments that I can't quite puzzle together. Maybe memory doesn't work the way I want it to, but maybe the muddled image provides a more accurate picture of my experiences. By "more accurate," I don't mean more valid—I'm attempting to move away from any notion that my felt experiences could be more or less valid. I mean accurate in that they might clear up (to myself and to you)

my motivations behind this project: feelings of confusion, of shame, of connection, and joy. I outline my approach to these feelings below.

This project is personal to me, with roots in my own inner world. Nancy J. Chodorow analyzes personal meaning through a psychoanalytic lens to argue "against the view that subjectivity is shaped, determined, or constituted by language and culture, or that feelings, identities and selves are culturally constructed."[1] This may seem entirely antithetical to my preoccupation with identity, race, and language. However, Chodorow doesn't imply that subjectivity is unrelated to language, or that identities are not also culturally constructed. Her argument is based on the idea that subjectivity "is equally shaped and constituted from inner life, and the inner world is not a direct reflection or a result of that which is given and exterior." [2] I do not tread directly into the realm of psychoanalysis like Chodorow does, but I follow her extension of subjectivity beyond exteriority and into interiority. I ground this paper in inner lives: my own, as well as those of other mixed individuals. Nevertheless, I am also trying to tackle the exterior world, to understand the ways our inner and outer worlds inform each other and shape our identities.

As a Media and Cultural Studies researcher, I draw on a range of academic fields, namely, cultural theory, ethnic studies, and raciolinguistics. My interdisciplinarity helps me comprehensively capture the histories, social realities, and emotional worlds of mixed people. I tie together this variety in method with a practice of what I will call re-poetics. By the prefix "re-," meaning "in the general sense of 'back' or 'again'," I signal an effort to go back and once again write our stories, to draft futures from a newly scripted past.[3] By poetics, I am not thinking

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[1] Nancy Chodorow, "Introduction," in *The Power of Feelings: Personal Meaning in Psychoanalysis, Gender, and Culture* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999), 5, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=53007.
[2] Chodorow, 5.
[3] "Re-, Prefix," in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed March 23, 2023, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/158795.

strictly in the traditional sense of poetry, but rather in the act of writing in an affective dimension, and of attending to narrative structure. As in Fred Wah's definition, this is a project of recuperation, rewriting, transportation, and transformation. While I weave arguments throughout this paper, the paper in its entirety does not compromise a singular overarching argument. Instead, I think of this project as an exercise in re-poetics, and as an urge towards similar applications.

I organize my paper into five chapters. Chapter One presents my theoretical approach to race. Drawing on Stuart Hall's conception of the "floating signifier," and a new body of raciolinguistic work, I characterize race as a continual process, something constantly being reproduced and renegotiated through language. This sets the stage for Chapter Two, in which I detangle what it meant and what it means to *be* Japanese. I set out to retell the history of race in Japan, from the pre-racial conditions of the archipelago to the introduction of Western notions of race and the development of colonial conquest and nationhood. Looking at contemporary legislative conditions, I contextualize the racialization of mixed subjects within Japan. In the following chapter, I move beyond law and literature to show how visual media also participates in this racialization. I analyze how an instance of television reproduces Japaneseness discourse, forcing mixed-subjects to negotiate identity formation within its discursive boundaries. This lays the backdrop for Chapter Four, in which I transition to an exploration of inner life, illustrating the affective embodiment of mixedness as a racial category. I tell my own stories, and the stories of six interviewees, sewing together our experiences of race, identity, and belonging. The final chapter takes a dive into theoretical potentials for racial liberation.

The organization of this paper represents a journey I have embarked on with myself. I began this project with feelings of confusion related to my racial identities and an interest in

trying to quell them. In each chapter I approach these feelings from a new angle, asking myself different questions and finding new answers. I end this project with a kind of release, moving away from this line of questioning and instead with a look towards the future, thinking about what might be gained from my exploration of narratives of race and self.

While I pay attention to various academic approaches, my main focus is on the relationship between race and language. As such, I would like to make clear that the words I use to refer to myself and other mixed individuals remain limited. Terms like "mixed," "mixed-race," or "*hāfu*" are neither equally accepted by all who might be identified as such, nor do they adequately encompass people's lived experiences.[4] Race and language seems to suggest a separateness to the two, though I contend they are more like co-producers of one another. As my first chapter will explain, the way race is understood results from a history of linguistic repetition.

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[4] *Hāfu*, derived from the English "half," is a Japanese racial label, referring to people of mixed-Japanese descent.

Chapter One: Speaking of Race

It is we who fix the meaning so firmly that, after a while, it comes to seem natural and inevitable.

- Stuart Hall, "Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices"

Racial categories are ubiquitous, so much so that they seem natural. We identify ourselves and others by race. We check boxes confirming our seemingly timeless truths. But even these "truths" exist in the multiple. I have checked myself into race, so to speak, but not always the same one(s): sometimes White and Asian, sometimes Japanese, if that's even presented as an option. On other occasions, I'm Mixed Race, sometimes, I'm just Other. Racial categories mutate across geographical and temporal landscapes; accordingly, so have my self-identifications. I also read differently to others.

An Uber driver once identified me as Caucasian, remarking on the oddity of my name. "What's the story with your name?" he asked, as I entered the car. "My mother's Japanese," I quickly replied, reciting a response I've become used to, hoping to avoid any potential "*What are you really*"s or "*Where are you really from*"s. He remarked with surprise: "You look Caucasian."

On a different occasion, an Uber driver also took notice of my name, this time assuming I was Swedish. I assumed he was referring to my last name, Samuelson, which is of Scandinavian origin. He had actually read my first name as Swedish: "*zuki,*" he voiced repeatedly back to me, attempting to confirm his interpretation. I corrected him, "Mizuki is Japanese." He wasn't entirely convinced, so I told him that my mother is Japanese, from Japan. Perhaps somewhat more satisfied, he agreed with me; he then began to recount a trip to Thailand.

Once, an Uber driver greeted me with an accented *konnichiwa*, having immediately read

my name, and me, as Japanese. He lived in Japan for a couple years, he told me, and remarked

on the niceness of the country. Later, still in the car, I expressed my worries to my friend who sat

beside me: "I have so much to do," I whined. "Oh, stop it, don't remind me!" she playfully

scolded me. The driver quipped, pleased with his assessment: "She's just being a *good* Japanese

girl." I bring up these experiences to illustrate the interplay of language and race.

Central to my exploration of mixed identity is the idea that racialization—the process of

assigning racial identities—functions through linguistic resources, and is a process of "becoming

as opposed to being."[5] I approach race *not* as a biological fact, but as a product of societal design,

one that has been sewn into the global social fabric to the point of naturalization. Stuart Hall

succinctly summarizes this process in the term "floating signifier." He says:

> Race is more like a language than it is like the way in which we are biologically
> constituted. Signifiers refer to the systems and concepts of the classification of a culture
> to its *meaning-making* practices. And those things gain their meaning *not* because of what
> they contain in their essence, but in the shifting relations of difference which they
> establish with other concepts and ideas in a signifying field. They are meaning because it
> is relational and not essential, [and] can never be finally fixed but is subject to the
> constant process of redefinition and appropriation.[6]

When others have racialized me as Asian, as white, or something in-between, they are dissecting

parts of what they perceive of me and plotting them onto their conceptual maps of race. Race

"floats in a sea of relation difference," producing subjects differently across time and space; we

have seen how racial categories have changed over time, classifying humans through expanding

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[5] H. Samy Alim, "Introducing Raciolinguistics: Racing Language and Languaging Race in Hyperracial Times," in
Raciolinguistics: How Language Shapes Our Ideas About Race (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 2,
http://dx.doi.org//10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190625696.001.0001.
[6] *Race, the Floating Signifier: Featuring Stuart Hall*, 2006, 2:03,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMo2uiRAf30.

groups of sameness and difference.[7] Attempts to reason race as essential, scientific truth—blood quantums, for example—have been, as Hall says, "largely shown to be untenable."[8]

Race as a discursive category, however, does not deny the existence of race, as some aspirations toward colorblindness do. Race as a floating signifier recognizes that race exists as a highly unstable category, but also allows us to see the way it produces subjects under violently oppressive systems of power that are material, and often inescapable. My engagement with raciolinguistics, I hope, allows us to see the way language produces race in a seemingly intangible way, but also simultaneously renders the embodied experiences of racialized bodies.

Raciolinguistics theorizes race and language as symbiotic constructs, *not* mutually exclusive entities. The subfield of linguistics aims to "race language and language race," to understand how language functions in racialization.[9] Language is central to how people self-racialize and racialize others. Language constructs racial categories, maintaining their social currency and mutating them in counter-hegemonic projects. However, more than simply stressing language's centrality in racialization processes, raciolinguistic research also reveals to us the very instability of race. Through speech, race is continuously created anew. Speakers produce race, reconciling "powerful linguistic ideologies with the social interactions that make up the substance of our everyday lives."[10] Later, I will delve into how mixed speakers' own self-racializations reproduce mixedness as a racial category, often doing so in ways that negotiates a gap between normative racial categorization and personal experience. Firstly

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[7] *Race, the Floating Signifier*, 3:00.
[8] *Race, the Floating Signifier*, 1:39.
[9] Alim, "Introducing Raciolinguistics: Racing Language and Languaging Race in Hyperracial Times," 1.
[10] Jennifer Roth-Gordon, "From Upstanding Citizen to North American Rapper and Back Again: The Racial Malleability of Poor Male Brazilian Youth," in *Raciolinguistics: How Language Shapes Our Ideas About Race* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 62, http://dx.doi.org//10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190625696.001.0001.

though, I turn to Japaneseness, a discourse that demonstrates the complex intertwinings of race

and language.

Chapter Two: On Japaneseness

The cultivation of essences, the belief that they exist, whether in nature or as artifact or character, is seductive and constraining. Drawn to its deployment in poetry and painting and performance, I long failed to recognize its power to stunt and deceive. Feeling betrayed, I became vigilant, in part out of shame over my blindness, and forbade myself pleasure in things announcing themselves as distinctly Japanese. Now words like 'mederu' I find straying into my head. I roll them around on my tongue, still unvoiced.

- Norma Field, "From My Grandmother's Bedside: Sketches of Postwar Tokyo"

For those of us who do not embody the Japanese child or Japanese adult, our views become distorted. We fight against accepting that there is anything uniquely Japanese, because that would exclude us. But we suspect that there is something Japanese, and that ironically we embody it.

- Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu, "When Half is Whole: Multiethnic Asian American Identities"

Approaching Essence

Japaneseness has no materiality, no central essence. It contains no place, no language, no identity. But it is believed to possess a sort of essential core, and so it does, floating in a sea of signs, crafted out of a swarm of classifying concepts. Norma Field and Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu illustrate the seductive grasp of Japaneseness, of believing in its actuality and in our possession of the essence. Japaneseness reaffirms a vision of selfhood steeped in nationalistic, racist, and multiculturalist ideologies. As an essence, it remains fixed, caught in a current towards a certain path: "one looks Japanese because one is ethnically Japanese because one possesses Japanese citizenship."[11] To contextualize mixedness in Japan, it is paramount to

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[11] Debitou Arudou, "Japan's Under-Researched Visible Minorities: Applying Critical Race Theory to Racialization Dynamics in a Non-White Society," *Global Perspectives on Colorism (Symposium Edition)* 14 (2015): 714.

understand Japaneseness, its ties to ideas of difference, its necessarily self-centered outlook, and
its contemporary iterations in multiracial realities.

Before diving headfirst into Japaneseness discourse, we must first look at the history of
race in Japan. Race—and its progenitor racism—have and continue to receive great academic
attention, but much is displaced from the East Asian context.[12] As Kowner and Demel write, this
is curious considering Western racializations of East Asians and the sheer enormity of the
region's population and participation in global affairs. In contemporary Japan, race is swept up in
a dizzying debate: Are Japanese people all racists? Or is race irrelevant to the more salient binary
of *gaijin* (foreigner) versus *nihonjin* (Japanese), which speaks to a problem of xenophobia, and
not racism? This rhetorical battle ends at a standstill, in which Japan is compared with Western
nations to argue for moral superiority. What is more pertinent, and helpful in deconstructing
Japaneseness, is retelling the story of race in Japan. It is true that modern theories of race began
in the West, and not East Asia. But racial meanings have traveled across the globe, reproduced
locally and felt beyond the borders of the nation-state.

In contemporary editions of this history, race formally begins in Japan with the
introduction of Western racial concepts in the late nineteenth century; notably with scholar
Yukichi Fukuzawa's 1869 *Account of the Countries of the World*, which mapped broad skin-color
phenotypes (white, "slightly yellow," black, brown, red) onto various geographies.[13] However,
academic accounts offer little attention to the integration of racial concepts. Colorblind rhetoric
similarly glosses over the reproduction of race in Japan, instead putting to the fore accounts of
xenophobia and the like. Both academic and popular renderings fail to register the gravity of

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[12] Rotem Kowner and Walter Demel, *Race and Racism in Modern East Asia: Western and Eastern Constructions*,
Vol. 1, Brill's Series on Modern East Asia in a Global Historical Perspective (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 4.
[13] J.H. Yamashiro, "The Social Construction of Race and Minorities in Japan," *Sociology Compass* 7, No. 2 (2013):
148.

Japan's projects of coloniality and nationhood, whose racialist designs precede their nineteenth century beginnings.

In this chapter, I outline the myth of homogeneous Japan, with roots dating all the way back to the fifth century. I describe some early historical records and policy which blueprint the incorporation of Western racial concepts. Thematic concerns about purity and mixture throughout these examples reveal to us the rigid power play of race. I examine the relationship between Japan's colonial pursuits and its shifting racial self-identifications. While I do not provide an extensive history of Japan's lengthy and violent colonialism, I look at an incident in colonial Korea to illustrate the mutation of race in colonial deployments. Taking a detour to nation-building, I give a general overview of *nihonjinron,* a large body of literature centered on Japanese national and cultural identity, in order to summarize a shifting (racial) self-image running tangentially to Japan's global positioning.[14] I end this chapter with a look at post-war constructions of mixed subjects, their racializations a result of the aforementioned histories.

This chapter aims to initiate a deconstruction of Japaneseness through what Yuko Kawai calls a transnational critique, a process of investigating the essence "by attending to the role of non-national discursive Others and by linking the past with the present, the discursive with the material, the cultural with the political and economic, the local with the global, the self with the other..."[15] As Kawai points out, to think about the national is necessarily to think transnationally, "considering that constructing nationhood involves imagining non-national groups."[16] A transnational lens enables us to attend to race in a way that is neither essentially Eurocentric nor uniquely Japanese. It also allows us to connect places and people, to consider what imagining

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[14] *Nihonjinron* (日本人論) translates literally to theories (論, *ron*) about Japanese people (日本人, *nihonjin*).
[15] Yuko Kawai, "Introduction," in *Transnational Critique Of Japaneseness: Cultural Nationalism, Racism, and Multiculturalism in Japan.* (United States: Lexington Books, 2022), xiii.
[16] Kawai, xiii.

encounters between otherwise separated geographies tells us about race, and about ourselves. In order to think transnationally, I begin by dissecting a mythology that maintains a local notion of race.

Homogeneous Japan: Racial Origins and Racial Fantasies

The myth of homogenous Japan constructs a fictitious past and predicts a future of uniformity, effacing the heterogeneity of Japanese society, as shaped by colonial, national, and capitalist projects. Since prehistoric times, movements of peoples—Ainu, Ryūkyūans, Chinese, Korean, Taiwanese, and more—have shaped Japan's polyethnic population and resisted attempts at erasure, both literal and metaphorical.[17] The mythology of homogeneity dates back to the fifth century Yamato state:

> When written records replaced oral transmission, the commonality of origin with mainland people was denied and a legend of a single, unmixed Yamato people of unique, indigenous origin was developed. The people were said to be of divine ancestry and the imperial line directly traced to the sun goddess. From its inception, Yamato identity implied uniqueness from the rest of mankind.[18]

The language around Yamato purity is pre-racial, but the vocabulary invokes what might be considered "naturalist [or] even creationist discourse of racial distinction and discrimination."[19] At the time, the conditions necessary to produce a "full-blown idea of race," were absent in East Asia.[20] Still, the rhetoric around Yamato purity remains important in considering proto-national population control, which affirmed the centrality of lineage—and later, embedded a racial imperative—in Japanese nationality.

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[17] Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu, "Multiethnic Japan and the Monoethnic Myth," *MELUS* 18, No. 4 (1993): 63–80, https://doi.org/10.2307/468120; Yamashiro, "The Social Construction of Race and Minorities in Japan."
[18] Murphy-Shigematsu, "Multiethnic Japan and the Monoethnic Myth," 66.
[19] Kowner and Demel, *Race and Racism in Modern East Asia*, 1:4.
[20] Kowner and Demel, 1:17.

William Wetherall traces this history, arguing that population registration, rather than ethnography, "illuminates how Japan came to define its nationality." Since the sixth century, historical records establish population mixing as a politicized issue. A reform to the late seventh century legal system pushed the country closer to nationhood, affirming the use of population registers—particularly in aristocratic clans—to track population flows.[21] Wetherall cites an annotation appearing in *Nihon shoki,* an eighth century chronology of Japanese history, which notes that: "'When a Great Yamato person takes a barbarian woman as a wife and a child is born, it shall be a Korean.'"[22] This question of mixture—not nominally of race but of blood—retains its relevance throughout national histories, including Japan's *konketsuji mondai* (mixed-blood-child problem), upon which I will later elaborate.

Legislation fortified fear around mixed progeny. In 1636, the Tokugawa shogunate exiled all Portuguese and the Japanese women and children with whom they were entangled.[23] The decree called for the exile of women who had had children with Portuguese men, and even the exile of women who had previously cohabitated with these men. Human telegony theory claimed that the influence of previous intimate partners branded these women with impurity, regardless if they were now married to Japanese men. Only three years after the initial shogunal decree, intercourse between foreigners and local women (with the exception of prostitutes) was banned. Japan was not yet a nation-state, but these incidents reflect anxieties around selfhood; the borders of the body became the embodied self—any threats to it had to be eliminated.

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[21] William Wetherall, "Nationality in Japan," in *Japan's Diversity Dilemmas: Ethnicity, Citizenship, and Education* (New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2006), 11–46.3.
[22] Wetherall, 13.
[23] Kowner and Demel, *Race and Racism in Modern East Asia*, 1:18-19.

Ultimately, Japan's swift incorporation of Western racial concepts aligned with these

earlier efforts of social control through cohesion. As Kowner and Demel contend, race was not

so much new in goal as it was novel in language:

> Since premodern times all the major kingdoms in [Japan and China] were using various
> means for creating this cohesiveness, understanding, as Dru Gladney has suggested, that
> "the composition of the nation is not a natural process but is achieved, promoted, and
> represented through political and cultural means." In the face of multiple religions and
> cultural ambivalence, broad categories of race used in the West since the eighteenth
> century appeared to surpass any other naturalized category in offering common
> definitions.[24]

Race offered a language to build nationhood upon pre-existing visions of selfhood. *Kokutai*

(national body) ideology—most prominent from the mid-eighteenth to mid-twentieth

century—reproduced the thematic dynamics of origin and belonging present in the Yamato

people's early self-imaginings, emphasizing "the ancient racial qualities" of a "great and

harmonious society."[25]

The fortification of Japanese nationality spanned decades, beginning with early planning

by the Meiji government.[26] The 1872 Family Registration Law (*Kosekihō*), established

nation-wide family registers and thus solidified the importance of lineage within the national

framework. This law planted seeds for later legislation: namely, the Constitution (*Kenpō*), the

Civil Code (*Minpō*), and eventually the Nationality Law (*Kokusekihō*). Two years after the

Family Registration Law, the International Marriage Proclamation was issued, allowing

international marriages and nationality changes. A foreign partner could gain Japanese

nationality through marriage, regardless of racial origin. The first Nationality Law of 1899 and

the termination of extraterritorial treaties with the U.S., Britain and others, officially established

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[24] Kowner and Demel, 1:12.
[25] Murphy-Shigematsu, "Multiethnic Japan and the Monoethnic Myth," 66.
[26] Wetherall, "Nationality in Japan," 14.

Japanese nationality as legally viable on both a local and international scale.[27] Much like the

legal foundations that preceded it, the Nationality Law carried no particular mentions to race;

naturalization became possible, irrespective of racial origin.[28] Yet race had already become

imprinted in the national imagination, and was inevitably superimposed onto legislative

language. Japan's entry into a period of violent colonialism capitalized on the power-politics of

race, using it to grow its power as a global nation-state and to justify its action, as atrocious as

they were.

Race and Empire

Only two decades after the forceful opening of Japan's ports and the ensuing humiliation

of American gunboat diplomacy, Japan forced Korea to undergo an even greater indignity.[29]

Before Japan embarked on colonial conquest in Korea, the West had already succeeded in

promulgating "self-serving theories of race in East Asia."[30] Intimidated by the global scale of its

militaries and technologies, Japan sought to emulate the West, and to do so, reproduced its ideas

about race. Race appealed to Japan not only because it was a central concept of Western

modernity, but also because it was a necessary crux in the construction of national identity;

adopting race meant self-sustenance under the global nation-state model.

Race was first adopted at an individual level, through the travel of intellectuals, but also

through the spread of colonial beauty standards, which upheld the visual aesthetics of

whiteness.[31] Beyond beauty, Japan began to embrace Western technology and politics. Post-Meiji

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[27] Harumi Befu, *Hegemony of Homogeneity: An Anthropological Analysis of Nihonjinron* (Trans Pacific Press, 2001), 13.
[28] Wetherall, "Nationality in Japan," 17.
[29] Kowner and Demel, *Race and Racism in Modern East Asia*, 1:13.
[30] Kowner and Demel, 1:24.
[31] Kowner and Demel, 1:24.

revolution, Western modes of political organization and cultural life laid the groundwork for an aggressive climb to perceived modernity.[32] Cultural elites were paid large sums to share their knowledge of the West; *bunmei kaika* (culture and enlightenment) became the slogan for these aspirations. Encounters with Western foreigners and their (no doubt racist) critiques of the country fueled an engine of shame. To describe the internalized shame that fed Japan's era of empire, I turn to an instance of literature.

The work of Shusaku Endō, a novelist characterized by a primary concern with Catholicism, provides interpretations of race and colonial psychology—ones that Christopher L. Hill parallels to the observations of philosopher Frantz Fanon. In Endō's novel, "As Far as Eden," protagonist Chiba reconciles with color and colonialism, transplanted from Japan's former empire to the European imperial context. Though this piece comes from a post-WWII moment, Chiba's account of race articulates the psychology of (self-)racialization, and displays the uneven geographies of race, both of which remain pertinent in understanding the earlier age of empire. For Chiba, the mutations of race in Japan do not prepare him for the ontological struggle of racial being in France. He begins a romance with a white French woman, through which he enters into an eternal yellowness, an eternal damnation. Entangled with the body of his lover, he stares at his reflection in the mirror, and begins to perceive his "color" the way he experiences it socially. The disgust that his white world projects onto his body becomes his own:

> Next to the radiance of the shoulders and the breasts of the woman, which shone pure white in the room's light, my flesh sank into a lifeless, dark yellow hue….And in the two colors that the woman's body and mine tangled together there was not a shred of beauty, no harmony. On the contrary, it was revolting. It brought to mind a grub of the color of yellow dirt clinging to a pure white petal. The color itself also reminded me of bile or some other human secretion. I wanted to cover my face and my body with my hands… I turned off the lights, out of cowardice, and tried to lose my own flesh in the darkness.[33]

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[32] Kowner and Demel, 1:25.

[33] Christopher L. Hill, "Crossed Geographies: Endō and Fanon in Lyon," *Representations* 128, no. 1 (Fall 2014): 100.

Just like Chiba, Japan looked at itself in the West's distorted mirror, and saw itself mirrored back in disgust. To conquer these feelings of self-hatred, Japan turned to mimic the Western idea of civilization, rapidly transforming into a leading competitor on the global stage.

Japanese colonialism regurgitated the "Western racial outlook," wielding "a highly hierarchical worldview" which classified subjugated populations as racially inferior, but united under empire.[34] Imperial conquest of the pre-war period assimilated colonized peoples—Okinawans, Chinese, Taiwanese, Koreans, and Pacific Islanders—into the umbrella of Japanese. "Japanese" were not thought to be ethnically homogeneous, but "united as Japanese citizens."[35] Race was not formally sewn into imperial law, but Japan's colonial project drew on inherited delusions of racial homogeneity, as evidenced in nationalistic writing, which deployed terms like *Nippon minzoku* (Japanese race) and *Yamato minzoku* (Yamato race)[36]. Popular slogans like "*Ichioku isshin*" (One hundred-million hearts beating as one) reified the belief in an empire built of a racially, linguistically, and culturally singular people—a singularity that falsely represented "one historical experience, and one destiny." Imperial Japan posited Japanese racial superiority while simultaneously encouraging assimilation of colonized peoples under the label of Japanese *minzoku*; colonized peoples were necessarily considered "'quasi-Japanese,' and inferior to 'pure Japanese'."[37] In short, Japan's colonial projects configured the country into ambivalent self-categorizations. Stuck between claims of a larger Asian racial identity and a separate Japanese racial identity—one which dissected Japan from the Western imperial

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[34] Kowner and Demel, *Race and Racism in Modern East Asia*, 1:31.

[35] Murphy-Shigematsu, "Multiethnic Japan and the Monoethnic Myth"; Yamashiro, "The Social Construction of Race and Minorities in Japan," 149.

[36] Wetherall, "Nationality in Japan," 19.

[37] O. S. Törngren and Y Sato, "Beyond Being Either-or: Identification of Multiracial and Multiethnic Japanese," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 47, No. 4 (2019): 803, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2019.1654155.

paradigm of "'Asia' = barbaric = Coloureds = the ruled."[38] A school protest in colonial Korea, a seemingly obscure sample of Japanese imperialist history, offers a rich illustration of the transnational workings of racial formation at play.

The Kubo Incident took place in 1921 at Keijō Medical College, "an elite medical school established by the Japanese Governor-General."[39] After the disappearance of a skull used in lecture, Professor Kubo Takeshi accused Korean students of theft. He argued that their racially inferior anatomy predisposed them to barbaric acts; their guilt was only natural. Professor Kubo had built his entire career on the study of racial anatomy, which was grounded in the physical anthropology of his predecessor Koganei Yoshikiyo, who had learned his scientific racism in Germany. This global movement of racist thought demonstrates the intertwinings of race and power: these racial meanings were wielded to maintain colonial hierarchies.

To legitimize their imperialism, the Japanese had to rework the Western racial paradigm. In the Western configuration, Japanese were inferior, and certainly not differentiated from most of the peoples that Japan was subjugating to violent colonial rule. Japanese had to distinguish themselves from Koreans—as in the case of the Kubo Incident—and simultaneously reinforce their cultural and racial similarities. Hoi-eun Kim describes Japan's answer to this racial conundrum:

> [The] boundaries of the Japanese race needed to remain functionally impervious while seemingly malleable. In other words, as long as Koreans were defining themselves in racial terms that intrinsically assumed a developmental hierarchy, they were all operating within the discursive trap of Japanese racism.[40]

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[38] Eji Oguma, "Introduction," in *The Boundaries of "the Japanese,"* trans. Leonie R. Stickland, vol. 2: Korea, Taiwan and the Ainu 1868-1945 (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2017), 7.
[39] Hoi-eun Kim, "Anatomically Speaking: The Kubo Incident and the Paradox of Race in Colonial Korea," in *Race and Racism in Modern East Asia: Western and Eastern Constructions*, 2013, 411.
[40] Kim, 425–26.

The Korean students' response to the incident calls attention to the paradoxical nature of Japan's racist colonial violence. In a twisted but unsurprising turn of events, the Korean students' protests failed (partially) on account of their focus on Kubo's faulty scientific practices. Their anti-racist effort laid charges to the "inaccurate and malicious depictions" of their racialized selves, failing to address the "the concept of race itself." Kim's historical account of this incident urges us to analyze racism in Korea "beyond the binary interaction between Japan and Korea, since Japan's colonialism was in itself a production of Japan's own coloniality."[41] Subjugated by the West, discursively trapped in (racial) inferiority, Japan sought to propel itself into modernity, to strengthen its global position through violent territorial expansion, and to solidify its sense of self. Defeat in World War II put an end to its colonial pursuits. But a racial imperative continued to be sewn into the country's self-image, due in large part to *nihonjinron* literature, a post-war commodity that shaped contemporary notions of Japaneseness.

Theories of Japaneseness

Nihonjinron literature promoted a Japaneseness defined in opposition to foreignness. A popular commodity and a "species of cultural nationalism," *nihonjinron* attempted to explicate Japan's uniqueness, doing so through self-Orientalizing language.[42] In the remains of a former empire, this body of literature reflects a continued obsession with self-image in the West's eye. *Nihonjinron* is in large part built by this lasting insecure narcissism: "Most Japanese are keenly interested in the Otherness of themselves, or perhaps even obsessed by how foreigners,

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[41] Kim, 429–30.
[42] Harumi Befu, *Hegemony of Homogeneity: An Anthropological Analysis of Nihonjinron* (Trans Pacific Press, 2001), 14.

especially Westerners, see them."[43] It is no surprise then, that literature translating Japan through the Western eye—produced locally and overseas—is ever increasing. Co-produced by Japan and the West, *nihonjinron* plays into the same racial narratives of Japan's colonial period: in face of multiracial and cultural reality, Japan confessed only to homogeneity.

Under *nihonjinron*'s paradigm, Japaneseness' homogeneity is totalizing, demanding "ethnocultural, statist, and racial," uniformity—of which "looking Japanese" is paramount. The visual construction of "Japanese" borrows the remains of Social Darwinist theory, associating a kind of whiteness with a pure Japaneseness, and hence darkness with a dirtied, less valid claim to Japaneseness.[44] Evidence of heterogeneity is denied. Minority populations are considered too small, or already assimilated and visually indistinguishable, hence ineligible to be distinguished from a desired image of uniformity. Academic endeavors fabricate mythology of cultural and racial origin, ignoring historical connections to neighboring nations and re-affirming internal colonial logic on thinly veiled scientific racist grounds.[45] *Nihonjinron* also posits that homogeneity extends beyond race, maintaining a uniformity in class, language, and citizenship.

It would seem that the only subject capable of possessing Japaneseness is one born and raised in Japan, whose ancestry is purely "Japanese" (and therefore looks Japanese), who is fluent in both the (standardized) Japanese language and culture, and who professes loyalty to the state. "The implicit genetic determinism," or rather the racial imperative to Japaneseness, implies that "cultural and linguistic competencies" flow in Japanese blood.[46] As John Lie writes: "[this] discourse of Japaneseness casts 125 million Japanese citizens into *an essentialized receptacle of*

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[43] Befu, 57.
[44] Arudou, "Japan's Under-Researched Visible Minorities: Applying Critical Race Theory to Racialization Dynamics in a Non-White Society"; Yamashiro, "The Social Construction of Race and Minorities in Japan."
[45] Befu, *Hegemony of Homogeneity: An Anthropological Analysis of Nihonjinron*, 39–43.
[46] Befu, 72.

homologous individuals whose primary identity is Japanese [emphasis added]."[47] *Nihonjinron*'s

modern articulations reflect a history of fluctuating self-identification, following the ebb and

flow of foreign contact and colonial conquest.

The National Learning School, or *kokugaku,* could be considered a "budding

nihonjinron," scholarship reacting to sinology's emphasis on Neo-Confucianist values.[48] A

movement of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, *kokugaku* insisted on cultural

superiority over China, through essentialized notions of collective Japanese aesthetics and

morals. Attempting to rid the Japanese polity of Chinese influence, the Tokugawa regime had to

replace itself with the previous imperial system, ushering in an era of rapid changes in social and

political structure. The West replaced China as Japan's cultural model. The forced opening of

Japan's ports in 1853, a "symbolic rape" of sorts, procured deep shame.[49] Perry's arrival brought

on a period of what Harumi Befu conceptualizes as auto-Orientalism, as Japan relinquished itself

to self-degrading racism and fell into a rapid scramble to match pace with the West.

The auto-Orientalist mode of self-perception colored Japan's emulations of empire as

well as its nationality discourses.[50] Indeed, masochistic hierarchization of Western ways

dominates retellings of Japanese history. However, Befu suggests that mid-Meiji onward can be

characterized by a return to positive self-identification—albeit dipping into a defensive

auto-Orientalist bent. To match the West's global standing, the cultivation of positive national

identity was essential. As Befu writes, "[to] rationalize Japan's action and to bolster Japanese

morale, it was imperative to develop a national identity that made Japanese people feel proud of

themselves."[51] Japan's successful colonial expansion and rapid industrial development reinforced

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[47] John Lie, *Multiethnic Japan, Multiethnic Japan* (Harvard University Press, 2004), 50,
https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674040175.
[48] Befu, *Hegemony of Homogeneity: An Anthropological Analysis of Nihonjinron*, 124.
[49] Befu, 125.
[50] Befu, 127.
[51] Befu, 130.

a proud national identity; Japan looked again in the Wests' distorted mirror, and saw something worthy of pride. The cultural currency of *nihonjinron* fluctuated, with interludes of decreased obsession with the West and revivals of fervent nationalism in the face of revitalized imperial desires.[52] Following defeat in World War II, Japaneseness once again took on a strong auto-Orientalism; narratives dealt with the shame of this defeat on the global stage by "creating a world in which the Japanese were totally subjected by the white race and enthralled by their own subjugated status."[53] As time healed these wounds, and newfound economic success once again signaled a return to positive—yet of course, necessarily homogenizing—discourse. Contemporary *nihonjinron* retains this more positive outlook, for decidedly nationalistic and economic means.[54]

Post-bubble Japan saw what might be considered the fall of *nihonjinron*'s dominance in hegemonic imaginings of Japaneseness. Yet diversity is still approached with ambivalence. Measures of contemporary diversity in Japan remain uncertain: official census reports and academic surveys fail to recognize ethnic or racial diversity, reinforcing a vision of near-monoethnicity. Popular thought insists on a similar vision, in a paradoxical "assumption of monoethnicity" and "tacit awareness of multiethnicity."[55]

John Lie cites Edwin O. Reischauer, a prolific Japanologist in post-war America, who writes: "the Japanese today are the most thoroughly unified and culturally homogenous large bloc of people in the world…"[56] This belief lives on, thoroughly embedded in domestic and international discourse—so much so, that "obvious evidence that falsifies [the myth of

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[52] Befu, 131–33.
[53] Befu, 139.
[54] Befu, 140.
[55] Lie, *Multiethnic Japan*, 46.
[56] Lie, *Multiethnic Japan,* 1; "Edwin O. Reischauer | Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies," accessed February 5, 2023, https://rijs.fas.harvard.edu/edwin-o-reischauer.

homogenous Japan] is often blatantly ignored."[57] Japanese leaders actively weaponize the myth to induce a public amnesia, erasing former colonial subjects along with the country's imperialist past. Thus homogenous Japan lives as a political weapon: "all members of Japanese society can be thought of as being basically alike, only if those who are different are either said not to exist or assigned to the status of outsider."[58] Legislative measures have and continue to render measures of Japaneseness, marking its inclusive and exclusive potentials.

Citizenship laws are one such measure, as they work directly to build the nation-state. While many pre-war colonial subjects were forced to take on Japanese citizenship, post-war subjects were stripped of this legal status, trapped between forced repatriation or the shameful process of naturalization.[59] Mixed Japanese people occupy an ambiguous position in claims of citizenship.[60] Initial *jus sanguinis* Nationality Law only granted citizenship to descendants of a Japanese patriarch.[61] This changed in 1985, with the addition of matriarchs. But contemporary nationality laws remain racialized, excluding those born in Japan to parents considered foreign. Mixed Japanese people propose a problem to rigid imaginings of Japaneseness via our partial access to essential traits of Japaneseness, namely citizenship, constituting a threat to pure homogeneity.

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[57] Murphy-Shigematsu, "Multiethnic Japan and the Monoethnic Myth," 65.

[58] Murphy-Shigematsu, 67.

[59] Murphy-Shigematsu, "Multiethnic Japan and the Monoethnic Myth"; Arudou, "Japan's Under-Researched Visible Minorities: Applying Critical Race Theory to Racialization Dynamics in a Non-White Society."

[60] Aarohi Narain, "Daburu Bind: Perceptions of the Speech of Mixed Race Japanese," *ICU WPL: Selected Papers From the 3rd Asian Junior Linguists Conference (AJL3)*, 2009, 25–36.

[61] "THE NATIONALITY LAW," The Ministry of Justice, accessed February 5, 2023, https://www.moj.go.jp/ENGLISH/information/tnl-01.html; "The Choice of Nationality," The Ministry of Justice, accessed February 5, 2023, https://www.moj.go.jp/ENGLISH/information/tcon-01.html; Arudou, "Japan's Under-Researched Visible Minorities: Applying Critical Race Theory to Racialization Dynamics in a Non-White Society."

Konketsuji Mondai: Multiplicity Problematized

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Paulo Freire theorizes dialogue as "an encounter among [people] who name the world."[62] To Friere, to exist—humanly, as he emphasizes—is to name, to label the world, and transform it through this process. If to name is an essential operation to our existence, then it could be said that to be named is equally important. One's name defines one's world, shaping the space in which one can move. To be named is to be granted belonging in a world of names. To be named is also to be limited, trapped to its parameters. There is great power in choosing one's name, of claiming one's identity. But there is also dangerous power in naming others, in ridding them of their autonomy to speak for themselves. With the heightened visibility of mixed Japanese children in the 1940s, labeling them was a political act, reproducing them as a problem for the state.[63]

Ainoko, meaning "betweener," "hybrid," "half-caste," or "half-breed," was the predominant word pre- and post-war to name mixed subjects in Japan.[64] Similar prejudicial nuances were translated into the word *konketsuji*, or "mixed-blood child," which gained legitimacy in the 1950s through public discourse.[65] Policymakers framed them as a problem (*konketsuji mondai*), placing them outside of a desired homogeneity. Debito Arudou applies critical race theory to Japan, illustrating the ways in which race is central to discriminatory social rhetoric, as particularly evident in the *konketsuji mondai*.

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[62] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th ed. (New York: Continuum, 2000), 77, http://edrev.asu.edu/reviews/rev146.htm.
[63] See Narain, "Daburu Bind: Perceptions of the Speech of Mixed Race Japanese."
[64] H. Okamura, "The Language of 'Racial Mixture' in Japan: How Ainoko Became Haafu, and the Haafu-Gao Makeup Fad," *Asia Pacific Perspectives* 14, no. 2 (2017): 41–79.
[65] See Narain.

Konketsuji were birthed out of narratives of "shame, pity, and parental responsibility," assumed to be the offspring of American soldiers and prostitute mothers.[66] Government officials affirmed that *konketsuji* performed poorly in school, a generalization made with no connections to larger structures of disenfranchisement. Discrimination against *konketsuji* was both anticipated and accepted.[67] Based on phenotype (which Arudou seems to conflate frequently with 'race'), *konketsuji* were assumed to behave differently, suggesting that their heterogeneity could not be peaceful—they disrupted a desired image of a homogenous *Japanese* society. Yet despite focus on their differences, policymakers differentiated them as a kind of Japanese: "a 'sameness' with an asterisk."[68] Such partial allowance to a Japanese identity, considered "an act of kindness," precluded attempts to claim discriminatory treatment. Though the language of racial mixture has changed in contemporary Japan—recognizing the prejudicial connotations of *ainoko* and *konketsuji*—mixed Japanese people still occupy a liminal space.

Central to this liminality is language. Linguistic profiling is an underemphasized step in racialization. Arudou's application of critical race theory to Japan's *konketsuji mondai* reveals racialized biases within legal procedures and state discourse. However, his singular focus on the ocular minimizes the pain of invisibility, implicitly privileging a version of mixed-ness (and general otherness) that is visually differentiable from "Japanese," going so far as to suggest that white people suffer the consequences of racism. Aarohi Narain mends the pitfalls of Arudou's work by expanding a definition of racialization. She exposes the salience of linguistic profiling, telling us that racialization occurs beyond the ocular, and demonstrates how whiteness takes on a privileged position in racial hierarchy regardless of linguistic dissimilitude. Narain describes the

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[66] Arudou, "Japan's Under-Researched Visible Minorities: Applying Critical Race Theory to Racialization Dynamics in a Non-White Society," 722.

[67] See Narain and Arudou.

[68] Arudou, "Japan's Under-Researched Visible Minorities: Applying Critical Race Theory to Racialization Dynamics in a Non-White Society," 722.

ways in which mixed Japanese people's speech is perceived as a measure of their Japaneseness. Japanese fluency is an *a priori* assumption of Japaneseness; one must speak the language (presumed to be the standard Tokyo variant) to be Japanese. As a *type* of Japanese, mixed-race Japanese people are expected to "inhabit foreignness in their speech while simultaneously speaking in a way that is easy to consume by the average Japanese."[69] More than linguistic profiling though, is the salience of our own language use. Language becomes both an intersection at which exterior and internal racialization processes take place. Through speech we index our racial identities, negotiating rigid conceptions of race and fluid affective dimensions. We call attention to the gap between them.

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[69] Narain, "Daburu Bind: Perceptions of the Speech of Mixed Race Japanese," 30.

Chapter Three: Speaking Japanese(ness)

We have no place that we can claim without contention
We are constructing a whole new edifice of boxes to put people in
To protect a space inside which you can exist
Very concerned about giving names, giving names
Dissatisfaction seems like the natural byproduct of identification...

- Moses Sumney, Taiye Selasi, "boxes", grae (2020)

Screening Identity

In *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Stuart Hall describes identification as a perpetual process, always under construction. Identification, he contends, produces in excess or in insufficiency. It is "an over-determination or a lack, but never a proper fit, a totality."[70] Racial identification falsely promises a *total* embodiment of race in its scientific iterations: one is and will always be *x* race(s) on account of their blood, to which they quantify with percentages. For many mixed people, the totality of racial identity can be justified neither by blood nor by feeling. In this chapter, I examine the speech of a mixed-Japanese individual on television to lay bare the tensions of this partiality.

My object of analysis is a clip from Japanese talk show *Ōdorīsan, zehi atte hoshi hito ga iru desu ga* (Mr. Audrey, we have a guest for you), or *Odo zehi* for short.[71] Comedy duo Wakabayashi Masayasu and Kasuga Toshiaki, known together as "Audrey," host a variety of guests who have a story to tell. In the episode I draw from, the duo is in conversation with nineteen year old Shimura Kiseiki, a mixed Pakistani-Japanese convenience store worker.[72]

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[70] Stuart Hall, "Who Needs 'Identity'?," in *Questions of Cultural Identity* (Sage Publications, 1996), 3.
[71] "クチコミ投稿.," Chukyo TV, accessed February 5, 2023, https://www.ctv.co.jp/audrey/.
[72] 【ほぼ放送復元！完全版】ハーフのコンビニ店員が番組の裏側を暴露(オードリーさん、ぜひ会って欲しい人がいるんです！), 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzxT0v7Mk7E.

The language I examine is not sourced from a traditional research-focused interview. It would be a mistake to claim that I can dig out Shimura's true feelings, or true self, whatever that may be. Television screens a secondary representation, a re-representation, and not the thing itself. But, as Hall reminds us, identities are situated within this representation, not separate from it. Hall explains:

> Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not "who we are" or "where we came from," so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves.[73]

I approach *Odo zehi* as a "[site] for the production of meaning," engaging in discourse analysis, arguing that televisual media writes the discursive rules with which people—in this case, racialized *hāfu* people—construct their identities.[74] The very fact of Shimura's televisuality means that his speech represents shared representational patterns, meant to be consumed by subjects already existing within its discourse. A close-reading of the clip tells us how *hāfu* identity formation is situated within Japaneseness discourse. It displays how mixed subjects struggle to fulfill the discursive demands of purity, fueling often futile attempts at affirming wholeness, and procuring tenuous feelings of (un)belonging.

A Poetic Analysis of *Odo zehi*

To engage with this instance of languaging race, I turn to Yamaguchi Masataka's method of poetic analysis. Yamaguchi conceptualizes "poetic structures" as places where "discursive regularity" emerges through the repetition of words and clauses, the organization of pronouns, as

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[73] Hall, "Who Needs 'Identity'?," 4.
[74] See Spigel for a comprehensive explanation of a discursive approach to television.

well as verb tense.[75] He frames his methodology with the notion of "discursive interaction," in which language is communicated "in a specific [sociohistorical] context in order to mediate social relations."[76] In other words, language refers to *and* reproduces discourse.

Yamaguchi organizes poetic structures in "triplets," a group of words or phrases that occur three times.[77] I adopt this notion of triplet, tweaking it to fit my text with addition of what I will call "couplets," systematic repetitions of phrases in the double. My use of couplet carries no reference to the poetic use of "couplet," which usually denotes shared rhyme and rhythm. I organize the triplets, as well as the couplets, by syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships: syntagmatic referring to the combination of words and paradigmatic referring to the choice of words. The syntagmatic frame of each triplet or couplet signals a production of a particular meaning (through combination) while the various paradigmatic contrasts demonstrate a change of meaning through substitution.

My appropriation of Yamaguchi's method narrows in on the reproduction of racial discourse. I trace repetitions of racial, ethnic, and national labels, deictics connoting racialization, and verb tense. I concentrate on the affective dimensions of the interlocutor's (Shimura Kiseiki) language to focus on his self-identification. Like Yamaguchi, I figure present tense as a conveyor of timeless truth, suggesting the fixity of verbs' objects.

To account for the linguistic differences between Japanese and English, I shift my method of annotation. English speakers recite their pronouns each time they refer to themselves, whereas Japanese speakers do so sparingly—the subject or object of reference is often implied. In consideration of this tendency towards contextual implication (particularly a limited use of

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[75] Masataka Yamaguchi, "Finding Culture in 'Poetic' Structures: The Case of a 'Racially-Mixed' Japanese/New Zealander," *Journal of Multicultural Discourses* 7, no. 1 (March 2012): 99, https://doi.org/10.1080/17447143.2011.610507.
[76] Yamaguchi, 101.
[77] Yamaguchi, 106.

first-person and referent pronouns), I use the sign "[I]" to connote unspoken but implied

meanings.

In the clip I analyze, Shimura introduces himself to Audrey in order to explain his

submission: "僕はコンビニでバイトをしていますが、人一倍気を付けている自分の中のルールがあります。" (I

work part-time at a convenience store. I have a rule that I follow carefully).

(Data Set) Shimura Kiseiki on *Odo zehi* (see Appendix for transcription conventions)

1. Kasuga：コンビニバイトして– 何ルールというのは？
2. Shimura：はい。えーと、まあ、僕<u>ハーフ</u>なんですけど。
3. Kasuga：あ、そうなんだ。
4. Shimura：父親が<u>スリランカの人</u>で。でも、あの…小さい頃にも離婚してしまって，
5. 　　　　　母子家庭で育ったんで。あの、日本語しか喋らないんです。
6. Kasuga、Wakabayashi：あー
7. Shimura：はい。
8. Kasuga：そういう人いるよね。はい。
9. Shimura：で。あの本当見た目だけなんで、<u>1パーセント</u>なんですよ。僕の中では。
10. Kasuga、Wakabayashi：あー
11. Wakabayashi：はい、はい、はい。
12. Kasuga：<u>スリランカ</u>の？
13. Shimura：でも、はい。まあ、客観的に見たら、まあ、<u>50パー</u>はくだらないじゃな
14. 　　　　　いですか。
15. Kasuga、Wakabayashi：[(笑笑笑笑)
16. Wakabayashi：ま、確かに高いね?
17. Kasuga：<u>スリランカ人</u>ね]
18. 　　　　[まあ、見た目はそうだね。
19. Shimura：はい、見た目は。]はい。
20. 　　　　中身はめちゃくちゃ<u>日本人</u>なんですけど。
21. Wakabayashi：[なるほどね〜
22. Kasuga：あ〜いる、] そう人いるよね。
23. Shimura：なんで、その…<u>外国人の方</u>に間違いるとか。
24. Kasuga、Wakabayashi：はい、はい。
25. Shimura：<u>外国の方</u>も、僕がその英語が喋ると思って、[話しかけてきたりとか。
26. Kasuga、Wakabayashi：あ〜
27. Kasuga：なるほどね。]
28. Shimura：でも、日本語しか喋れないので…
29. Kasuga：はい、はい、はい、はい。
30. Wakabayashi：なるほど〜
31. Shimura：はい。だから、その…「僕は<u>日本人</u>なんだよ」というのを、アピールという
32. 　　　　　　か、伝えるための感じですかね〜
33. Wakabayashi：あ〜ルール。
34. Kasuga：ルール？
35. Shimura：はい。
36. Kasuga：それバイト中に…それと間違えられることが多いですか？
37. Shimura：そうで。大学が近くにあるんで、<u>外国の方</u>たくさん来られるんですよ。

38. Kasuga：あー留学生とか？はい、はい。
39. Shimura：あのー、「いらっしゃいませ」をちょっとはっきり言うみたいな。
40. Wakabayashi：はい、はい。
41. Kasuga：「いらっしゃいませ」をはっきり言う？
42. Shimura：はい。
43. Kasuga：うん。
44. Shimura：あの、やっぱ。外国の方も働いているんですけど。やっぱ、「いらっしゃいませ」
45. 　　　　　　って、もう違うじゃないですか。
46. Kasuga：（笑笑）まあ、イントネーションはねー
47. Shimura：はい。
48. Kasuga：確かにそうだね。
49. Shimura：僕は19年使ってますからね。日本語。
50. Kasuga：まあ、日本人なのね。
51. Shimura：そう、なんですよ。だから、もう。あの、店員さんが使うこの「いらっしゃいま
52. 　　　　　　せー」みたいな。
53. Wakabayashi：はい、はい。
54. Shimura：これが、スタンダードなんですよ。僕の。
55. Kasuga、Wakabayashi：あ〜
56. Wakabayashi：やっぱ、結構慣れている「いらっしゃいませ」、「いらしゃあっせー」みたいな　　　感じ
　　　　なの？
57. Shimura：あの、「いらっしゃませー！」（礼）
58. Shimura, Kasuga, Wakabayashi：(笑笑笑笑)
59. Wakabayashi：日本人です！
60. Shimura：(unintelligible) 日本人です！

(Translated Data Set) Shimura Kiseiki on *Odo zehi*[78]

1. Kasuga: You work part-time at a convenience store- So what is this "rule" that you have?
2. Shimura: Yes. Um, well, I am *hāfu*.
3. Kasuga: Ah, right.
4. Shimura: My dad is Sri-Lankan. But, well… When I was young, my parents got a divorce, and
5. 　　　　　I was raised in a single-mother household. Um, so I only speak Japanese.
6. Kasuga、Wakabayashi: Ah–
7. Shimura: Yes.
8. Kasuga: There are people like that, right.
9. Shimura: And, it's just my appearance, but at my core, I'm only one-percent.
10. Kasuga、Wakabayashi: Ah–
11. Wakabayashi: I see, I see.
12. Kasuga: Your Sri-Lankanness?
13. Shimura: Yes, but. Well, if you look at me objectively, I look more than
14. 　　　　　fifty-percent right?
15. Kasuga、Wakabayashi: [(*laughs*)
16. Wakabayashi: Well, yeah, you definitely look very Sri-Lankan.
17. Kasuga: Sri-Lankan, right.]
18. 　　　　　[Well, you look like one, yes.
19. Shimura: Right, my appearance. Yes.]
20. 　　　　　My core is very very Japanese though.

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[78] I provide a translated data set for my English-speaking readers. However, the very nature of translation means that the English conversation does not correspond one-on-one to the original Japanese.

21. Wakabayashi：[I see–
22. Kasuga：Ah~ There are,] there are people like that, right.
23. Shimura：And so, I get mistaken for a foreigner for example.
24. Kasuga、Wakabayashi：Right, right.
25. Shimura：Even foreigners think I speak English and will [try to talk to me, for example.
26. Kasuga、Wakabayashi：Ah–
27. Kasuga：I see.]
28. Shimura：But, I only speak Japanese, so…
29. Kasuga：Right, that's right.
30. Wakabayashi：I see–
31. Shimura：Yes. So, my rule is to appeal to other Japanese people, to convey that
32. 　　　　　　I am Japanese.
33. Wakabayashi：Ah ok, your rule.
34. Kasuga：Rule?
35. Shimura：Yes.
36. Kasuga：When you're at your part-time job… Do you get mistaken as a foreigner a lot?
37. Shimura：Yes. The convenience store is close to a college, so a lot of foreigners come.
38. Kasuga：Ah– like exchange students? I see, I see.
39. Shimura：So–, I make sure to carefully pronounce "*irasshaimase*."
40. Wakabayashi：I see, I see.
41. Kasuga：Carefully pronouncing "*irasshaimase*"?
42. Shimura：That's right.
43. Kasuga：I see.
44. Shimura：And of course, there are a lot of foreigners that work at convenience stores. But
45. 　　　　　　when they say *irasshaimase*, it's different, right?
46. Kasuga：（*laughs*）Well, their intonation is different, right.
47. Shimura：Yes.
48. Kasuga：Yeah, that's right.
49. Shimura：I've been using it for nineteen years. Japanese, that is.
50. Kasuga：Well, because you're Japanese right.
51. Shimura：Yeah, exactly. So, well. The "*irasshaimase*" that Japanese workers use is like:
52. 　　　　　　"*irasshaimaseee*."
53. Wakabayashi：Right, right.
54. Shimura：That's my standard.
55. Kasuga、Wakabayashi：Ah–
56. Wakabayashi：For sure, the *irrashaimase* of people who are used to saying it, sounds sort of like
    "*irashasseee*" right?
57. Shimura：Yeah, "*irasshamaseee!*" (bow)
58. Shimura, Kasuga, Wakabayashi：（*laughs*）
59. Wakabayashi：I'm Japanese!
60. Shimura：(unintelligible) I'm Japanese!

From his very first self-identification, Shimura translates himself into Japaneseness

discourse: "I am *hāfu*," he says. His repeated mentions of racial/ethnic/national labels reify

hegemonic imaginings of Japaneseness, reproducing *nihonjin* as implicit category of belonging

and *gaikokujin* as Other. To see how Shimura constructs his identities in a "temporalized

framework," I organize several triplets and couplets. The use of *desu* (to be) in all of the triplets and couplets present Shimura's identities as timeless truth, adhering to the ethnic, national, and racial demands of Japaneseness.

Table 1. Triplet of 見る

Paradigmatic contrast (↓)	Paradigmatic contrast (1) (↓)	Paradigmatic contrast (2) (↓)	Paradigmatic contrast (3) (↓)
Line 9	[I] 僕の	見た目([I]は)	[I] スリランカ人([I]です)
Line 13	[I] 僕を	見たら	[I] スリランカ人([I]に見える)
Line 19	[I] 僕の	見た目([I]は)	[I] スリランカ人(([I]です)
Syntagmatic frame (→)	*My /* *at me*	*appearance /* *if you look*	*ethno-national / racial label* *(Sri Lankan)*

I highlight Shimura's attention to visual appearance in lines 9, 13, and 19. The repeated words are all variations of the verb *miru* (to see), two being nominalized in *mitame* (appearance), and the other being a conditional conjugation of the verb, *mitara* (if you look). Shimura is the implied owner of this appearance, or the subject of being looked at—objectively (*kyakkantekini*) as he emphasizes. Line 13's *mitara* suggests a present and future of possibility; the two other instances equally imply a fixed fact. Shimura's presentation of his appearance as Sri Lankan as opposed to Japanese cites a normative "Japanese" phenotype. In contrast to his looks, Shimura presents himself—his core—as *nihonjin*, as seen in Table 2, also figured as an enduring actuality (line 20, 31, 61). The contrasting dynamics of looking Sri-Lankan and feeling/being Japanese reappear in Table 3, where he locates his Sri Lankanness in his outer and inner self, assigning percentages to his being.

Table 2. Triplet of 日本人

Paradigmatic contrast (↓)	Paradigmatic contrast (1) (↓)	Paradigmatic contrast (2) (↓)	Paradigmatic contrast (3) (↓)
Line 20	中身は	日本人	なんです
Line 31	僕は	日本人	なんだ
Line 60	[I] 僕は	日本人	です
Syntagmatic frame (→)	*I am / My core is*	*ethno-national / racial label (Japanese)*	*present tense copula 'to be'*

Table 3. Couplet of パーセント

Paradigmatic contrast (↓)	Paradigmatic contrast (1) (↓)	Paradigmatic contrast (2) (↓)	Paradigmatic contrast (3) (↓)	Paradigmatic contrast (4) (↓)
Line 9	[I]スリランカ人([I]が)	僕の中で(は)	1パーセント	なんです
Line 13	[I]スリランカ人([I]が)	[I]見た目([I]は)	50パーくだらないじゃない	です(か)
Syntagmatic frame (→)	*[I] ethno-national / racial label (Sri-Lankan)*	*location of identity*	*percentage*	*present tense 'to be'*

Shimura's use of percentages, particularly the mention of fifty, discursively reproduces notions of *hāfu* individuals as split (literally in half) between two ethnicities, two races. A loanword from English, *hāfu*, like its predecessors *ainoko* and *konketsuji*, employs the logic of biraciality as additive. Shimura challenges his initial affirmation of *hāfu* identity (*boku wa hāfu)* in line 13 (Table 3), with his localization of his Sri Lankan "half" on his body's surface instead of at his core. The addition of *"maa, gojuupaa wa kudaranai janai desu ka"* (well, it's more than 50 percent, right?) jokingly confronts the idea of fifty percent as a possibility of looking or feeling. His joke implicitly assumes that there is a way to look Japanese—hence reciting Japaneseness discourse. But it also underscores an attempt to enact a Japanese identity separate from his appearance: in fixing only one percent of Sri Lankan identity at his core, he affirms his Japanese identity by locating it in an affective dimension.

Table 4. Couplet of 日本語しか喋らない

Paradigmatic contrast (↓)	Paradigmatic contrast (1) (↓)	Paradigmatic contrast (2) (↓)	Paradigmatic contrast (3) (↓)
Line 5	[I]僕は	日本語しか	喋らない
Line 28	[I]僕は	日本語しか	喋らない
Syntagmatic frame (→)	*[I] I*	*only Japanese*	*speak (present tense)*

Shimura dynamically figurates his ethno-racial identities in a binary of looking and feeling, but he also pays attention to language as means to convey and *be* Japanese. As seen in Table 4, Shimura repeats twice that he *only* speaks Japanese. He performs linguistically in order to validate his claim to a Japanese identity. Shimura explains his linguistic rule to Audrey: だから、その…「僕は<u>日本人</u>なんだよ」というのを、アピールというか、伝えるための感じですかね〜 (So, [my rule is] to appeal to other [Japanese] people, to convey that I am Japanese). Shimura inserts himself squarely into the linguistic stipulations of Japaneseness. He compares his speech, specifically his use of *irasshaimase* (welcome), to that of *gaikokujin* (foreigners). Their use is "a little different," he professes (line 44, 45). As Kasuga and Wakabayashi point out, foreigners' pronunciation of *irasshaimase* lacks *nihonjin*'s voiced naturalness. Shimura comedically reenacts his use of *irasshaimase* in line 58, to which Wakabayashi imitates in the following line with an emphatic *nihonjin desu!* (I am Japanese!). In line 49, Shimura declares ownership of the Japanese language because of his lifelong use, which tacitly functions as a justification for his claim of Japaneseness. Shimura repeats Wakabayashi in the final line. "I am Japanese!" he says, co-constructing his identity.

Ultimately, Shimura and his conversation partners discursively reproduce Japaneseness, reaffirming its linguistic and ethno-racial demands of uniformity. Shimura locates his identities between exterior readings of his body/voice and interior feelings; his experiences of being

categorized as a foreigner (line 23) clash with his felt Japaneseness. Still, he fails to translate himself outside of established racial categories, maintaining their social weight and validating their normalcy. His attempts to affirm his Japanese identity falls into a discursive trap, using the very language that maintains his impurity.

My poetic analysis remains limited on several fronts. I did not account for some linguistic particularities, like the sentence ending phrase *nan da/nan desu* (なんだ・なんです), which appears in Table 2 and 3. The phrase can be used to indicate explanations or answers, but it also can indicate emotion, that the speaker is trying to be emphatic about something. Shimura's use of the phrase could be interpreted for its affective qualities. Additionally, I did not pay much attention to Shimura's interlocutors. Their co-construction of Shimura's identity possesses equal weight in discursive production, particularly as their Japaneseness can be read against Shimura's. Finally, the clip taken from *Odo zehi* represents but a snippet of the Japanese televisual landscape, a few minutes of meaning making within lifetimes of discourse production. A more comprehensive look at national television would detail the racial politics of representation.

In spite of these aforementioned limitations, I believe my analysis provides insights into the problems of identity that mixed-Japanese people face. The discursive trap of Japaneseness ensnares racialized *hāfu* people within the fundamentally disempowering power structure that is race. But mixed-Japanese people are not powerless, nor are our experiences necessarily painful; to suggest so would diminish the emotional diversity of our lived realities. "Mixed" encompasses diverse peoples and diverse emotional worlds. Each story tells us more about ourselves and about our world.

Chapter Four: Mixed Speak

I insist on my right to be multiple
I insist on my right to be multiple
Even more so, I insist upon
The recognition of my multiplicity

All things encompassed in one

I- I really do insist that others recognize my inherent multiplicity
What I no longer do is take pains to explain it or defend it
That is an exhausting (Exhausting), repetitive (Repetitive) and
draining project (Draining project)
To constantly explain and defend one's multiplicity
So I've reached a point where
I am aware of my inherent multiplicity
And anyone wishing to meaningfully engage with me or my work
Must be too

I can also, also, also, and, and, and"

- Moses Sumney, Taiye Selasi, "also also also and and and", grae (2020)

Introduction

"Mixed" as a racial category has been subject to much examination, but such scrutiny often ignores the embodied experiences of mixed people.[79] Thus far, my paper has examined mixed as a locus of critical engagement with race and belonging. However, I want to ground my theorization in lived realities. Detaching my theoretical observation from these lived realities risks flattening the diversity within those that identify or may be identified with mixedness. In this chapter, I combine interview and autoethnographic material into narrative form. By combining the two, I do not intend to distort my interviewee's words. To quote Susan Krieger,

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[79] Silvia C. Bettez, "Mixed-Race Women and Epistemologies of Belonging," *A Journal of Women Studies* 31, No. 1 (2010): 150.

"all of our statements about others are, very significantly, also about ourselves."[80] Any analysis I make of my interviewees reflects my (dis)junctures with their experiences. Suturing the two, I hope, captures a collective and relational production of meaning.

I interviewed six people, mostly while studying abroad in Japan. A few interviews were conducted in person, some on video, and some via email. While the sample of people I spoke with represents a variety of experiences, there were limits to my interview pool, namely that they were all from highly-educated backgrounds. Three of my interviewees were fellow students at Waseda University: two were exchange students like myself, and one was a full-time student. Another interviewee was a student at Waseda's peer Keio University, another highly selective private university in Tokyo. My two non-student interviewees were both working in higher education institutions. The lack of vocational diversity meant that the majority of my interviewees were in their early twenties, with the two exceptions being in their forties. There is a similar bias in gender representation, with all my student interviewees being mixed-race women, while the two older interviewees were mixed-race men.

The most glaringly obvious lack of variation was in racial diversity: all but one of my interviewees were biracial with a white parent and a non-white parent, which reinforces an already prevalent bias in mixed race studies. This demographic is already overrepresented, and I cannot say my work remedies this. Mixed identity is often presumed to have proximity to whiteness; while this reflects racial histories and realities of mixedness, it also prolongs legacies of white supremacy. I want to be mindful of this absence of voice throughout my interviews, but I also crucially want to engage in a discussion about whiteness as it relates to mixedness. In purely racial terms, whiteness is the threatened object of mixedness: we cannot have a

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[80] Susan Krieger, "Beyond Subjectivity," in *Journeys Through Ethnography: Realistic Accounts of Fieldwork* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 178.

conversation about mixedness without also talking about whiteness. However, the endless correlation between the two erases the experience of those not of a white and non-white racial background. The following autoethnographic and interview material does not attempt to represent the entirety of mixed-race—or even specifically mixed-Japanese—experience. Instead, I intend to draw out thematic experiences of racialization and racism to paint a few portraits of mixed-race realities.

I organize the following in five subsections. The first, "Introduction," provides a brief biography of each interviewee, making clear my relationship to each of them, and setting the stage to understand how their backgrounds shaped their personal understandings and experiences of race. The following section, "Becoming" investigates racial consciousness, exploring various initial encounters with race, initial awareness of one's racialized self/selves. This section pays particular attention to my interviewees' social and familial environments, setting the stage for personal racial identity formation. "Speaking Selves, Observed Selves," narrows in on experiences of using language and concurrently being observed, consumed and translated racially through spoken voice and physical body. I think about language here as a means to affirm racial belongings, co-mingling with desires to pass and desires to remain unseen. "*Hāfu, Daburu,* and Other Words," deals with the plethora of racial language by which we are hailed. I consider my own feelings about these words, and gather those of my interviewees; the variety of experiences illustrate the limits of identification and our places of disjuncture within them. Finally, "Acceptance, or Some Kind of Loss," considers my interviewees' current realities—their current relationship to themselves and the world around them.

Biographies

My first interviewee was Mario Anton. I was first introduced to Mario through my father's friend Joseph Shaules, a professor at Keio University. I spoke to Mario for our interview over Zoom, and would keep in touch with him over email throughout the completion of this project. Mario is one of five children. His oldest sister came along to Japan with his parents at the age of five, but Mario and his three younger siblings were all born and raised in Shizuoka, Japan. Mario attended public schools up until the age of fifteen, when he left for boarding school in the U.S.. His high school and college days were spent studying in the U.S., until he moved back to Japan upon graduation. He is now 41, and resides in Oita Prefecture, where he lives with his partner and two children, and teaches English at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University.

My next interviewee was Saaya Laure.[81] She was also introduced to me through Joseph Shaules, as she was a student of his at Keio University. I conducted two interviews with Saaya, the first over Zoom, and the second over email. Saaya was born in Tokyo, Japan, but from the age of two began to move around periodically due to her father's job. She moved first to Hong Kong, where she spent seven years, and then to Paris, where she spent three or four years before returning to Japan. During the years she spent between these countries, she attended various international schools. She completed her middle school education in Japan at a public school—with a brief stint in *kikokushijo* (returnee children) class. Saaya once again relocated for high school, moving to the U.S. for boarding school. Her most recent move was back to Japan, to attend her current school, Keio. She now lives in Tokyo, where she is a first year student in Keio's Faculty of Letters, studying Japanese literature.

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[81] Saaya Laure is a pseudonym, used and requested in order to protect her anonymity.

My third interviewee was Jessica Misiorek. She was one of two other students participating in my spring study away program. Partly due to circumstance, and partly due to personality, I spent most of my time abroad with her—as such, she will make frequent appearances in my own autoethnographic material. Because of our relationship, I was able to interview her in person. Jessica was born and raised in Maryland, but is now a senior Anthropology and Japanese double major attending Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York.

My fourth interviewee was Robin E. Kinko. She was the third student on my study away program, but we were unable to meet in person before our respective departures from Japan, and so I interviewed her over email. Robin was born and raised in Kalamazoo, Michigan, where she currently is a senior at Kalamazoo College, studying Religion and East Asian Studies.

My fifth interviewee was Risa. I met and befriended her in a class I took at Waseda. Though we saw each other often, like Robin, we were unable to schedule an in-person interview during the semester, and instead spoke over Zoom. She was born in California, but at two months of age moved to Tokyo, and spent her childhood and adolescence moving back and forth between Japan and the U.S., along with a brief time spent in Hong Kong. Her most recent move was back to Tokyo, where she is now a student at Waseda University's School of International Liberal Studies.

My final interviewee Michael[82] wishes to remain anonymous. I will keep the circumstances of our relationship private, aside from the fact that I was able to speak with him in person for our interview. Michael was born in Tokyo and lived in Japan until the age of three, when he moved to New York. Though he did not live long-term in Japan, he visited frequently, spending about a month in Kyoto and a week in Tokyo every summer. He now works in higher education in the United States.

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[82] Like Saaya, Michael is a pseudonym.

As for my own background, I was born in Chicago, Illinois and lived there till the age of four. A job opportunity took my family to Rhode Island, where I spent the rest of my childhood and adolescence. I lived two years in Pawtucket, but spent most of my time in the state's capital, and neighboring city, Providence, where most of my memories remain and where I now call home. I currently reside in Saint Paul, Minnesota, where I am a senior studying Japanese and Media and Cultural Studies at Macalester College.

Becoming

While it was easy to unearth commonalities in my experiences and those of my interviewees, it was also clear that our versions of coming into race were widely different. Some were born immediately into a felt (physical and otherwise) difference from their peers, one that was either quickly translated back to them through racism or left murky, without specificity. Others slowly came into an understanding of their bodies as racialized subjects, while others struggled with shifting experiences of race.

Mario grew up in rural Japan, where all his peers were "Japanese" in race, ethnicity, and nationality. Even so, he felt at home; like all the other kids around him, Mario and his siblings spoke Japanese, ate Japanese food, and attended Japanese public school. He told me: "Japanese was our first language, we watched everything that the other kids watched. We were culturally very Japanese, right?" Outside of his hometown bubble though, was a different story:

> So on a daily level, I was just like every other kid. Of course, once we left our community, we would notice the stares, or the comments. But it was always outside the community. So we knew we were different. But yeah… It was kind of all we knew too? That's all we knew. We knew Japanese society… That was home. Japan was home to us.

Mario felt his difference but he was also used to it; there were no other possible realities for him.

The terms with which he understood his difference—in his mind, not racial—were translated

through Japan's racial paradigm of *nihonjin* versus *gaijin*. Indeed, he described the country as an

"A or B society." "It's like you're Japanese or you're not," he told me.

Only upon moving to the U.S. for high school did Mario seem to find himself translated

in a race-specific way. He explained:

> So I grew up in this A or B society. Then I went to the States, and it's like an A to Z
> society. There's African American, Irish American, half this, half that. It's like: "Woah,
> this is interesting. I never knew about this." People were always like: "I'm half Cherokee,
> I'm Black, I'm this or that." Like, "Woah, yeah that's pretty cool." And that's when as a
> fifteen year old, I realized something that was *super* obvious. You know, my father is
> white, my mother is Black. My father is Jewish descent. My mother is Caribbean descent.
> And I kind of knew that my mother was Black, my father was white. But it was an A or B
> society, so like they're both *gaijin*, you know what I mean?

The way Mario described the U.S. calls on popular multiculturalism discourse; his lighthearted

mentions of other's self-racializations paints the country as a multicultural, multiracial paradise

in which racial difference is common, accepted, and even appreciated. Mario felt his perceived

value, describing his experience in the States as "the first time people appreciated [his]

background," and suggested that his time in the U.S. helped him realize he had "something to

offer," to both Japan and America.

In a sense, Mario found comfort in a more diverse social environment, and found the

language with which to talk about his family and himself beyond the generalizing *gaijin* label.

Even in an A to Z society, however, Mario felt pressure to reduce himself to a singular

monoracial identity. He explained:

> In the States, there was a *whole* different context … That was surprising, initially. I was
> very much into sports—basketball. I was into hip hop, which was culturally very Black.
> So to me, there was always a like: "Who am I? Am I Black? Am I white? Am I this? Am
> I that?" The United States forces you to answer that question, which I was never into in
> the first place. I was always just myself. It was me. Yeah, my mother is Black—I'm

proud of it. My father's Jewish—I'm proud of it. I grew up in Japan, Japanese is my first language… and that was who I was, right? … But yeah, at that age—fifteen, sixteen—I realized: "I'm not going to fall into this trap here." You know? Identifying just with one? That doesn't make sense to me. I embody everything that my ancestors created here. But it was a different time to now, to the 2020s or whatever.

Of all my interviewees, Mario spoke most positively of himself, and often expressed pride in his background, though usually in a non-specific way. "It was me," he said, and frequently repeated the sentiment: "himself" existed separately from any kind of racial identifications. He talked about his language abilities, or his parents racial and ethnic backgrounds, but before any prompting to do so, he never described himself in a way (aside from the above self-questioning) entirely exterior from his parents. This mode of self-identification was not uncommon among my other interviewees, and perhaps not uncommon for many mixed-race people, as a 2010 study found that many mixed-race women self-describe through their parents.[83] I asked Mario directly to describe his racial identities, and if his identifications had changed throughout his life.

Growing up in Japan, Mario confessed that he didn't think much about racial identity. Mario had a sense that his mother was "more different," in appearance than his dad, and he encountered racism in his everyday life—blackface on television, frequent comparisons to popular Black athletes like Carl Lewis, and so on. These experiences bred a certain feeling of discomfort, but Mario didn't know how to describe it. Through his family, Mario garnered an understanding of Black culture. Introducing him to musicians like Bob Marley and Miles Davis, they fostered in him an idea that this culture was "unique." Still though, as a child, he didn't think of himself or his cultures in a racialized way. He told me that before his time in the States, "[race] was almost a non-issue." For other interviewees, questions of race began at an earlier age.

Robin grew up in an "almost exclusively white community," where her early encounters with racism solidified her racial difference in an inescapable way. She wrote:

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[83] Bettez, "Mixed-Race Women and Epistemologies of Belonging," 145.

> I was influenced in a way that, very early on, taught me to feel deep-set shame in being different…In elementary school, I was frequently the target of racist remarks such as "Japanese germ," while also being labeled as the "teacher's pet." Kids made fun of how my European nose "stuck out of my face" and pulled their eyes. There were many instances where other students targeted me as "Asian girlfriend" material, dubbing me as the "Asian Angel," or "Asian Emily," insinuating that I didn't say bad things and was a "pushover" for staying civil/positive in stressful situations.

Through these experiences, Robin wrote that until high school, she understood herself entirely based on what other people identified her as. Racially, she understood herself as entirely Other from her white peers. Jessica, on the other hand, thought of herself as white for most of her childhood. I asked Jessica if anyone had asked her about her racial identity—to clarify it for them, or quell their uncertainties about her. She responded:

> Well, people weren't really asking me at that point. But like, my *family* knew who I was. And I would have said Japanese still, but that didn't mean Asian, maybe? I grew up in an area that was mostly white people, and then the main minority was Black people and so the kids were like "Jessica is not Black, so she is white." My dad was white. And so I just associated myself with white kids? But maybe in middle school I realized that Asian was a thing? [laughs] So now I would consider myself an Asian person? Because of being Japanese. And I don't think it's changed necessarily being in Japan, but I have noticed that people will say that I'm half-American, which is interesting, cause I always think of Japanese being the notable half-part.

While Robin found herself in a white or Other racial dichotomy, Jessica found herself in a white or Black binary, and didn't have the language to identify racially in a way outside it. In a similar way, Michael didn't come to consciousness about his Black identity until his twenties.

When I asked Michael how he would describe his racial identities, he answered that it was "complicated by the fact of [his] blackness." Michael's father was Black, but light-skinned, and Michael and his other mixed siblings didn't present phenotypically in a way most people understood as "Black." It was not until a family trip during grad school, that family members "told [him] very clearly" that he was Black. This clear articulation of his racial identity awoke a racial consciousness previously dormant. Yet it was an identity that caused him a "great deal of

anxiety or awkwardness in how to talk about it, reveal it, name it in public to who or when." He

struggled claiming blackness, even in a qualified way, complicated by friends who "objected to

the idea" on account of his paleness, and strangers—often white people—who regurgitated

similar absolutes about racial identity and skin color. Like Michael, Risa struggled to understand

her racial identities, complicated by cosmopolitan schooling environments and a belated

understanding of her family history.

Risa spent her childhood moving around, attending various American international

schools from elementary to middle school, both in Japan and Hong Kong. She didn't encounter

any kind of discrimination growing up in Japan, possibly because she "looked more Caucasian

when she was younger." She explained, joking: "So people didn't really question my identity at

all. Or maybe I just didn't notice because that wasn't important to me at the time. I just wanted to

get caramel frappuccinos with the girls [laughs]." In Hong Kong, Risa was viewed as a

tourist—she couldn't speak Cantonese—which didn't bother her, as she had no connections to a

Hong Konger identity. It wasn't until moving to Seattle that Risa found herself confronted with

questions of identity. There she attended public school for the first time, and in her recounting,

encountered non-Asian people for the first time as well. She said:

> I think I saw Hispanic people, or Black people for the first time, or Black Americans or
> Hispanic Americans. So it was a bit of a culture shock, when I saw that at once. But that
> definitely got me accustomed to more of a liberal environment, because I was in a blue
> part of Seattle. I think that's where I built a lot of my values…Trying to be open minded
> and active about thinking about race… Even though there were a lot of incidents at my
> school regarding race, and racism, but that definitely fostered more of an environment for
> me to think about my identity. And for the first time actually, I really had to confront who
> I was at that school, because there weren't a lot of mixed kids. I think there were like
> eight.

Only upon immersion in a new social environment—where she was no longer in the

majority—did Risa begin to concern herself with her racial identity. She began encountering

microaggressions on account of her race, and developed an understanding of herself within the

U.S. 's racial context:

> When I went to the States, I realized people saw me as Asian. You know, a bunch of small comments, like… When we were in biology class, apparently, one of the guys said to a bunch of people, or maybe his friend: "If you want the answers, just ask that Asian girl over there." Then I became identified as the studious Asian girl. I did get good grades. And I was smarter than him. [laughs]

Another time, she was mistaken for a worker at Daiso[84] by an old lady. Her outfit was clearly not

that of a part-timer—a dress and sandals—so she deduced it was because of her race. Risa said of

these sorts of moments: "But I realized that in this country, I'm Asian. Except for when people

pronounce my name. They always anglicize my name to Lisa.[85] That part isn't Asian. Fuck that.

You Lisa here."

Saaya, like Risa, spent much of her life in international schools, and was accustomed to

being surrounded by those with similar backgrounds. Moving to Japan for middle school, she

found herself challenged by others' perceptions of herself, and their attempts to "fit [her] into one

box." In Saaya's first year in middle school, she was placed in a class for international students,

and on account of her foreignness, found that local Japanese students avoided her. They assumed

she couldn't speak Japanese, despite language proficiency being a requirement to enter the

school. Once the local Japanese students realized she could speak the language, they began to

treat her as "one of them." In Japan though, she continued to struggle with her perceived

difference, and others' attempts to flatten out her identities into a singular *gaijin* label. Whereas

in Hong Kong, or France, or New York, even if she would be considered a foreigner, she wasn't

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[84] Daiso is a Japanese franchise dollar store chain, with over eighty locations in the U.S..
[85] Risa's non-pseudonym name has more of an obvious difference in its anglicized spelling; I chose Risa as her pseudonym to stay true to the spelling difference though the pronunciation difference is slightly subtler in anglophone settings.

burdened with the stereotypes thrown at her constantly in Japan. Saaya said that others just treated her as she was.

I asked Saaya to describe her racial, ethnic, or national identities, to get a sense of how she thought of herself. She prefaced her answer with: "That's really, really, really hard." But finally responded: "But like, I'm just a mix of the three." She described her identities in essentialized ways, linking her Frenchness to her straightforwardness, her Japaneseness, to her politeness, and her Americanness to her friendliness. When Saaya talked about herself, she always seemed to point to a whole made up of this "mix," one that was not quite specific to race, ethnicity, or nation. She did, however, speak to a consistent experience of others attempting to guess her origins. Saaya described this:

> It's interesting, because everywhere in the world, people would try and guess my ethnicity for some reason. I don't know why that is. But it would always be different. Somewhere in America, someone asked me if I was Colombian, and I was: "Ok." It's always changing. I feel like my face kind of changes as well, so it's kind of understandable…. But you know, it's just a subconscious part of their brain that are like: "Oh, look at this person and put them in a box."

Saaya located her felt identities in her personalities, or her mannerism, but beyond that, described her racialized self only through the eyes of others. As her experience in the Japanese schooling system demonstrates, language abilities interplay with racialization. The performance of race via language (and consequent acceptance by in-group members) points to the relational nature of race. The next section looks at the experience of speaking languages, and the way language abilities can affirm or deny racial belonging. It considers the way racial identities are often unforgivingly in the eyes and ears of the beholder, and explores experiences of being racialized at a psychological level. As this section already hints at, for many mixed people, racialization detaches one's body or one's voice from their being, and can be met with feelings of frustration, anger, and confusion.

Speaking Selves, Observed Selves

In Chapter Five of *Black Skin, White Masks,* Fanon writes about colonial ontology, demonstrating that the racialized experience of a Black man is to experience himself through others. He begins with a hailing—racial slurs slung at him—and describes an ensuing psychological experience:

> Sealed into crushing objecthood, I turned beseechingly to others. Their attention was a liberation, running over my body suddenly abraded into nonbeing, endowing me once more with an agility that I had thought I lost, and by taking me out of the world, restoring me to it. But just as I reached the other side, I stumbled, and the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye. I was indignant; I demanded an explanation. Nothing happened. I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self.

Fanon's metaphorical explanation of his racializations speak to a sort of medicalizing interpellation, one that sticks to the body and remains unyielding, with no care for its subject. Whether or not mixed-race people can relate to Fanon's experiences is another story, but I find that his use of existentialism offers a language with which to discuss racialization, particularly that which happens outside of one's self. As I conceptualize racialization beyond simply phenotype, I examine my own and my interviewees' experiences speaking languages (mostly Japanese) as they relate to our racializations and notions of racial belonging. Beyond voice, I do also think about phenotype, as the two interplay with each other in these instances of racialization. I begin this section with a few of my own experiences, before transitioning to those of my interviewees.

My spring semester abroad in Tokyo, I found myself in a new racial context, and experienced myself differently than I had in the States. I was excited to be in Tokyo, to revisit a lot of what felt familiar and nostalgic. But I also held deeply personal anxieties about being in Japan. I was lucky enough to have Jessica to share these with; we were both mixed, and our

conversations fluctuated from shared disbeliefs to excitements, often centered on our

Japaneseness. One of our first evenings spent together, I rattled out my worries with her: I didn't

speak Japanese well enough, and I didn't really know what I looked like. Jessica confessed to the

same, and I felt understood. Throughout the following six months, I found a certain peace with

myself and my place in Japan. But I was also plagued with self-policing tendencies. I worried

endlessly about my Japanese ability, about whether I was progressing enough. I needed a voiced

naturalness, and any mistake I stumbled on, I scolded myself, and would replay it over and over.

I struggled with others' curiosity of me as *hāfu*; I had never received so much attention to my

physical appearance before. I wanted people to tell me what I looked like, to give me an answer

to my own confusion. But I also wished people would stop commenting on my appearance. I

wanted a single answer, one that wouldn't hurt, and I wanted one without any praise of my

beauty, which often came as a condition to their racializations. Aya, my mother's close friend,

would proclaim every time she saw me: "いいね。綺麗なハーフの子って。(How nice, to be a

pretty *hāfu*.)" I grew to resent this sentiment, though I knew it worked to my benefit.

I often felt myself being read. It was a kind of observation that stitched together my daily

life. Sometimes I wondered if it was my own imagination, that I had projected myself into a kind

of surveillance that wouldn't have existed for me otherwise. But on my commute to campus, I

towered above other women in the train, and my clothes stood out in color and shape. This was a

kind of quiet observation, one that kept me on my toes, but also let me doze off into my own self,

unaware of others' perceptions. There were, however, several instances that stuck to me: ones

that took me out of myself, remolded my shape, and gave back to me an unfamiliar self.

One day, a graduate student at Waseda asked my friend, gesturing towards me: "Can you

tell she's not one-hundred percent pure?" Despite their insistence that it was a weird question, he

proceeded to stare at me for several minutes, waiting for them to confirm his perception. In the silence arose only my discomfort, and his insistence that my face shared no trace of his own. Another day, I greeted one of my host family's neighbors. I stumbled through a *jikoshoukai*, likely speaking quieter than I thought.[86] The woman stared at me blankly, and turned to my host father for guidance. She began to repeat my name, incorrectly, asking him for corrections. I repeated myself, though I wasn't sure she was even listening. My host father spoke for me, reciting my name and then explained to her that my mother was Japanese. I worried endlessly that I couldn't say my own name properly, or that my face was too white for her to register my words.

Many of my interviewees shared similar anxieties about themselves. They worried about their investment in the Japanese language, and the language as a means to *be* Japanese. They worried about being outed as *not* Japanese, consumed by a hyperfocus on their bodies, their speech, and their surroundings. Some had found peace with this tormenting inwardness—Mario, exceptionally so. Mario, unlike any of my other interviewees, asserted that he felt comfortable wherever he was. Other interviewees had more fraught experiences of themselves. Language often transformed into a tool with which to rightfully lay claim to identities; in turn it was the grounds on which their claims would be denied. Language also became a creative resource, an instrument with utility beyond obsessions with passing, and served to strengthen familial bonds, and comfort in one's self.

Risa's relationship to the Japanese language was complicated by her familial ties. She identifies as mixed-race, Korean and Caucasian. However, Risa grew up understanding herself and her family as Japanese. Once she realized her ancestry was Korean, her relationship with language—and herself—inevitably shifted. She described the way she divided her identities

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[86] *Jikoshoukai* (自己紹介) translates to "self-introduction."

through language. When she spoke English, Risa felt American, like a "white American tourist."

She approached Japanese much differently. She said:

> When I speak Japanese, I think I actively try to sound as Japanese as possible. Whether that be using the right colloquialisms, the right accent, pronunciation, or just something really natural. Because that's when I kind of identify as a Japanese person, when I'm speaking in Japanese. So I think I get really self conscious when I can't speak Japanese very well—which lately is always. And I can't really read very well. I think my reading is at second grader level? And my writing is probably about the same. So sometimes when I come to terms with my level of Japanese, I start to feel less like a Japanese person. I think before that really crushed me, because I thought I was Japanese. I thought my ancestors were from this country. And then later, when I learned, I was like, "Oh, y'all are Korean, you're just living here." I started to use my Korean identity as an excuse for not knowing Japanese. Like: "It's okay, basically, I'm Korean. Anyway, I'm not even Japanese, so it doesn't matter." But it does matter. To me. That I know Japanese. Because that's how I connect with my mom too. And my whole family, that's the only language they know. So the less I know Japanese, the less I can feel connected to them. And I can communicate in that way.

Risa's obsession with the naturalness of her Japanese speech speaks to the idea that *being* Japanese means *speaking* it; her confession of feeling less Japanese reveals her position within a strong current of Japaneseness discourse. Her denial of attachment to the Japanese language on account of blood ignored the complicated notions of Koreanness and Japaneseness within her own family.

Risa had many times asked her family if they felt Japanese, but they would usually brush off her questioning with a: "リサ、別にいいけど" ("Risa, it doesn't matter."). Still, she felt that her second-generation mother saw herself as Japanese, being born and raised in the country, but with a hefty Korean cultural influence, from her *chousen* schooling.[87] Her grandmother, she postulated, identified more as Korean, using the language more frequently than her mother. But Risa said it seemed her grandma perceived her Koreanness as a "detrimental mark," like "a form of discrimination that she [couldn't] escape." In any case, Risa concluded that most of her

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[87] *Chousen* (朝鮮) means "Korean"; Risa's mention of "*chousen* schooling" refers to *chousen gakkou*, schools in Japan for Korean students.

mother's family identified as Japanese. As Risa came to terms with her relationship to the language, she accepted that it offered her connection to her family. She told me her decision to move back to Japan for university was largely motivated by her desire to master Japanese.

Many of my interviewees described a sense of validation earned from using Japanese, and improving their Japanese skills. For Robin, language simply strengthened a felt connection to Japanese culture and her Japanese identity. Robin recalled her time working in Iiyama, Nagano, and found that "operating within the language" helped her feel a sense of belonging within the "countryside working culture." On the other hand, Michael found himself in a relentless pursuit of the language and fell into an absorption with its mastery—the final cornerstone of an affirmed, whole Japaneseness.

Michael was taught Japanese by his grandmother, who taught him *hiragana* and *katakana*. Scrap paper fashioned out of advertisement-adorned newspapers became his study guides, and his yearly summers spent between Kyoto and Tokyo accustomed his senses to life in the country. Upon entering college, he was placed in a 101 level Japanese class—a placement he resented. Though he could speak informally, being in the class made him feel like his "Japanese was not correct." Michael became determined to master the language. He told me: "I was invested in trying to demonstrate and achieve something that would prove my Japanese identity, like a way to establish my Japanese self. If I could master the language, I could be Japanese." Underlying this investment was a fear that he would be outed. He told me: "I wanted to get everything right—if you make a mistake, you'll be outed." His desire to pass as Japanese was twofold. Beyond the linguistic component, there was a physical one. He described it:

> And there's a whole body thing, how you comport yourself in places. I felt a certain pride when walking around with all Japanese people, it allowed me to swim with everything else. It still comes up sometimes—feeling sort of repelled with foreigners. The more they didn't seem to know Japan, the worse. Like crossing the street. Quite a bit of

condescension here, but it had to do with the threat of being exposed, how I could be perceived, how I feared I might be perceived. Especially by white people.

Jessica spoke about a similar preoccupation with passing—linguistically and otherwise.

I asked Jessica how language influenced her identities. Her answer echoed Michael's

sentiments. She told me learning Japanese made her "feel more validated in calling [herself]

Japanese, from the second [she] started learning [the language]." She explained:

> Yeah. Not speaking any Japanese was… probably a barrier to feeling Japanese for me. Um. Yeah. I still… I probably won't feel like I'm good enough until I'm fluent and nobody can tell that I never spoke Japanese. I probably won't feel good about my Japanese until I pass as a native speaker, which might never happen. It's harder because I heard so much Japanese that I definitely absorbed Japanese grammar as a child. Not enough to speak it, but enough where anytime I hear Japanese, I can tell when other people aren't native speakers, even if their Japanese is way better than mine, I can hear accents and mistakes, even when I don't know what the mistake is. So I can hear my Japanese being bad, even if I can't fix it sometimes.

Her fixation on linguistic verisimilitude intertwined with an attention to her physical appearance.

In Japan, Jessica said she had become "obsessed with passing." In the U.S., she wasn't quite sure

how she was being racialized, but it mattered more in Japan. She told me:

> Sometimes I would ask people if I looked Asian or not. Cause I don't know what I look like. In Japan- I still don't know what I look like, but it matters more in how people are going to treat me, if they think I'm foreign or not. So, I think about it a lot more.

Jessica felt her claim to a Japanese identity was more tenuous in Japan. In the U.S., she felt she

had "proved being Japanese enough to call [herself] Japanese." But with Japanese people, Jessica

"didn't want to claim it as much," because she felt that she'd "never be as Japanese as a Japanese

person that lived in Japan their whole life." I asked her if she felt that the idea of Japaneseness

was too rigid. She replied firmly: "I think if you lived your whole life in Japan, and you speak

Japanese, and you live in Japan, I think that makes somebody more Japanese. I lived my whole

life in the U.S." Saaya seemed to share similar qualms about claiming Japaneseness in Japan.

While Robin, Michael, and Jessica had pursued Japanese language study later in life—college and onward—Saaya grew up trilingual. She told me that being able to speak "the native [languages]" of her three nationalities made her feel more connected to them and the people, it was hard for her to discern the relationship between language and her identities. She said:

> A lot of people ask me: "What's your native language?" Or, "What language do you feel comfortable in?" And I always say, "I don't know." Because English, Japanese, and French, I started at the exact [same] time, when I was three. And so it's all natural to me… Personally I don't feel there's- for example, like, "You're French." and I can't do French…

When people accepted her as French, American, or Japanese, there was no linguistic inability on which her acceptance could be denied. However, there was a disconnect for Saaya when it came to feeling Japanese.

Saaya talked at great length about the disjuncture she felt with collectivist culture in Japan, citing the popular Japanese proverb: "The nail that sticks out gets hammered down." She also talked about her mother's struggles in Japanese schools, being bullied for her lack of language abilities—an experience which Saaya didn't face thanks to her fluency. She did, however, face assumptions of incompetency with the Japanese language on account of her appearance. Saaya explained:

> But when you're mixed- Especially because I look like this, and then we wear our masks. They are like I'm a *gaijin*, basically a foreigner. And people don't talk to me, because I apparently look like this…It's not that they don't want to talk to me, they assume that I can't speak Japanese. So they're scared that if they speak to me in English, I'll judge them or something like that. Or just, they can't speak English, in general. So some people we're like, "Oh, can she speak Japanese?" kind of vibe. I'm literally in Faculty of Letters. And Faculty of Letters, the main thing is Japanese literature. So I'm like, "Um, make it make sense."

Saaya recounted several instances of this kind of occurrence, where despite her insistence that she was Japanese, it never seemed to click with others, and her spoken Japanese would be met

with exclamations of surprise, and the "fact" of her Japaneseness, only met with suspicion. But even when others accepted, or claimed her to be Japanese, Saaya said she didn't see herself as that way:

> If someone would say "You're Japanese," that kind of sounds wrong, because I don't really see myself as a Japanese person. Compared to fully Japanese people here…with Japanese people, I don't really connect that much. Like the Japanese side of me. Because I feel like it's partially because I'm in international schools and surrounded by international friends and stuff.

Saaya's difficulty in thinking of herself as a "full" Japanese person speaks to the notions of purity central to Japan's racialization of mixed people. Her racial halfness in conjunction with her other dissimilarities in personality and culture disqualify her from claiming a Japanese identity. Other interviewees like Michael however, had begun to approach their own Japaneseness less rigidly.

Michael realized his pursuit of Japaneseness via the language was futile when a close friend told him that he was "hitting his head with a brick wall trying to become Japanese." Michael admitted he doesn't feel so consumed by how other people see him anymore. His academic interests are less driven by a desire to prove his Japaneseness. He spoke about this shift in himself: "It's made me not worry as much about how other people see me, but ironically it's when my Japanese has become best." His use of Japanese morphed into a way to claim his own kind of Japaneseness. Michael explained that he speaks Japanese in an intentional way: "Maybe it's like an announcement like: 'Yeah, I'm foreign,' but I can speak it correctly. There's almost an aggression to the clarity of it."

Risa didn't confess to the same settled feelings in relation to Japanese, but her Korean identity existed for her beyond a lack of language ability. She explained:

> I don't speak Korean… In the back of my mind, I feel it's definitely [the same] for Asian Americans who are born and raised in America, or adopted by white parents. They're just

like: "I just happen to be Asian. But I'm born and bred American." So for me, I happened to be Korean. I grew up in Japan and the U.S.

At the same time, Risa struggled with how others approached her in Japan, often labeling her as American, and not understanding her as both Korean and Japanese. Risa described this feeling to me: "I just always constantly felt like I was being seen as half a person. Kind of sucked." Risa and other interviewees talked about, or at the very least hinted at this feeling of halfness, a kind of gnawing lack. This feeling of partiality frequently came up with usage of words like *hāfu*. The next section continues to focus on the relationship between language and race, but narrows in on my interviewees' feelings about racial language specific to the Japanese context. Firstly though, I describe my own relationship to *hāfu, daburu*, and other words.

Hafu, Daburu, and Other Words

Towards the end of my stay in Japan, my host father took me, along with my host mother and host sister Ai-chan, to a small Okinawan bar in Shinjuku. Just shy of Kabukicho, I found it a strange choice for a family meal.[88] I ducked into the restaurant, a small room, already at capacity with the twenty or so other people crammed in. Fumes of savory oil filled the air, and drunken clamor shot across tables. We were seated at a *chabudai*, the four of us silent amidst the surrounding chaos. Dishes arrived at our table one by one. I took small bites of bitter melon—still too astringent for my liking. I slurped down sesame covered noodles, chewed on fatty pork belly and crunchy pig ears, and refreshed my palette with popping *umi budou*. I took a few bites of taco rice, a bit bland and not nearly as spicy as I'd like, and left the rest to Ai-chan who wasn't happy with the rest of the unfamiliar food.

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[88] Kabukicho is a red-light district in Shinjuku, known for its nightlife.

The four of us turned our attention away from our plates and towards the owner of the restaurant, who stood just a few feet away from us, a ukulele in hand. He began to sing Okinawan-style songs, capturing everyone's attention. He would finish a song, and then make small talk with customers, commenting on their drinking habits and then diving into some musings about Okinawa. He wasn't a native, but professed a deep love for the place. A particularly rowdy table to our right, surrounded by drunk twenty-somethings, cheered for him, and brought roars of laughter to the room. One of them got up and began to accompany the old man in dance. The other walked to the back of the restaurant and began to drum a taiko to the beat of his song.

The old man finally turned his attention to our table. He named us one by one, deciphering our positions: "So you're the father, the mother, the daughter, and…" He paused at me, clearly unable to gather any similarities to the family I was with. My host father spoke for me, "She's an exchange student from America." At this mention alone, a collective gasp captured the room, and I could feel eyes begin to focus on me. I told the man my name, which my host father attempted to relay back to him, my quiet tone unable to rise above the chatter in the room. The man heard neither of us, and commented, his microphone still at his mouth: "Your face looks Japanese." I replied, telling him I was *hāfu; m*y host father told him my mother was Japanese. Another exclamation rolled across the room. A man seated to our left began to clap, everyone else followed suit. The old man smiled, and brought his hands together: "Yes, let's clap for her!" My host father looked back at me again, smiling proudly, and clapped. Ai-chan and my host mother laughed. I shook my head, unable to reply to the cheers and claps any other way.

Two of the drunk twenty year olds came up to me, and began to converse with me. "What a great host family you have!" they exclaimed. "Wow, you must be smart if you're studying at Waseda." When I spoke to them in Japanese, I was met with an obligatory: "日本語上手ですね！凄い。(Your Japanese is really good! Wow.)" One of them called over a friend to our table, "She's *hāfu* too." I smiled, thankful for a semi-escape from my host-family, but uncomfortable with all the attention, and too tired to process any of it. Our chat was broken up, as my host family and I were summoned up to sing a song together. I towered over them, but couldn't read the lyric book held in Ai-chan's hands. Their heads bobbed up and down to the rhythm, kanji appearing and disappearing from my sight. I walked home alone from the station, and returned to my host father sat at the couch, humming the tune to the same song.

This night solidified my misgivings with the word *hāfu*. *Hāfu* remarked on my partial Japaneseness—which I resented—but it also marked my uniqueness, one that felt uncomfortably close to the fetishistic attention I received in the States, ironically on account of my Japanese identity. I used the word *hāfu* myself, but it only felt comfortable when deployed in banter with other mixed friends. With others, I dished it out for convenience—I knew the moment it hit their ears they would offer me understanding, something I'd otherwise have to go to great lengths to receive. After my time in Japan, I intentionally switched my use of its equivalent in English, and found other words that made sense, like "mixed," which felt to me less unpleasant. But in Japanese, all I had was *hāfu*, and I inevitably became it each time it left my mouth. Other words—*daburu*, *mikusu rutsu*, to name a couple—hadn't made quite a dent in the Japanese lexicon, and even so, they only seemed to me to be re-iterations of my dissatisfaction with *hāfu*. I wondered if any of my interviewees shared my feelings.

Many of them did, particularly with the word *hāfu*. Mario didn't see himself as *hāfu*—both his parents were American—but he grew up with *hāfu* friends. He told me:

> Growing up, I never really liked the word *hāfu*… Just because it didn't make sense to me. I know it's only a word but- It's like, "*Hāfu*?" What do you mean? They're both right?

He made a conscious decision not to use "*hāfu*" when he could avoid it. I asked him if he felt there was a difference between the Japanese "*hāfu*" and the English "half." He told me he did, and recounted his time working in Okinawa, where a large U.S. military base has produced a much more visible mixed-race population. Mario believed "half," didn't mean much in the U.S., while "*hāfu*" was a much more loaded word. He told me that some of his mixed-race Okinawan students struggled with this difference:

> In Japan, there's a stigma, as well as there's this: "おーハーフ！いいね! *Hāfus* are so beautiful and pretty, and like models…" So you're not as special in the States. For better or worse. Some of my former students struggled with that because they were always unique, you know?

Beyond *hāfu*, Mario also told me about a family friend, Reggie Life, who he claims was one of the first to coin the term *daburu*; translating literally to "double," the word attempted to remedy the implications of "*hāfu*." Mario felt *daburu* was an empowering idea, but didn't use the word himself. In English, Mario said he would use "mixed," to him, "mixing [was] a very positive thing." But rather than using singular words, Mario told me he tried not to "describe mixed people… by their national identity or culture or race," and instead would describe their backgrounds at length.

Saaya also objected to the word *hāfu*, a sentiment carried on to her from her parents. Though she used the word herself, her mother always told her: "'Not half something. You're one-hundred percent.'" Saaya also mentioned that she believed *hāfu* carried derogatory meanings, and so she preferred to use the word "mixed."

Like Saaya and Mario, Risa described dislike of "*hāfu.*" Risa swayed between hatred and

frustrated acceptance of the word:

> There was a period where I *hated* the word *hāfu*. I was so adamant about it. I'm like: "I'm
> not *hāfu*. I'm not half a person, I'm a whole person with mixed roots." Not even divided
> half in the middle, you know? That makes no fucking sense. Made a whole presentation
> about it in a Japanese class to let out my anger. But then I realized that no one's ever
> going to change *hāfu*—at least in the next decade or so. It's pretty ingrained in the lexicon
> of Japanese people. So I'm like, "Whatever, I'm *hāfu*. Whatever, whatever, whatever!"

Risa, like Saaya, hadn't heard of *daburu* before, evidence that it hadn't made ground beyond a

circle of multicultural academics. But she also felt that it wasn't much of a solution. Instead of

halving someone, she said it felt like bashing two people into one, and maintained the same

quantitative language of *hāfu*. In her eyes, it stemmed from the same kind of "mono-racial

thinking." Beyond the Japanese context specific "*hāfu*" and "*daburu*," Risa expressed

displeasure with all other racial labels available for mixed people to use:

> I think "mixed-race" too has the implication that- It's kind of recognized as
> multiracialism? But it's definitely based on the idea of mono-racialism. That something
> crosses over- *Something's gross.* So I don't really love "mixed race" either. But I honestly
> don't know any other alternative. I'm sure someone's going to come up with a word down
> the line that's empowering or like, reclaim "mixed" or reclaim "*hāfu*," but right now,
> there's not really a label for my identity that ever makes me feel super… good. Right
> now, everything is like rooted from the- You know? Like the idea that it wasn't supposed
> to happen.

Other interviewees didn't delve into racial labels to the extent Risa did, but Michael echoed some

of her sentiments towards *hāfu* and *daburu*.

Michael's feelings about the word *hāfu* had "changed over time and contexts," and was

"sort of situational." He explained:

> It's one of those words that some people have an issue with, and some don't. I lean
> towards having an issue with it. There's something dissecting about it. I don't mind it
> when other mixed-race Japanese people use it, but when Japanese people use it…

He told me about his time in Okinawa, and confessed that it was "refreshing to be recognized as *hāfu* there." With a large population of mixed-race people, Michael told me being racialized as *hāfu* in Okinawa "felt like a relief, like, 'Oh, they see me. They're recognizing me accurately." In Tokyo though, it felt like people were always wondering what he was, and the word seemed to convey a kind of derogatory condensation. "*Daburu*," Michael said, "seemed to make the whole *hāfu* thing worse, digging the hole deeper."

Jessica and Robin didn't share the qualms about "*hāfu*" that others did. Jessica didn't use "*hāfu*" in the U.S., but found it useful in Japan "to indicate [that] there's a different experience of being mixed-Japanese." She did mention her surprise when a teacher at Waseda first called her *hāfu*. Jessica clarified though that she didn't believe her teacher's use of the word was meant as a "micro-aggression or anything," and was firm in this interpretation. In a brief comment, she told me she did prefer *hāfu* to other alternatives. Robin, on the other hand, expressed little to no thoughts about racial labels. She wrote to me that she used *hāfu* "quite a bit," but didn't really "put much attention to titles." Robin seemed to have arrived at an acceptance of herself, and any ambiguity that she might face from others' treatment of her. Her words spoke to a comfort, or release, that some had achieved, others were striving for, while yet others were unsure of its possibility. Even for Robin though, the path to this comfort was not so straightforward, interwoven with experiences of rejection and feelings of shame. The next section, "Acceptance, or Some Kind of Loss," interrogates each of my interviewee's journeys towards their current realities.

Acceptance, or Some Kind of Loss

Mario exuded certainty. He was quite proud of himself, his background, his family, and his place in the world. Even though he had witnessed and experienced racism, both in Japan and in the U.S., it didn't seem to affect his self-image in the same way it had others. I asked him if he felt safer in Japan or the U.S., after he spoke about growing up uncomfortable with the blackface frequently shown on national television. He quickly withdrew his previous claim, and said: "Nah, I'm always comfortable. Yeah, wherever I am." His optimism was exceptional in this regard, something that few of my interviewees shared.

Risa, in particular, spoke to a sense of defeat in herself. She told me, letting out a sarcastic laugh: "You just can't win as a mixed Japanese kid." Unlike Mario, she felt comfortable neither in the U.S. nor in Japan:

> Yeah, I think for a while I thought the US was safe. And then when I started encountering a bunch of racist shit, I was like, "I don't feel comfortable here anymore." Especially as hate crimes were on the rise. With my mask, I think people see me more as Asian. Even though I have a double lid…So I'm seen more as Asian, that didn't feel safe… But yeah, definitely in Japan, I don't feel safe in terms of being comfortable in my identity, because there's no way I'm ever going to be seen as a Japanese person here. Or a person who is, I don't know… I think people will accept me as *hāfu*. But they won't ever see the full picture. Because when I say, "My mom's *zainichi kankokujin*[89]," they have no idea what I'm saying. Or if they do, they're like, "*Oh, sure...*"

Risa didn't feel "seen" in either country, and joked that she was going to "try Europe next," even though it'd "probably be the same." Risa's perpetual limbo coincided with her struggle to appreciate her own mixedness.

Risa described past fantasies of a monoracial self. She would imagine her father marrying a white woman, or her mother marrying another Korean person, and would picture herself as a white woman, or a Korean woman, with no hyphenations. Risa held on to a lot of anger towards

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[89] "*Zainichi kankokujin*" is a term used to describe Japan's ethnically Korean population who have remained in Japan since Korea's colonization.

her parents; she felt that the fact of her mixedness had "branded her with [an] identity crisis for life." She confessed she still couldn't shake this anger, despite attempts to move past it. The proposed positives of being mixed-race—being multicultural, multilingual, and so on—didn't seem worth it. Risa felt that being mixed "just makes things so much harder." She could just as easily be a white person who spoke Japanese, or a Korean person who spoke English. Risa didn't see bilingualism as something inherent to being mixed-race, and any lack of language abilities (as in her own experience) only fueled feelings of unbelonging. She recognized that her fantasies were harmful, and some of them steeped in anti-black racial histories in the U.S., but confessed to imagining a different mixed-version of herself:

> There was a period of my life though. This is kind of getting into the racial minutia. Oh, there were also times where I wished I was Japanese—like ethnically. But there was a time in my life that I wished I was part-Black instead of part-Asian. I've realized that for Black people, like even if you're a little bit Black, you're Black. You're not half-white. You're just Black. And although I realize that's like a really shitty thing to wish, because I'm ignoring all of the racial, institutional racism that comes with that and also the identity crisis that comes with being Caucasian and African American. It's just that I had this perceived notion that it's much easier for Black people to identify… In terms of culturally, if they're also Caucasian, because Black identity always shows more when you're that kind of mixed? So it's easier, at least for other people, to recognize that you're Black and that you happen to maybe have a white parent. Whereas when you're mixed Asian, people are constantly trying to figure out where to place you, right? You have to constantly advocate where to be placed.

Her imagined Black-white self tests a null hypothesis. Michael's experiences evidence this enough. However, her fantasies reflect a strong desire to be read, understood, and accepted, unconditionally. Risa was tired of advocating for herself, exhausted by others' confusion.

Michael also experienced this burden, of constantly having to advocate for himself. But he had come to a realization about four or five years ago that it wasn't "[his] burden to explain" himself to others. Before then, Michael "was quite self conscious about being so complicated," and struggled with "how and when to explain [his identities] to people." He told me he "just

started to not care as much." It wasn't a shift that came instantly, though. It had slowly dawned

on him that, "one half of identity formation is recognition from the culture." And while he had

tried his best, he realized that "the definition of this recognition is so strict." Michael found this

"devastating at first to accept and stomach." But once he did, "it was pretty liberating." He told

me he only talks about his identity with "people who have some sort of understanding,"

otherwise it just felt "like a waste of time."

Robin, like Michael, had accepted the complexities of her identities. As a child though,

she struggled with anxious neurosis, and "didn't want to be Japanese." She had wished her

features were more Western, that "[she] didn't have deep set eyes, or dark Asian-ish hair, that

[her] eyes weren't so long." But her self-image changed "very radically" in college. In her

freshman year, Robin had tried to fit in with the other Japanese students, but "was almost

immediately excluded," which she described as "one of the most painful experiences [she] ever

had." Since then, she simply "stopped caring as much." She described her current outlook:

> By the time I left for Japan to study abroad, I had fully embraced a "it's whatever" kind
> of attitude and just rolled with whatever happened. Now, I live by the fact that I will be
> myself and accept the fact that I am not entitled to things—a broad statement that really
> helped me in the long run. In Japan, though I may be half-Japanese, I am still a foreigner.
> It's similar to if I moved suddenly from the rural U.S. countryside to New York—I would
> be a foreigner there too. I just accepted the ambiguity with my half-Japanese status.

Robin no longer thought much about others' perceptions. She confessed to being comfortable in

the in-between, "floating somewhere between Japanese and American."

Like Robin, Saaya seemed to be comfortable in transience, though still felt a kind of

unbelonging. Saaya never desired to pass as French or Japanese, since she knew that she would

"never fit into only 'one' group." She recognized that people racialized her differently in France,

where people mostly perceived her as mixed, versus Japan, where most saw her as "French or a

foreigner." Though she wasn't excluded by monoracial French or Japanese people, she did feel a

barrier with them, and instead found security in a largely mixed-race and international friend group. She told me:

> Most of my friends are either people who have experience living in different countries or are mixed. Not that I am being picky, I obviously have many amazing friends who only have one nationality. But I feel like it's because a lot of my mixed friends can relate and have gone through the same things that I have, which makes us connected in many ways. Most specifically, I feel like they can just see me and won't create this sort of idea of who I am and what kind of person I would probably be.

In Japan especially, Saaya was often told things like "Oh, I wish I was mixed," or "If I were mixed I would have been so pretty," or even "Mixed people have it all." Saaya admitted these words took a toll on her; they had no idea what she went through on a daily basis. With her friends, she was able to create a space free from others' generalizing perceptions of her, and free from their projection of desire. She could just be.

Jessica didn't speak about her self-image the way other interviewees did. She did, however, speak to a consuming preoccupation with passing in Japan. She felt confident in her Japaneseness in the U.S., felt like she had proved it, but in Japan, she believed and accepted that she would never achieve the same Japaneseness that those born and raised in Japan had. Even so, Jessica didn't fight against any of the qualifiers of Japaneseness nor her desire to fulfill them. She spoke about others' racializations of her: "I feel like I'm being read as a *hāfu* that grew up abroad, so it's probably exactly right." Jessica spoke about herself squarely within Japaneseness discourse, understanding her position as *hāfu*, and all the assumptions that came with it. Whether this was a kind of acceptance, or a kind of loss, I wasn't so sure.

My time in Japan settled some of my hesitancy in claiming Japaneseness for myself. Perhaps out of stubborn resistance, I gained certainty in my identities. I found language to talk about myself that felt truer to my experiences. I made meaningful connections to other mixed-Japanese people, and found comfort in them. But I couldn't muster up the optimism that

Mario effused, and like Risa, I was deeply unhappy—angry even—with the status-quo. I knew it wasn't my job to explain myself to others, or to demand understanding. But others never seemed to be able to swim in uncertainty, and so it fell on me to fish them out, and give them a satisfying answer. Each time I did, it felt like I was lying, or like I was losing something. I wondered if it would always be like this.

Mario spoke at length about his concerns and hopes for the future, and others' answers hinted towards what they believed might change, or what wouldn't. In the final chapter, "On Racial Futures," I consider these desires, and what kind of futures they might shape. I transition from interiority to exteriority to assess the discursive correlation between mixedness and futurity. I challenge popular conceptions of colorblind and multicultural futures, and consider instead how a re-poetics might guide us towards liberation. I ask: Is there a path to liberation for mixed people? What does liberation look like? And what would it imply for race?

Chapter Five: On Racial Futures

Nobody ever speaks of a human identity.

- Paul Gilroy, "Against Race"

Almost a decade before I was born, Time Magazine released a special issue, the title page adorned with a computer-generated image of a woman's face, labeled "The New Face of America."[90] Behind her naked shoulders lie countless other portraits in mosaic, her olive skin, brown hair, and hazel eyes seemingly a summation of them. When I was thirteen, National Geographic released "The Changing Face of America," another issue predicting a future of racial mixture.[91] Similar portraits decorate its pages: a woman's piercing hazel gaze, her eyes almost yellow in studio light, and her beige skin framed by soft blonde-brown curls. Two children, both beige in skin, but one with black curls and brown eyes, the other with curls so blonde, almost white, and eyes a blue-green. These are not faces of the present, but the future. A MIC magazine article summarizes the issue aptly: "National Geographic determined what Americans will look like in 2050, and it's beautiful."

Like the Time Magazine issue, National Geographic detailed the rapid increase of mixed-race populations from Census data, pointing out the social construction of race and mixed-race people's positions within racial categories. It was perhaps an attempt to meaningfully engage with race and racism in the U.S., and consider the place of mixed people within it. But the article reproduced a common sentiment: mixed people were an "opportunity," the confusion

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[90] "TIME Magazine Cover: The New Face of America - Nov. 18, 1993," TIME, accessed February 26, 2023, https://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19931118,00.html.
[91] Zak Cheney-Rice, "National Geographic Determined What Americans Will Look Like in 2050, and It's Beautiful," MIC, April 10, 2014,
https://www.mic.com/impact/national-geographic-determined-what-americans-will-look-like-in-2050-its-beautiful-16166684; Lise Funderburg, "The Changing Face of America," *National Geographic*, October 1, 2013,
https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/article/changing-face-america.

of their bodies allowed others to engage with their own racial biases. Their bodies were rid of backwards notions of race—perhaps even entirely devoid of race itself—and became the image of a bright future, free of racial strife. The article begins with a question: "What is it about the faces on the pages we find so intriguing?"[92] The intrigue didn't die down; in 2018, the magazine published another special: "The Race Issue."

The National Geographic cover featured a familiar image.[93] Two young girls gaze solemnly forward, their faces alike in expressions and features, and their bodies donning matching cream dresses. One has white skin, blonde curls, and blue eyes. The other, who clings to her shoulders, has brown skin, black curls, and brown eyes. "Black and White," the title says, the script of "Black" placed in front of the whiter child, and "White," in front of the darker one. The subscript tells us their purpose: "These twin sisters make us rethink everything we know about race." The cover story tells us more about them, and why we should find them important. Their white mother and Black father met and fell in love, their love unattending to any of the racial politics they may encounter. Yet their twin daughters, Millie and Marcie, immediately became objects of surprise, people unable to understand how their genetic relation could result in stark visual contrast. Then follows the required musings about the social construction of race and the scientific workings of phenotype. Millie and Marcie understand racism, but are not bound by it; in fact the article tells us their relationship is remarkably free of race-thinking, and they themselves have been unscathed by racism.

Doreen St. Félix of the New Yorker critiques the Nat Geo issue, dissecting its obvious contradictions.[94] The very framing of the twins, one as Black and one as white, "inspires the kind

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[92] Funderburg, "The Changing Face of America."

[93] Patricia Edmonds, "These Twins Will Make You Rethink Race," *National Geographic*, March 12, 2018, https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/article/race-twins-black-white-biggs.

[94] Doreen St. Félix, "The National Geographic Twins and the Falsehood of Our Post-Racial Future," *The New Yorker*, March 14, 2018,

of coarse racial quantifying from which the issue is ostensibly trying to escape." The discourse following its publication counters the implication that the sisters are of two races: "Linking to the article on social media, several people observed that both sisters 'look' black." Félix ends her piece with an eloquent quip on the National Geographic's colorblind ideations: "Our awe at the notion of a raceless future only betrays the truths of our present." The racial focus of these magazines are narrow, preoccupied with a Black and/or White binary, and does not align entirely with my interest in mixed-Japanese people. But even outside of this dichotomy, pluralized notions of racial identity become grounds to project us into non-racial futures.

A 2019 New York Times Magazine article turned its attention from the mainland to Hawaii, and in tradition with its predecessors, attempted to shake off race—with again questionable results. The article's title is simultaneously a promise and a command: "Want to Be Less Racist? Move to Hawaii."[95] Author Moises Velasquez-Manoff ventures to the archipelago, determined, and convinced, that Hawaii can procure an anti-racist vision of the future for the world. Like earlier Time Magazine and National Geographic articles, the piece links notions of racial mixture to futurity through its photographic display. A collage of six portraits visually represent Manoff's point of view: six people, some gazing forward, some staring off into the distance, their photos tangled together by a background of fauna, and their visual differences quite literally toned out, each one colored in sepia, each one made beige.

The photos tell us that in Hawaii to be mixed is to be unremarkable, and edge us once again towards an investment in beige, one that holds the key to "another way forward."[96] The

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https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-national-geographic-twins-and-the-falsehood-of-our-post-racial-future.

[95] Moises Velasquez-Manoff, "Want to Be Less Racist? Move to Hawaii," *The New York Times*, June 28, 2019, sec. Opinion, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/28/opinion/sunday/racism-hawaii.html.

[96] Velasquez-Manoff; My use of "investment in beige," cites YouTuber Khadija Mbowe. They reference George Lipsitz's conceptualization of a possessive investment in whiteness to discuss the politics of race and representation in the new Gossip Girl reboot. I do not delve into their work, or Lipsitz's, as they represent slightly different intellectual trajectories, but I adopt their language.

article dives into short histories about the modernity of race as we know it, and the economic purpose of color lines. Manoff details a psychology study that found white mainland students move to Hawaii and begin to understand themselves (now in the minority) as racialized, and that as their "ideas about race relax," their cognitive flexibility increases. While the article briefly touches on the harmful connotations of framing Hawaii as a multicultural paradise, and the realities of prejudice in the archipelago, the main takeaway is clear. Hawaii's "aloha spirit," a concept of community founded on mutual respect and care, drives away the rigidity of race, and replaces racialized identities with a more pertinent one: "the local." Manoff imagines that if we were only to conceptualize the globe as an island, and our relationships as ones of dependence and not competition, we could "see each other differently" like they do in Hawaii, and perhaps even "have less use for the very idea of race." Ultimately, Manoff's instruction doesn't take the time to critically engage with race and the implications of doing away with it. One of the article's top comments exposes the danger of Manoff's wistful aspirations: a reader tells us he's stopped identifying as white because "race is a social construct" and it doesn't offer him any kind of utility.[97] Of course, the very ability for him to disengage with his racialized self is itself only a symptom of a racial hierarchy, with white at its peak.

From the 2019 New York Times piece to its 1993 predecessor in Time Magazine, the future-directed desires of escaping the shackles of race and racism has been slapped onto mixed-race bodies. Mixed bodies have been, and continue to be framed as futurity; there is no belonging for the present, and the future can only be a beige one. This notion of colorblindness plagues global discussions about futurity and race, and is certainly also present in musings about (a future) Japan. Of my interviewees, Mario, in particular, spoke hopefully about a colorblind future.

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[97] Sam I Am, June 28, 2019. Comment on Velasquez-Manoff.

Mario cited the growing visibility of mixed people as a source of his hope. Obama's presidency offered a new vision of what it meant to be "American," moving further away from associations of whiteness. In Japan, athletes like Naomi Osaka and Rui Hachimura made Mario feel proud. "There are so many of us," he said. These were the people who were changing what it meant to be Japanese on a daily basis, and it made him happy to wait for this future. Mario clearly found a need to change what it meant to *be* Japanese, but it was not a definition in which he found race to hold much importance.

Mario compared the U.S. and Japan, telling me that at a young age he recognized that race "mattered," but that it was "obviously a kind of social construct." During his time in the U.S., he observed the way poor neighborhoods were overwhelmingly Black, and understood it as a symptom of the country's racial history. Japan, he thought, was a different story. He explained:

> In Japan it's totally different. I almost feel that is the state that we want to be in. Colorblindedness is seen as almost a… yeah, it's a bad thing now. Right? But I don't think that. The goal for me is kind of a MLK vision. Of race, that: "Yeah, we're totally different." But I think the point that we want to reach is: "Yeah race is a non-factor." We all come from Africa… And we differ in the kind of historical route we took. Um, so… That's how I feel now, I will say.

Mario's assessment of Japan falls into the ideological debate that sweeps up attempts to talk about race in the country. In his understanding, it seemed race *was* irrelevant to the *gaijin* (foreigner) versus *nihonjin* (Japanese) dynamic. Mario told me about Black friends who reported back to him about their visits to Japan, admitting they preferred being treated as *gaijin*, feeling their otherness defined by their foreignness and not their race. A few white friends claimed that Japanese people were racist, to which he countered that they had simply experienced being a minority for the first time. Yet, Mario also spoke about race and racial stereotypes in Japan as an import from the U.S.; it was through these distorted imports that Japanese people had inherited their prejudices. He suggested it was only natural Japanese people would associate Black people

with poverty and violence, with hip-hop, basketball, and dance. Under this "consumption of imported-goods" paradigm, race is not Japanese, and one can not apply a racial critique to the country's politics. One can critique prejudice on account of xenophobia and ignorance, but beyond that, race is out of the question. It is precisely this notion of race and racism that I am trying to push back against, or at the very least complicate.

There is no way to talk about race or racism in Japan *productively* if they both exist in a region-locked way. One can recognize that race is a modern construction, born and grown in the West. Race was not, in Mario's words, "ideas that Japanese people created." However, race—regardless of its importation—exists in Japan, and not in a passive way. I am arguing that the integration of race into pre-existing rhetorics about purity and blood have remade race and solidified racialized worldviews in Japan. Accounts re-framing racism as purely consequences of Japanese people's ignorance unwittingly underestimates their ability to *understand* ideas about race and spew them out. How does one explain a long history of blackface comedy? Is it just a sad consequence of ignorance, or worse yet, a misguided kind of appreciation? Why does the Japanese government consistently support politics that insist on a self-image of mono-ethnicity, and a past free from colonial violence? A colorblind future implies that these questions will never have to be answered, because race immediately becomes a non-factor, and ahistoricity becomes the norm. A colorblind Japan cannot be a healthy one.

If we accept that categories of difference must remain, then the offered counter-solution becomes multiculturalism. In its popular iterations, multiculturalism "pluralizes" a notion of identity while keeping intact "a unified concept of identity."[98] While colorblindness promises utopia through the dissolution of identity categories, multiculturalism promises the same through

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[98] Joan W. Scott, "Multiculturalism and the Politics of Identity," *October* 61, no. The Identity in Question (Summer 1992): 13.

the *reinforcement* of these very categories. To put it shortly, through the celebration of our differences, any politicized tensions between them will surely melt away: we are different, but we are the same, we are human.

The multiculturalist solution promises a vision in which difference remains and is important, but I find its notion of value as it relates to mixed-race identity troubling. Under its umbrella, mixed-race people hold value for our embodiment of its possibilities—through multilingualism we become a transnational vessel, an intermediate for global affairs, and a visual representation for global unity. Mario and Saaya collectively imagined themselves within this kind of future. Mario spoke to a felt pleasure and found purpose within a visually differentiated social body, but one in which this accentuation didn't hold any social weight. It was within these contexts—like his experienced version of the United States—that Mario understood what he had to "offer." It was within these visions of futurity that he saw himself represented: through the bodies of Naomi Osaka, Rui Hachimura, even Barack Obama. Saaya, on the other hand, projected herself into a globalized work space. She wished to work for UNICEF, to break down language barriers, and to herself become "a connection between countries." It was her language abilities that propelled this desire.

There is no denying that multiculturalism offers up a kind of optimism about mixed-race futurity that feels lighter than its colorblind counterpart. Multiculturalism promises that the stories with which we understand ourselves and others will *remain*. Colorblindness tells us that while our stories may remain, their colors will not, and soon enough the bright hues will give way to an unintelligible gray. We will lose the ability to understand our racial histories and our racialized selves: both give way to meaninglessness under our collective unity.

However, as much as there is something dangerous about the current realizations of colorblindness, there is something revealing about the threat of it. In the words of Paul Gilroy, "for many racialized populations, 'race' and the hard-won, oppositional identities it supports are not to be lightly or prematurely given up."[99] Our fear at the idea of race's destruction reveals to us our dependency on it; our world flows on its river, and if it were to run dry, it would mean restructuring on an unimaginable scale. Questions of racial liberation run tangentially to this fear: is it even worthwhile to consider the destruction of race? Is there a way to think about this destruction that does not fall into the hands of a bleak colorblind worldview, or its rosy multicultural cousin? Does the destruction of race inherently translate to liberation? What does liberation look like?

What liberation might mean for mixed-race people is complicated by their ontological uncertainty, stratified by a simultaneous exclusion and inclusion within communities of color. Some critics imply that mixed-race identity represents desires to escape *being* a person of color and to strive for whiteness.[100] Others have argued that in its separation from monoracial categories, it undermines emancipatory attempts for these traditional communities—playing into colorblind politics popular with conservatives. Even harsher critiques have asserted that mixed-race identity will bring upon a color caste system akin to the ones in Brazil and South Africa. Some have argued that the very establishment of mixed identity hardens false ideas about race as necessarily singular, pure, and biological. Or, on the colorblind side of things, that *any* racial identities—mixed-race included—are inauthentic because they are in themselves racist, and are therefore taken on in bad faith. While some of these arguments may be dated, emerging from the height of the multiracial movement in the 1990s United States, they represent some of

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[99] Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), 12.
[100] Ronald R. Sundstrom, "Being and Being Mixed Race," *Social Theory and Practice* 27, no. 2 (2001): 286–93.

the obstacles in fashioning liberatory futures. I will not delve into a detailed defense on

mixed-race identity, though I do not believe mixed-race ontology is *essentially* antithetical to

constructing liberatory narratives. I do, however, find it necessary to investigate its criticisms, as

they bring to light the faults of colorblind and multicultural discourses and their interpellations of

mixed people.

An expansion of categorical options does nothing to re-frame or orient the systems of

knowledge that engender them. Mixed-race should be given space for belonging, for its accuracy

in some people's experiences of their racialized selves. It should not be mistaken as a kind of

liberation. My discussion of colorblind and multicultural futures takes issue with the co-opting of

mixedness by projects aiming to solve our issues with race and racism uncritically. To articulate

any sort of anti-racist praxis, we must object to the ways mixedness is intertwined in "racist

race-making practices."[101] The enemy is not mixedness per se, but in racist articulations of

mixedness that uphold racism.

Desiree Valentine denounces the popular embrace of mixedness in the U.S. and South

Africa, arguing that it is concomitant to racist logics of purity. Valentine reminds us that purity

and impurity are themselves not given, natural categories, and that it is "not enough to contest

biological purity."[102] Notions of (im)purity were produced by a "host of discourses," that

"[developed] these social heuristics for the purpose of bolstering racist conceptions of race."[103]

The key to escaping the "politics and practices of purity," will not be a reinvention of mixed

identity, but in challenging ourselves to sit with the "disorientation" that it procures. Valentine

details a directive towards liberation, one that in the ethos of mixedness will *not* be linear, but

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[101] Desiree Valentine, "Racial Mixedness in the Contemporary United States and South Africa: On the Politics of Impurity and Antiracist Praxis," *Critical Philosophy of Race* 4, no. 2 (2016): 190, https://doi.org/10.5325/critphilrace.4.2.0182.
[102] Valentine, 184.
[103] Valentine, 199.

"intent on constant movement and dynamism, seeking the fleeting moment, and fleeing the present moment, without guarantee of success."[104] Popular notions of colorblindness and multiculturalism fail immediately in their commitment to a linear trajectory towards success, something achieved without consideration of the past, or the present.

Within a liberatory framework, mixed-race identity must coincide with a "recognition and wrestling with the histories and politics that condition its availability as a form of self-identification today."[105] As Valentine puts forth, "a liberatory take on mixedness" will be about interrogating our relationship to practices of identity—racial and otherwise—that insist on their fixity, denies their full unknowability, and solidifies our possession of them.[106] Perhaps in slight misalignment with Valentine, I believe an anti-racist praxis *can* include "mixed-race," and that critical mixed-race studies can manufacture a pedagogy of resistance to responsibly participate in imagining liberatory futures.

At a Critical Mixed Race Studies Conference in 2010, Andrew J. Jolivétte spoke to what the field of study can offer, answering the question: "What is our call to action?"[107] He describes a version of critical mixed-race pedagogy, founded on tenants of social justice, self-determination, cross-ethnic and transnational solidarity, and radical love. To put this pedagogy to work, he argues we must fight for legal reform with a transnational scope, engage in self-reflective research and organizing with our communities, and practice emotional vulnerability, a kind of radical acceptance. This, he argues, will ensure the health of an anti-racist praxis. I do believe that Jolivétte's proposal can position us to address the structural frameworks of race and racism that we are attempting to de-construct. However, even Jolivétte's language

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[104] Valentine, 200.
[105] Valentine, 197.
[106] Valentine, 200.
[107] Andrew J. Jolivétte, "Critical Mixed Race Studies: New Directions in the Politics of Race and Representation," *Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies* 1, No. 1 (2014): 150.

teeters into familiar territory: he tells us that recentering radical love will "bring people together not to erase race or identity but to strengthen it."[108] Ronald R. Sundstrom echoes the sentiment in his essay *Being and Being Mixed Race*, where he puts forth "mixed race with irony."[109] Irony, he believes, allows a "consciousness of [human kinds'] contingency, fragility and changing nature," of the constant shifts that we must reorient ourselves to. This speaks to the dynamism that Valentine finds essential to thinking about liberation. But Sundstrom offers up an end goal, a final destination of the work irony can do: he believes it can "challenge America's racial vision of itself," and "[promote] hybridity and intermixture," so that we may even eventually "lead to the collapse of the races into one: *Una raza mestiza*."[110] Both Jolivétte and Sundstrom's projections of the future—though much more nuanced than simple colorblind aspirations or celebrations of multiculturalism—rely on a unidirectional logic, reinvesting in linear trajectories towards successful futures. In investing in a critical mixed-race pedagogy, it is crucial that we undo this logic.

At a 2018 Akademie der Künste plenary session for its "Colonial Repercussions" series, Angela Davis and Gayatri Spivak, along with moderator Nikita Dhawan, discuss planetary utopias. Nikita Dhawan begins articulating the issues central to the following speeches and dialogue: projects of de- and anti-colonialism in a post-colonial world, their failures, and our hopes and desires in their wake. She asks us: "How to script post-imperial futures while retaining a certain pessimism of the intellect and a optimism of the will? What are the challenges of imagining a post-imperial politics from the non-place of planetarity?"[111] Her answer, I think,

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[108] Jolivétte, 157.
[109] Sundstrom, "Being and Being Mixed Race," 306–7.
[110] Sundstrom, 307.
[111] *COLONIAL REPERCUSSIONS - Angela Davis and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: Planetary Utopias*, 2018, 30:56-31:09, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cc-nGN07gnk.

provides us a way to return to futurity, equipped with the ethos of mixedness that Desiree

Valentine presses us towards. Dhawan sketches out a planetary approach to utopias:

> In place of an eschatological tradition that lends to critical thinking claims of directionality and purpose with promises of salvation and fulfillment, a planetary approach to thinking utopias draws on *planetes*—which literally means "wanderers" in Ancient Greek. This facilitates multi-directional flows of hopes, desires, and imaginaries, without reproducing hegemonic paradigms of globality or transnationality, that offered romantic longings for global conviviality and transnational solidarity. The Greek term "eschaton" contains two meanings of the notion of an end: one, as the finishing of a process, as *finis*, and the other as the completion of a goal, as *telos*. In contrast to investing futures with a purposiveness, Kant speaks of Zweckmäßigkeit. We need to be cognizant of the non-formulaic openness of planetary utopias that involves not only reflecting on what is to be hoped, desired, and imagined, but *also* on the limits of our best efforts to do so. For imagining the unimaginable and hoping in the face of hopelessness is precisely the task of utopias. A nostalgia for that which is yet to be. The not-yet.[112]

Dhawan's outline of planetary utopias propels us to rewire aspirations of a not-yet—of a world

existing in the absence of race. Thinking in planetary terms, so to speak, provides an alternate

notion of futurity, one unbounded by unidirectionality, one that resists immediate erasure of our

present conditions and past histories. It is precisely this kind of thought that begins to exercise

the imaginary and procure sites—or non-sites—where we can productively attend to the crushing

presence of raciology.

Conceptualizing planetary utopias brings to the fore the work of a kind of humanism,

theorized by the likes of Paul Gilroy and Sylvia Wynter: planetary humanism. This humanism

reinvests in a human identity, demanding that we must rewrite the codes of what it means to be

human—and that, importantly, there is hope in doing so.

Wynter argues that what it means to be human has thus far been defined by an imperial

epistemology, and that the decolonial task entails a practice of "epistemic disobedience."[113] The

dominant system of knowledge solidifies a category of "Human" that delineates those outside its

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[112] *COLONIAL REPERCUSSIONS - Angela Davis and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, 31:09-32:30.

[113] Walter D. Mignolo, "Sylvia Wynter: What Does It Mean to Be Human?," in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015), 107, https://muse.jhu.edu/book/70291/.

parameters to a category of non-humanness, as in Fanon's concept of "les damnés." Wynter

contends that this episteme legitimates itself through its own self-image: that of Man, a

universalized image of Man produced by various colonizations—of time, space, geometries, and

so on—during the European Renaissance. Under this knowledge system, we "[fail] to notice that

the stories of what it means to be Human—specifically origin stories that explain who/what we

are—are, in fact, narratively constructed."[114] The planetary humanism which Wynter puts forth

seeks to critique other iterations of humanism that only partially rewrote origin stories, but it also

strives to reinvigorate a new universalism. In a conversation with David Scott, Wynter describes

the work to be done by this new strain of universalism: it will rescript our origin stories so that

"we can, for the first time, *experience* ourselves, not only as we do now, as this or that *genre* of

the human, but also as human."[115] Being human will mean "experiencing ourselves in which

every mode of being human, every form of life that has ever been enacted, is part of us. We, a

part of them." Her proposal is not entirely unlike Gilroy's, which also urges us to proceed

towards a new humanism that does away with race-thinking.

Gilroy finds routine attempts to assert race's constructedness but accept its permanence in

our social fabric inadequate to liberatory thinking. Like Wynter, he argues that the "human" has

to become central to our attempts to dismantle race—and to destroy it as it were. He describes

the conditions of this humanism:

> In other words, the alternative version of humanism that is cautiously being proposed
> here simply cannot be reached via any retreat into the lofty habits and unamended
> assumptions of liberal thinking, particularly about juridical rights and sovereign
> entitlements. This is because these very resources have been tainted by a history in which
> they were not able to withstand the biopolitical power of the race-thinking that
> compromised their boldest and best ambitions. Their resulting failures, silences, lapses,
> and evasions must become central. They can be reinterpreted as symptoms of a struggle

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[114] D. Mignolo, 107.

[115] David Scott, "The Re-Enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter," *Small Axe* 8 (September 2000): 196–97.

over the boundaries of humanity and then contribute to a counterhistory that leads up to the rough-hewn doorway through which any alternative conception of the human must pass. This can only be attained after a wholesale reckoning with the idea of "race" and with the history of raciology's destructive claims upon the very best of modernity's hopes and resources. A restoration of political culture is the evasive goal of these operations.[116]

Like Wynter, Gilroy seeks to engage in a restorative re-conceptualization of humanity, and reimplants in this project a "framework of []direction."[117] Gilroy lays out a method to be taken up in intellectual pursuits: a re-historicization highlighting the inadequacies of previously written stories. Wynter is also occupied with re-writing "ideological hegemonies," but the praxis she lays out is not in the rewriting itself but in the *being* human.[118]

I have only begun to brush up against the detailed prerogatives of Wynter and Gilroy's respective theorizations. Their proposed humanisms are much more extensive in their explorations of social, political, and economic terrains, and in their attention to theory. I bring attention to their versions of planetary humanism to *begin* to work the imaginary, to consider what imagining futures might do for us in the present. Both Wynter and Gilroy's work seems, perhaps, familiar to the popular aspirations of colorblindness, or multiculturalism. Indeed, the very utopian nature of their work reaches towards futures with seeming delusion—the tasks they produce require a collective will at enormous scale, and offer no promises of success. But it seems to me that the problems of race and racism at hand require a re-poetics at this impossible scale, and that the idea of planetary humanism directs us—from various poles—towards this.

I think of this paper as several attempts to engage in a re-poetics. The idea of poetics fits well with my focus on the relationship between language and race, race and the self, the self and storytelling. My step towards re-scripting the history of race in Japan seeks for us to re-orient ourselves towards the present realities of race and racism *and* to re-engage with an already

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[116] Gilroy, *Against Race*, 30.
[117] Scott, "The Re-Enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter," 121.
[118] Scott, 121.

published past. My study of language in the televisual sphere asks us to consider the embodied

tensions of racialized mixed people in the realm of identification and belonging. My interviewees

tell you their stories, as do I. Each of these endeavors take on a narrative—the stories about our

pasts, our presents, and futures—playing with the ways they have been traditionally constructed,

the ways they are to be constructed. This is the kind of re-poetics I engage in.

The Oxford English Dictionary describes poetics as: "Of, belonging to, or characteristic

of poets or poetry; appropriate to a poet."[119] Next to its present definition, is its obsolete one:

"fictitious, imaginary." Perhaps it is time we revive the imaginary and take on the duty of poets.

Let us move courageously towards ourselves, for each other, and for what we might become.

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[119] "Poetic, Adj. and n.," in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed March 22, 2023, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/146532.

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Appendix

__ (underline) racial, ethnic, nationality deictics
[ ] simultaneous talk by two speakers
(笑笑笑笑) laughter
(unintelligible) indecipherable speech