“KOBUSHI AGEROO! (=PUMP YA FIST!)”:
BLACKNESS, “RACE” AND POLITICS IN JAPANESE HIPHOP

By

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For my son, Xola Dessalines Amilcar Fischer, and my mother, Cheryl Fischer, with love, respect and eternal admiration
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Anything productive that comes of this work is because it is multi-vocal and made possible by much support and guidance from a number of people, programs and institutions. Any mistakes are the sole fault of the author and so, in advance, I say, *mea culpa*, as this project was initially inspired by and continually driven by only good intentions as well as dreams of hope, healing and human equality. I am most grateful to the many people whose work, presence and support made this document possible. Writing to express my gratitude has been such an emotional process that I have actually—in the spirit of Hiphop—produced an “underground” and “commercial” version of Acknowledgements! What follows is the concise and commercial version. However, I still hope that readers will enjoy this part in the true spirit of a mixtape, and play your favorite instrumental sample while reading this academic version of the Hiphop “shout out.” In a final mixtape move, I send sincere apologies to all I may have forgotten to thank. I got you next time! One love; let’s get free.

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NOTE ON LANGUAGE

When last or family names are provided for Japanese nationals, I follow Japanese practice with last name first followed by given names. Japanese American names follow common practice in the United States. Exceptions exist when I contacted the person whose name I am using and she or he requested that the name was presented otherwise. I often use Japanese characters for Japanese words for two main reasons. One is to show how the author of the text utilized codeswitching in print (e.g., song lyrics published). The other case is for emphasis, particularly when I am making points about language use. When I utilize Romanization, I follow a variant of the modified Hepburn style. All translations are the author’s unless otherwise noted.
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<tr>
<td>AAE</td>
<td>African American English</td>
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<tr>
<td>BPP</td>
<td>Black Panther Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAE</td>
<td>General American English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICERD</td>
<td>International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAFA</td>
<td>Japan African-American Friendship Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J-Pop</td>
<td>Japanese popular music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OMB</td>
<td>Office of Management and Budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MNMMMR</td>
<td>Movimento Nacional de Meninos e Meninas de Rua (=National Movement of Street Boys and Girls)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEH</td>
<td>National Endowment for the Humanities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>NHHPC</td>
<td>National Hip Hop Political Convention</td>
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<tr>
<td>TSMO</td>
<td>Transnational Social Movement Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNWCAR</td>
<td>United Nations World Conference Against Racism</td>
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<tr>
<td>UZN</td>
<td>Universal Zulu Nation</td>
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<tr>
<td>WUNC</td>
<td>Worthiness, United, Numbers, Committed</td>
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This project examines how specific communities of Japanese Hiphop cultural workers translate their political identities within a black diasporic imaginary. Performances of “blackness” through the use of African American English, Hiphop language ideology, and other related operationalizations of Hiphop aesthetics are examined in a manner that considers the intersectionality of racialized, gendered and sexualized identifications. This research analyzes narratives and representations in transnational Hiphop culture in an effort to document and elucidate social realities as described by cultural workers in a transnational Japanese Hiphop community. Using Hiphop cultural production and its purported social movement as a point of entry as well as a site of inquiry, the analysis presented contributes to understandings of how “race,” gender, sexuality, class, and transnational location affect cultural workers in their everyday lived experiences and resistance strategies, such as efforts to build a social movement.

This research is also necessarily about rethinking how engagements in aesthetic practices and language ideology that cannot be fully “excavated” as originating from the community in question are ethnographically interpreted as inauthentic or as mimicry. In an effort to call attention to this analytic crisis in ethnography, the objective of this project is to understand the
discursive qualities of “race”—as an organizing principle of social order—when its status cannot be reduced to “origins” histories or biological classifications. The analysis addresses central questions such as how are current popular cultural productions in conversation with transnational social movement mobilizing and organization, and how are these popular cultural productions contesting historical governmental policy and identification practice? Are identifications such as “race” central to modern movement building strategies that resist governmental practice which limits and fixes identity? This research project considers evidence from Japan that attends to these general global issues and theoretical inquiries.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE TRANSNATIONAL AS TRANSLATIONAL

“[Hiphop] is Black Power”

I mean a culture like Hiphop, which is brand new, that’s bringing us together like this—that’s amazing! That’s the power of music, I think. And not only that, the power of Hiphop. I’ll say this: it is black power. I’m not kidding. It is black power. For real! Everybody recognizes that. I mean, don’t get me wrong. I have a lot of respect for the white people—everybody—but as far as Hiphop is concerned, it’s black power.

--A Japanese-national Hiphop cultural worker

Are these the words of a confused, “wannabe-black” victim of the “black hegemony” of American popular culture, as some scholars suggest (Cornyetz 1994; Matory 2002; Wood 1997), or is the cultural worker cited attempting to articulate something more significant? Could his comments represent reflections regarding the postcolonial condition that he believes his people have been suffering from since the United States’ occupation of his country after WWII (Dower 1986, 1993, 1999)? And, could these comments provide any insight into the context of the more recent barrage on Japanese youth by dominant images of whiteness as “humanity” and “beauty” in the media—that is, the over-reliance on white models and actors for the majority of

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1 The operational definition of Hiphop for the purpose of this project considers Hiphop as a culture, as it is described by the cultural workers with whom I work. Hiphop incorporates--but is not limited to--five major cultural “elements”: knowledge, lyricism, beat production, graffiti art or writing, and dance. Other elements such as fashion, language, and entrepreneurship also abound in Hiphop cultural production (cf., Hebdige 1987; Kitwana 2005; KRS-ONE 2000; Morgan 2001; Perkins 1996; Rose 1994; Smitherman 1997). The spelling of Hiphop—using a capital H and no space or hyphen--serves to honor an artist who writes theory about Hiphop culture (KRS-ONE); however, I do not completely agree with his views and theories. I began writing academic papers on Hiphop as a Hiphop-generation scholar about 13 years ago, and at that time, Hiphop cultural studies was not recognized or respected as an acceptable area of study. In 2000, when Davey D circulated KRS-ONE’s “Refinitions” (KRS-ONE 2000), I began choosing this spelling in order to honor the people about whom I have been writing as well as to accentuate that I am writing about Hiphop as a culture.

2 I use the term “cultural worker” to refer to the artistic, music, media, and literary producers who create the culture that I understand to be Hiphop. Read more about this term in the latter part of this chapter.
commercial and marketing material (Honda 1993; Kondo 1997)? Japan, which is often considered a world economic power and key player in Pacific hegemony (Tamanoi 2003) is a complex site for documenting the every day lived experiences of youth, who are increasingly dissatisfied with the alienating effects of state-regulated identity. Youth report that they are grappling with “spoiled identities” (Goffman 1963) as a result of (1) increased employment uncertainty and related social structural insecurity due to the country’s most recent economic recession, (2) continued cross-cultural misunderstandings and perceived social violations concerning US-military occupation, (3) non-reflective and non-affirming images of whiteness in the media and marketing—particularly those that are youth-centered, such as cartoons and fashion billboards, and (4) official public policy that is simultaneously homogenizing and hierarchical, such as Nihonjinron, which exacerbates disparities between socially constructed “pure” Japanese nationals and “others” (Fischer and White 2002).

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3 I define “state-regulated identities” as the identifications that are assigned to human bodies by the governing institutions in the locations in which they reside. These identifications are regulated by governments in that there are a fixed number of identity categories and these identity categories are hierarchically situated in social practice, despite laws that recommend otherwise (cf., Article 14 in Japan; Civil Rights Acts in US legislation).

4 Nihonjinron reflects theories of Japanese uniqueness and national identity; it is generally critiqued as being culturally chauvinist and culturally nationalist. See Lie (2001) or Befu et al. (2000) for more anthropological information concerning Nihonjinron as social science theory and public policy. See http://www.imadr.org for articles concerning how conceptions of a “racially pure Japanese people” discriminate against other Japanese residents in the areas of education and criminal justice.

5 In accordance with American Anthropological Association citation style guides, quotation marks are used not only used to capture spoken words and citations, but they are also used to designate problematized terms. Furthermore, quotation marks are utilized when introducing discipline specific concepts or vernacular vocabulary. To optimize readability, once a term has been established as problematic through the initial use of quotation marks (e.g., “race”), it appears throughout the text without quotation marks, unless they are invoked for emphasis or ironic effect.
All of the aforementioned issues can be connected to a history of power that is centered in a relationship to the West (particularly, but not limited to, the US), and they are indicative of complicated and contradictory colonial and postcolonial policies (such as General MacAuthor’s political re-education programs). However, the question still remains: what do the comments from the cultural worker presented mean? Do they allude to some sort of “borrowing blackness” (Bucholtz 1997)? If so, why, or for what purpose? Why connect Hiphop, a popular cultural genre, to blackness and power, when speaking about it from the geopolitical location of Japan? Does making this connection aim to manage a “spoiled identity” or to petition a particular political rhetoric? Is the process of borrowing blackness truly only about blackness, or is the cultural worker contributing to a political conversation that is more complex and reflective about whiteness and its relationship to the West as it is experienced in Japan? That is, does the process of borrowing blackness reference whiteness or its contentious history with the West without actually naming it? If so, why invoke the black/white binary in (politically constructed “yellow”) Japan (Allen 1994, Dower 1986)? What insight do utterances such as the cultural worker’s lend to the ethnographic study of “race,” and what could this discourse tell us about youth, race, culture, and politics in Japan?

By analyzing utterances that tie Hiphop to blackness and politics, I examine how race works in a no race political era. I pay special attention to rhetoric and practice that is situated in Japan’s Hiphop generation, which following Bakari Kitwana’s definition (2002) refers to people born between the years 1965 and 1984. From surveys and participant observation, it seems that the majority of the consumer audiences of the cultural workers discussed in this dissertation consists of youth born after 1984.

While it has been proven biologically that race is a social construct, ethnographic analyses and political policies must still consider the continued uses and abuses of race in the 21st century. The reference to a “no race” era critiques the current trend of “un-recognizing” race in research and policy (cf., anti-affirmative action court rulings in the United States; former Prime Minister

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within a particularly racialized discourse that is inextricably linked to a narrative concerning Hiphop. I execute the former in a manner that considers the unspoken complex historical significance of Japan as simultaneous colonizer and colonized as well as the transnational space in which Hiphop discourse and practice are produced. Therefore, the research I conducted is largely concerned with how Hiphop cultural workers in Japan are interpreting the significance of race. That is, if Hiphop is a trope for blackness, i.e., bodies and things perceived to be marginal, in resistance and in association with Africa, what does the public and voluntary practice of this cultural form by non-black cultural workers reveal about the production of race as a discourse? Specifically, what is meaningful about the relationship between the signifying potential of blackness and the subjectivities of such Hiphop practitioners whose racial “origins” are not publicly recognized as black? And finally, in what ways does blackness operate to signify a contentious relationship with the West and associated discourses on whiteness?

This project, in conversation with the research of cultural and linguistic social scientists who consider identity a form of lived and situated practice (cf., Bucholtz 1997; Codrington 2003; Condry 1999, 2001; Dimitriadis 2001; Goffman 1959; Greenhouse 2002; Hall 1998, 1996a; Nakasone Yasuhiro and former Minister of Justice Kajiyama Seiroku’s comments in 1986 and 1990 respectively that not only reproduced colonial models of racial hierarchies abroad, but also reinforced notions—and policy—of Japan as a racially homogenous or “pure” nation-state, see Russell 1992).

8 I define “non-blacks” as people who are not politically or historically recognized according to global recognitions of “race” and “descent” as “black” or as an “African-descendant” (cf., the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights Declarations). I recognize that there are non-“African-descendant” populations who have been historically situated and identified by governing states as well as societies as “black” such as Asian-nationals (e.g., people from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh) in England, Tongans in the Pacific Islands, Roma in Eastern European states and Maori in Australia. However, this project focused on African-descendants who have been historically marked as “Negroid” and Japanese nationals who have historically been marked as “Mongoloid” by raciologists/18th Century race theorists.
Hannerz 1987; Harrison 2002; Hebdige 1979, 1987; Herzfeld 1997; Kondo 1990, 1997; Mercer 1994, 1996, 2000; Morgan 2001, 2002, forthcoming; Rickford and Rickford 2000), examines how cultural workers in Japan translate their political worlds within a black diasporic imaginary, specifically the practice of Hiphop culture and identity. As such, this project is also necessarily about rethinking how engagement in aesthetic practices that cannot be fully excavated as originating from the community in question are likely to be ethnographically interpreted as forms of mimicry or displays of inauthenticity. In the effort to call attention to this analytic crisis, within a fashion that can consider the performative role of race as lived experience, the objective of this research is to understand the discursive qualities (or potential) of race—as an organizing principle of social order—when its status can not be ontologically reduced to diasporic scattering or biology.

Hiphop can be associated with blackness precisely because of its origins narratives9, which situate its cultural genesis in African-American speech communities (Baker 1993; Chuck D 1997; Hebdige 1987; Jackson 2003; Kitwana 2002; KRS-ONE 2000; Morgan 2008; Neal 2003; Potter 1995; Ramsey 2003; Rose 1994; Smitherman 1997; Toop 2000; Washington and Shaver 1997; Yasin 1999). Anthropologists, linguists and cultural studies scholars alike have documented aspects of African American English10 (AAE) language varieties in the lyricism of

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9 The term “origins narrative” in this chapter is akin to what professional Hiphop cultural archivists call Hiphop “history” (Chang 2005; Fricke and Ahearn 2002; Kitwana 2005). I refrain from fixing narratives collected from the ascribed pioneers as a static history, since they rely on memory and consensus to remain in being. I theorize about the uses of a dominant origins narrative in this paper. I use “origins” rather than “foundation” (Pratt 1992) because Hiphop is often spoken about by the pioneers who police this narrative in terms of “origins,” “originators,” and “originality.”

10 African American English (AAE) has also been referred to as Ebonics, African American Vernacular English (AAVE), Black English Vernacular (BEV), Black English (BE) and Negro English, among other terms over time. AAE is often defined as a language variety by linguists and the difference in reference term could possibly but not always signify ideological differences
Hiphop cultural workers. Furthermore, Hiphop’s origins narratives situate the cultural genesis in particular black, urban spaces in New York City. Whether these narratives reflect reality or not is insignificant, considering the fact that these stories have been reproduced in manifold ways in popular literature (e.g., The Source Magazine, Viacom’s music video industries such as MTV, BET, and VH-1), and consumed by youth as well as cultural workers who identify with Hiphop all over the world. The consumption of these narratives has facilitated the emergence of an imagined community of “Hiphoppers” through a common literacy and common struggle against controlling mechanisms of the state, i.e., “the man”/hegemony/“white power”11 (Anderson 1991; Beebe 2002; Dyson 2001; Grossberg 1997; Heath 2006; Hall 1996b; hooks 1992). This common literacy and language socialization can be demonstrated by the fact that any youth (from Italy to Japan) identified with this global culture can usually recount a narrative that generally begins with Kool Herc’s technological innovation and climaxes with the global popularity of Run DMC (Fujita 1996; Gilroy 1993b; Hebdige 1987; Kitwana 2005; Morgan 2008; Pipitone 2006; Prevos

11 Terms such as “the man,” “the establishment,” “hegemony,” “white power,” and “white supremacy,” are reminiscent of particular political rhetoric utilized for social movement building with “anti-establishment” efforts such as the Black Panther Party, the Weather Underground, the Women’s Liberation Movement, and the Red Guard. Early Hiphop artists came of age and began the production of their art in this atmosphere, so it is common to see remnants of this rhetoric in the lyricism of Hiphop. Recall that the Vietnam War, the Black Power Movement, Watergate, the Cold War, and a plethora of other politically volatile situations were occurring in the United States and abroad during the late 1960s and early 1970s when the onset of Hiphop culture is claimed to have occurred. The global political climate in conjunction with changes in domestic social policy (e.g., the Moynihan report) left subalternized urban poor and “minority” youth at a particular disadvantage with little or no redress. It should be no surprise that they incorporated the oppositional political rhetoric (e.g., “black is beautiful” and “power to the people”) of the time to voice their predicament and cope with harsh realities (cf., Wild Style and Style Wars). Here, the term “the state” refers to governments or nation-states that determine legislature that affect the peoples discussed.
Through the production of an origins narrative that situates the cultural genesis in specific, struggling African-American (and immigrant African-Caribbean) communities, the culture of Hiphop lends its political capital to anyone seeking redress for the transnational character of political and economic injustice (Harrison 2000). This phenomenon is not new, as African Americans have been conceptualized as trailblazers fighting against state regulation of identity that is intrinsic in colonial and, as we are witnessing, postcolonial processes, or metaphorically, a significant population that reside in the “belly of the beast,” cutting away at the intestines. Therefore, as US-based racial politics are exported abroad—specifically where US military interests persist—relational African American resistance narratives and strategies become of particular interest as an oppositional strategy for local populations (Gilroy 1993b, 2000; Hall 1996b; Harrison 2002; Mercer 2000). Such narratives and strategies have historically been transmitted through popular cultural genres (Atkins 2001; Chaney 2002:115; Eterovic and Smith 2001; Lahusen 2001; Ramsey 2003; Sterling 2003, 2006). In Japan since WWII, jazz, blues, reggae, dancehall, and now Hiphop have occupied an oppositional utility to state-regulated identificatory practice—whether that practice comes from the US military, multi-national corporations, or Japanese state policies (Davis 2000; Lie 2001; Nakazawa 1998, 2002).

For instance, most Hiphop-identified participants’ history and origins narratives concerning Hiphop will begin as follows with the over-produced and over-published story of artist Kool Herc (aka Clive Campbell): “In 1967, Kool Herc emigrated from Jamaica to West Bronx…. He extended break beats as a deejay…. and Hiphop was born….”

See Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer (1985:195) for a concise definition of the state as it is operationalized in this study. Corrigan and Sayer (1985) are discussed in detail later in this chapter.

José Martí coined the term “belly of the monster” and this phrase is my update of the concept.
Hiphop’s relation to AAE language varieties also situates its political rhetoric within a counter-language framework (Halliday 1976; Morgan 2002; T. Butler 1995). Likewise, its origins narratives, which position it in African-diasporic, specifically African-American, communities, associate it with a counterpublic sphere (Fraser 1992; Hauser 2001; Pough 2004). It is counterpublic because its participants do not have access to the public sphere (cf., contexts of slavery, Jim Crow segregation, prison industrial complex systems). This idea is not new for black bodies in the United States, and any successful overthrow of regimes that regulate these black bodies can be considered significant for democratizing efforts worldwide. The basic statement concerning the US as a false democracy, that is, the ethnographic realities—that humans are not treated equally—conveyed in the lyrics of African-American musical genres (such as blues, jazz, funk, soul, and Hiphop) is threatening to US imperialist efforts abroad since the political re-education of conquered countries like Japan and Iraq requires the US to be accepted as a democratic safeguard, where all people are treated equally, and race and class conflicts are downplayed (Tsuchiya 2002).

Therefore, Hiphop’s political utility is precisely its association with a black body politic, and its popular cultural presence allows it to be accessed and appropriated through performative measures. As Judith Butler comments, “any mobilization against subjection will take subjection as its resource, and that attachment to an injurious interpellation, by way of a necessarily alienated narcissism, become the condition under which resignifying that interpellation becomes possible” (Butler 1997b:104). The psychic process of identifying with the ultimate subjected body in the racialization process (i.e., Negroid, black, African-descendant) as a means of displaying ambivalence and displacing fixities that bind and limit personal freedom could be the utility of Hiphop cultural production, especially in a cross-cultural global process. As one
Japanese national cultural worker put it, “I use black power to fight white power.” These political strategies of ever-crafting and re-creating selves as a method of decolonizing minds are echoed in the works of Aimé Césaire (2000)\(^\text{15}\), Dorinne Kondo (1990, 1997), and Frantz Fanon (1967), as well as Judith Butler (1993) and Jose Muñoz (1999). Perhaps what has previously been read as Japanese racism against African Americans (i.e., all Japanese Hiphop as a performance of blackface and minstrelsy) and African-American hegemony over Japanese nationals (i.e., the conspicuous presence of African Americans in Japanese Hiphop) is in actuality a critique of racialization and the post-colonial experience (see also Dower 1986, Kondo 1997, and Lie 2001 on how race works in Japan).

As more scholarship is produced on the history of racialization and postcolonial experiences in Japan (c.f., Davis 2000; Dower 1993; Horne 2004; Kondo 1997; Koshiro 2003; Lie 2001), studies such as this one, which reveal how contemporary cultural workers—such as those who produce Hiphop music—are interpreting those racialized and postcolonial experiences to their consumer audience, comprise a useful contribution to critical race research. Hence, conceptualizing Hiphop as a trope for blackness is key to its political usefulness in Japan; the second it ceases to exist as such, it loses its relevance and utility for social movement building, a question I will explore in greater detail as I proceed. Although Stuart Hall (1996d: 471) explains this idea as “black cultural repertoires constituted from two directions at once,” over fifty years ago, anthropologist Cedric Dover (1947:25) alluded to a similar subversive strategy, as he advised agents aiming to dismantle global racism to be “racial and anti-racial at the same time.” Such strategies—to be racial and anti-racial at the same time (Dover 1947), to “use black power to fight white power” (Fischer fieldnotes), to mobilize against subjection using subjection as a

\(^{15}\) Aime Cesaire was a teacher of Frantz Fanon and he was a leading decolonization theorist who also theorized Negritude. His work predates the other theorists listed in this section.
resource (Butler 1997b)—are all phenomena in which Judith Butler’s concept of “disidentification” becomes central when analyzing their political significance.

Butler writes that “although the political discourses that mobilize identity categories tend to cultivate identifications in the service of a political goal, it may be that the persistence of disidentification is equally crucial to the rearticulation of democratic contestation” (Butler 1993:23). Likewise, Jose Muñoz introduces a “‘disidentificatory subject’ who tactically and simultaneously works on, with, and against a cultural form” such as the state—which regulates and ritualizes identificatory practice (Muñoz 1999:12). Disidentification abounds in Hiphop discourse as racial, gendered, economic, linguistic, and national categories are constantly disrupted, re-staged, and re-signified (Gates 1990; Hall 1996b, 1997b; Jackson 2001; Mitchell-Kernan 1972; Morgan 2001). Whether in the United States or Japan, one can collect countless examples of artists who negotiate the instability of categories such as race through performative acts that displace the dominant culture as the site of authority, thus exposing the fallibility of fixing subjects against definitions of other subjects.16 Butler comments on the political significance of such practices, as she explains that since subjects are brought into being through discourse, it is not enough to simply publicly identify acts of racializing discourse (for example), but perhaps it might be more sustaining to consider “how … we think about those particular rituals and how … we exploit their ritual function in order to undermine it” (1999:166). Similar

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16 Since Chapters Four and Five document examples from Japan, the following are samples from US Hiphop lyrics that exemplify this phenomenon. Cee-Lo from Goodie Mob (1998) raps, “I thought you said you was the G-O-D/ sound like another nigger to me, shit/ What a nigger do, what a nigger does/and a nigger is what a nigger was/ and a nigger done read history but yet his eyes didn’t see/ the only reason you a nigger is because somebody else wants you to be.” Mos Def (1999) raps, “Now, who is cat riding out on the town/ State trooper wanna stop him in his ride, pat him down/ Mr Nigga, Nigga Nigga/ He got the speakers in the trunk with the bass on crunk/ Now, who is the cat with the hundred dollar bill/ They gotta send it to the back to make sure the shit is real/ Mr Nigga, Nigga Nigga/ Nigga Nigga Nigga.” See Perry (2004:142-144) for commentary on use of pejorative N-word in public space.
explorations of mimicry or performativity as an oppositional strategy of post-colonial, post-structural resistance are also explored in the work of Homi Bhabha (1994), Carol Greenhouse (2002), Michael Herzfeld (1997), Dorinne Kondo (1997), Marcyliena Morgan (2008), and David Scott (1999). Scholarship that explores disidentification in popular culture (Muñoz 1999; Sterling 2003, 2006) could help to provide insight into the transformative promise in global Hiphop culture as it is produced by racially marked bodies.

**The Importance of Memory**

John Henrik Clarke (1995) provides an overview of numerous revolts, revolutions and uprisings that led to the foundation of several black social movements in the United States. Beginning with a description of a major enslaved African uprising in what is now Santo Domingo in 1522 (1995:74) and concluding with Haiti’s securing nationhood through revolution, he lays a foundation for understanding how modern black social movements came into being. He reminds his readers to remember the effect that slavery has on societies today. Clarke writes, “Slavery was a war. A war against African culture, especially against the structure of the African family. This war has not ended” (Clarke 1995:73). In short, humans create culture to cope. African-descendants created a culture of resistance. This resistance was about humanity; it was about people. Subjugated people representing diverse nations, cultures and languages needed to be able to communicate and create collective identities by creating common cultures. Language and music (especially percussion) were integral to creating a culture of resistance. Percussion is important because one does not need extra tools to create beats with body parts and breath control. Clarke comments, “African culture, reborn on the alien soil, became the cohesive force and the communication system that helped to set in motion more than 300 slave revolts in the American and the Caribbean” (1995:73). He then cites several examples.
There was a major enslaved African uprising in what is now Santo Domingo in 1522 and another one in Cuba in 1550 (Clarke 1995:74). In 1529 enslaved African mutineers destroyed Santa Marta, and the “Negro Republic” of Palmares in Pernamuco spanned almost the entire 17th century; between 1672 and 1692 it withstood, on average, one Portuguese expedition every 15 months (Clarke 1995:79). The best known enslaved African revolts against the Dutch are the revolts of Surinam Maroons, 1715-1763, and the Berbice revolt in 1763, and these revolts threatened the very foundation of an economy based on slavery (Clarke 1995:80). Clarke continues that Maroons in Jamaica, who began to revolt in 1655, were never completely conquered (1995:81). He cites nine revolts in Bahia between 1807 and 1835 (Clarke 1995:79). He contends that different systems of slavery resulted in different types of revolts. The aforementioned revolts collectively helped to create the condition and attitude that went into the making of the most successful enslaved African revolt in history, better known as the Haitian Revolution. The revolt’s leadership is accredited through narrative to Toussaint L’Ouverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, and Henri Christophe. The distinguishing feature of this revolution is that it achieved what the others were not able to achieve—nationhood (Clarke 1995:81).

The success of these African-descendants served as international inspiration. The Haitian Revolution invigorated increasingly oppressed enslaved Africans in the US. The back-to-Africa movement, the repatriation movement, the American Colonization Society, the abolition movement, and the African church establishment were inspired by news of movements abroad as well as research and writing (e.g., David Walker’s Appeal published in 1829) from the US. Some of these movements were concerned with the justice of African-descendants as well as other colonized and economically and politically oppressed people from all over the world (e.g., Asians). Such concern continued with the African Baptist and AME churches’ Ethiopianism,
with W.E.B. Du Bois’s cohort’s Niagara movement (which spawned the NAACP in 1909), with Marcus Garvey’s U.N.I.A. (1921-1936), with the post-WWII civil rights movement and post-Independence pan-Africanism movements, as well as the eventually global Black Power Movement, which, some say, Hiphop is supposed to follow (Kitwana 2005).

Charles Tilly writes that a social movement involves “WUNC”—Worthiness, Unity, Numbers, and Commitment. That is, if a cause is worthy, people are united, there are a large number of them and they are committed, then a social movement can occur. John McCarthy and Mayer Zald contend that “a social movement is a set of opinions and beliefs in a population representing preferences for changing some elements of a social structure or reward distribution, or both, of a society. A counter-movement is a set of opinions and beliefs in a population opposed to a social movement” (1977:1217-1218). Counter-movements should not be confused with countercultures or counterpublics or counterlanguages. Social movements often require the creation of a collective identity and allies or affinity groups for resource mobilization and political inspiration; culture along with cultural history, music, and narrative are often invoked to achieve these goals. The cultures created or excavated often are in opposition to the state or the dominant culture, public sphere, or language of power (e.g., General American English/GAE). Hiphop is said to be created in the spirit of such opposition, as its founding philosophers posit that its goal is to achieve human rights by teaching the “truth” about race and related material inequality that divides and destroys individuals, families, and communities (e.g., Afrika Bambaataa of the Universal Zulu Nation; see Chang 2005; Kitwana 2002).
Therefore, following Charles Tilly’s definition (2002:88), this project explores Hiphop as a potential social movement that is part of the counterpublic sphere (Dawson 1995; Fraser 1992).\(^{17}\) This assignment is not new, as Hiphop has been described as “counterhegemonic” (Yasin 1999), in accordance with M. K. Halliday’s (1976, 1978) conception of “counterlanguages” cf., Morgan (2002, 2008). In addition, Hiphop’s cultural workers are often referred to in cultural studies literature as “organic intellectuals” in this counterpublic sphere (T. Butler 1995; Neal 2003; Gilroy 1993a; Keyes 2002; Potter 1995; Rose 1994; Washington and Shaver 1997). Borrowing from Antonio Gramsci’s description of “The Intellectuals” (1997), I include not only cultural producers, but also their “deputies” to whom they designate the act of organizing (political work), using the culture and art that is produced. Henry Giroux (1994, 1997) writes about cultural workers as those who analyze the productions and representations of meaning within a culture, and they, along with teachers and students, are considered key for critical pedagogical practice as well as social change.

Transnational Hiphop pioneer Chuck D describes himself in these terms when he says, “As a co-founder of Public Enemy I've used that platform to transcend beyond what a rapper and a musician can do, taking a forward stance in turning great words into global community action.” He continues, “The critical and commercial success of Public Enemy opened the doors for me to deliver a message through a number of different mediums, extending a reach to all segments of the population…”\(^ {18}\) Additionally, many other “rappers” and people who use Hiphop to conduct social “organizing” in transnational spheres have used the term “cultural worker” to describe themselves; they also call themselves “Hiphoppers” or “hiphoppas” (using the katakana version

\(^{17}\) Like Fraser, I also critique Habermas (1996) for dichotomizing the state and the public sphere, which situates the latter as derivational. I maintain that state and society (including publicity and counterpublicity) are mutually reinforcing.

if one is speaking Japanese). Following these operational definitions, Russell Simmons, a Hiphop impresario and entrepreneur, could be considered a cultural worker just as Queen Latifah, a performing artist, actor and entrepreneur, would. People who use and produce Hiphop at a grassroots level for a non-profit or educational organization could also be considered cultural workers, as I am not limiting my definition to those who perform and sell music at an industry level. A description of the type of cultural work that each featured research consultant conducts is detailed in Chapters Four and Five.

If Hiphop cultural production is written about in accordance to “counter” politics, what exactly is its political movement “countering”? What is it that cultural workers are working for or against; what is the significance of “cultural forms” to cultural workers? Namely, what is problematic about the state, public sphere, and society so that cultural workers are finding useful dissent in the practice of Hiphop? I contend that the state regulates race (e.g., the U.S.A.’s OMB Directive 15, Japan’s Nihonjinron-influenced policy)\(^\text{19}\) and other identifications as part of its authoritative process to procure and maintain power (Foucault 1972; Tilly 2002; Greenhouse 2002; Harrison 2002). This occurs through bureaucratic processes (Chalfin 2006; Ong 1996; Herzfeld 1997; Weber 1968) and representational negotiations (Baker 1998; Dover 1947; Du Bois 1986; Hall 1997b; Harrison 2002; Mbembe 2002). That is, from the moment bodies are born, state-related paperwork is generated to catalogue and categorize bodies according to hierarchically situated values and socially constructed norms, such as those related to race (or color or heritage), sex, language use of parents, and national origin of parents, et cetera. Births,

whether in hospitals or homes, are thus attended to and monitored by state officials. Human beings ascribe these markings to one another’s bodies by law in nations across the globe throughout each individual’s life, from birth to death. One way this is executed in the United States is government law concerning Directive OMB 15, which is realized through a series of identity category boxes that one must mark in either a self-identification process or third-party identification process on various government forms including employer eligibility (I-9) forms that require a copy of an identification card with a photograph and applications for “food stamps” that require applicants to self-identify with Directive OMB 15 categories by checking boxes according to race, ethnicity, gender, marital status, etc. Most nations/ states have similar identity documentation processes (cf., Caplan and Torpey, eds ; Kumar 2000). These ascriptions are made based on socialization, perception and imagination, among other influences (cf., Simmons 2001).

The conception of “the state” and related identificatory practice in this project is influenced by Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer’s work (1985) concerning state formation of the English state and others modeled after its image, namely Japan and the United States, to an extent. Though Corrigan and Sayer do not incorporate a critical race theoretical perspective, their synthesis of Marxist, feminist and poststructuralist ideations of “nations,” “states,” “civilizations,” “capitalist economies” and “societies” provides a useful foundation for those interested in taking the analysis further in research that considers racialization as an identificatory practice that is part of state formation and strategies to maintain power for certain social groups. Of particular interest is their discussion of the state as a “regulator of cultural forms” and their call for research that studies these rituals by which regulation takes place. While I recognize that “the state” is not “an invisible regulator” of “representations pulled out of thin
air,” I also think that elucidating how power is sustained and managed is key to a complete comprehension of how people experience power (Corrigan and Sayer 1985: 5). Corrigan and Sayer assert in their conclusion that *studying up* is as important as representing critique and agitation *from below*. They comment:

> What we have been dealing with, in this book, is the immensely long, complicated, laborious micro-construction and reconstruction of appropriate forms of power; forms fitted to ways in which a particular class, gender, race imposes its ‘standards of life’ as ‘the national interest’ and seeks their internalization as ‘national character’. The capacity of such groups to rule rests neither on some supposedly ‘prior’ economic power—it is, on the contrary, above all through state forms and their cultural revolution that such power is made, consolidated, legitimated and normalized—nor simply on their control of some neutral set of state instruments. *Their political power resides rather in the routine regulative functioning of state forms themselves*, in their day-to-day enforcing, as much by what they are as in any particular policies they carry out, of a particular social order as ‘normality’, the boundaries of the possible.[Corrigan and Sayer 1985: 203; emphasis mine]

Such an idea of the state—one that considers its regulatory processes—that is, an understanding of the state that demystifies how control is reserved (in that there are people—bodies—that produce and reproduce power through strategic reconfigurations, rituals, regulations, deregulations and discourse on forms) allows one to consider theories of states’ intersection with social movement theory, which documents the dissents that Corrigan and Sayer describe.

State formation is something that has ever been contested by those whom it seeks to regulate and rule. It is first and foremost their resistance that makes visible the conditions and limits of bourgeois civilization, the particularity and fragility of its seemingly neutral and timeless social forms…..It is also, profoundly, a moral critique: what such struggles show again and again is the exact ways in which the regulated social forms of bourgeois civilization effect real, painful, harmful restrictions on human capacities. Such ‘general knowledge’—disarmed by legitimate disciplines, denied by curricular forms, diluted in its being refused the accolade of scholarship, dissipated as ‘empirical examples’ in a thousand doctoral dissertations—is the ‘classic ground’ for an understanding of bourgeois civilization that does not simply parrot its ‘encouraged’ self-images, as well as for any feasible or desirable social transformation. [Corrigan and Sayer 1985:8]

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Defining states’ identificatory practice as connected to disidentificatory practice by those who occupy the states’ counterpublics, is relational to the goals of critical race research. It allows ethnographers to consider subversive strategies of those who have historically been outside of the “power” circle, such as African- and Asian-nationals and descendants (and their oppositional cultures and cultural critiques produced over time). This intersection clarifies how ethnographers analyze the utility of cultural forms produced by those who feel the “pain” of state forms that “underdevelop human capacity” (Corrigan and Sayer 1985: 8).21

I posit that it is precisely the constructed, conflicted situation of state-regulated identification practices and the related history of how such practices come into being—and are continually reified in current times—that allow them to be de-stabilized through counter-hierarchical practices of disidentification.22 Therefore, the significance of disidentification is its promise to transform dominant cultural constraints through performance in an effort to renegotiate more equitable conceptualizations of selves that exploit the instability of state categorization and control of bodies (Caplan 2001; Kondo 1990). That is, such renegotiation is central to a contemporary understanding of how subalternized state subjects can reconceptualize state-imposed concepts of, for example, race and blackness or sex and queerness as tropes central to movement building and social change. By documenting Hiphop’s movement-building process and related conversations that constitute as well as deconstruct race, one can glean more

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21 Michel-Rolph Trouillot produces an exemplary theory and description that attends to the weaknesses of Corrigan and Sayer’s critique of race in their analysis, as he elucidates the US’s Directive OMB 15. Trouillot’s analysis is cited more in the following chapters.

22 Gina Ulysse’s research collaborators creatively termed this “finding the cracks in the foundation” (2007).
information as to how this movement-building process works in opposition to race, while simultaneously using it (Hall 1996d, 1997b; and Muñoz 1999).23

Global Races and Black Popular Culture

E. Taylor Atkins (2000, 2001) and Marvin Sterling (2003) consider popular cultural art forms associated with black cultural production24 that are negotiated across transnational terrain among African-descendants and Japanese nationals. Atkins examines the possibility of jazz, deterritorialized in regard to Western racial configurations, in Japan. He problematizes questions of authenticity regarding Japanese jazz artists and documents essentialist notions of black culture among some of these artists, noting the relevance of Japanese jazz artists and aficionados’ association with black culture as a tool for definitions of nation and self. Atkins remarks that “contrary to the image of Japanese as unrepentant racists, many are acutely sensitive to racial strife in America and sympathetic to the economic and social plights of black Americans” (2000:35).25 Studying dancehall in Jamaica and Japan, Sterling does not focus primarily on questions of authenticity as Atkins does. Instead, he utilizes an “extreme” version of Judith Butler’s theory regarding how the normative and the abject fully constitute each other in his effort to understand tensions and instabilities regarding races, nationalities and sexualities—among other aspects—in Jamaican and Japanese dancehall. Sterling, considering jazz, Hiphop, roots reggae, and dancehall, contends that such “black cultural productions similarly constitute

23 While this project focuses on elucidating discourse strategies, specifically codeswitching, as part of a potential transnational movement, it does not discount the equal importance of corporeality—bodies that matter, that produce the language and thinking and practice that frames our realities.

24 See Gina Dent, ed. (1998) for more discussion regarding this concept.

complex relations of identification and disidentification, embracing and reject[ing]…the West” (Sterling 2003).

Although Dorinne Kondo’s work (1997)—which studies Asian and Asian American identities through performances in fashion and theatre—is not explicitly about the intersection of African-descendant and Asian cultural production, her research, like that of Sterling (2003), draws upon theories of performativity (Butler 1993) to produce a brilliant ethnographic methodology and political project that de-essentializes, excavates, and historicizes forgotten conceptualizations of race and racialization. She asserts that her work “problematises the black–white binary and essentialist notions of racial hierarchy, which create separate, bounded racial groups and place them on a single continuum along the black–white axis” (1997:6). Kondo builds upon Homi Bhabha’s (1994) ideation of “mimicry” as she theorizes a politics of pleasure that has the potential to displace the dominant culture as the site of authority. This notion is exemplified in her analysis of David Hwang’s _M. Butterfly_, which is also useful in addressing how various manifestations of Hiphop in the United States (e.g., N.W.A.’s use of the pejorative “N-word”) and Japan (e.g., Rappagariya’s donning samurai gear) are performative for political resistance against normative processes. Moreover, Kondo concurs with John Russell (1991a) as they both problematize and recount “racial formations shaping various Japanese responses to and tropings of African Americans, which [Russell] argues were mediated through the West” (1997:244; see also Chapter Six).

Other scholars who have studied aspects of Japanese Hiphop, but are not necessarily overtly concerned in their writing with destabilizing essentialized notions of race via a critical
race research perspective include Ian Condry (1999, 2000)\textsuperscript{26}, Tadashi Fujita (1996), Akio Goto (1997), Kozo Okumura (1998), and James Spady (1999). Fujita (1996) and Goto (1997) are journalists who published personal narratives (in Japanese) of pioneering Japanese Hiphop artists in an effort to historically situate the autochthonous manifestations of the genre. They both provide information regarding artists’ life experiences as well as album reviews. In these descriptions, the artists at times refer to subalternized aspects of their lives and the lives of others in Japan (such as K Dub Shine’s growing up in an impoverished single-parent household or You the Rock’s raising awareness of anti-Burakumin discrimination). In these texts, artists relate their experiences of cultural, national, racial, and linguistic discrimination in the United States. For example, DJ Yutaka, the founder of the Japan Chapter of the Universal Zulu Nation, has taken into account his experience with police harassment in Los Angeles as well as being cut out of entertainment business opportunities because he did not fit a white norm. Japanese artists relate their own experiences with discrimination to their perceptions of African Americans’ experiences of subordination and political alienation. Spady (1999) presents an interview with DJ Yutaka in which they briefly discuss perpetuations of racial stereotypes in the United States and Japan. Okumura (1998) examines the popularity of Hiphop dance in Japan. He presents a history of Hiphop in Japan and accompanies his work with a documentary film presenting dancers’ Hiphop cultural productions. However, in his attempt to account for why Hiphop culture is popular among Japanese youth, he draws on theories regarding “black expressiveness” (Okumura 1998:18; Pasterur and Tolson 1982:4-5) in African-American studies and,

\textsuperscript{26} Condry’s more recent work, especially \textit{Hip-Hop Japan} (2006), focuses more on race than his previous publications and dissertation research. He comments that he is attempting to “shift attention away from questions of how American understandings of race are interpreted in Japan to focus instead on how Japanese conceptualize and embody ideas of hip-hop and race” (2006:25). Condry’s newest work is discussed more in Chapters Five and Six.
consequently, though perhaps unconsciously, essentializes and fixes blackness in his analysis of Japanese Hiphop.

Like Atkins (2001), Condry (1999) is concerned with authenticating “indigenous” Japanese Hiphop. Through rigorous ethnographic descriptions, he explains why Hiphop by Japanese artists is not imitation, but an authentic art form in its own right. In his work, Condry (1999, 2006) translates Japanese lyrics and contextualizes the genre within discourses relevant to economic anthropology, globalization studies, and more recently, racialization of Japanese nationals. Condry’s ethnographic contribution is extremely useful to those interested in the topic area. He provides an erudite and compelling argument concerning how Japanese rappers are able to utilize Hiphop as a voice against societal constructs, and thus, rebel. More research pertaining to how these rebellions intersect with popular constructions of race, sex, and citizenship among Hiphop participants in Japan, and how these performative acts intersect with AAE and Hiphop language ideologies would buttress his argument.27 Overall, his research is a much needed addition to the contemporary ethnography of popular culture and race as well as Japanese studies. In regard to Hiphop cultural studies, Condry critiques existing scholarship (Rose 1994; Lipstiz 1994; Fernando 1994) that limits descriptions and definitions of Hiphop to black urban (American) youth expression. While his critique is not entirely accurate, as African-diasporic roots of the genre are referenced in the work that he critiques (e.g., Rose 1994), analyses of Hiphop are perhaps best elucidated if they are not limited to or described in terms of a “black urban youth” norm, as obviously, it is not only black urban youth who practice Hiphop.

Condry is not alone in such a critique, as Tony Mitchell (1998, 2001) and Paul Gilroy (2000) have been quite vocal in echoing these sentiments. However, unlike Gilroy (1993a,

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27 See also Nina Cornyetz’s call for more research addressing these aspects (1994:133)
1993b, 2000), Mitchell (1998, 2001) has not adequately acknowledged or addressed the significance and influence of Hiphop’s African-diasporic roots on Hiphop outside of the United States. The failure to analyze Hiphop’s association with blackness only undermines its political relevance to nonblack performance and understanding of the culture. In addition, Mitchell’s work misses an important opportunity to critically engage the possibility of Hiphop’s disruption of static racial categories abroad by not analyzing how participants conceptualize race and racialization.28

Furthermore, Mitchell’s critique of US-based scholars of Hiphop has at times reified fixed identities, such as racial categories. Mitchell’s primary premise, to de-localize Hiphop analyses, has at times disregarded the historic agency of important pioneers and practitioners of global Hiphop, such as Afrika Bambaataa, the founder of the Universal Zulu Nation. In his scholarship, Mitchell makes comments such as: “I find I have a growing dislike of rap music that comes out of the USA and a growing fascination with rap from other parts of the world” (1998:2) in addition to “and in musicological terms, rap can be traced back to the recitativo in 17th century Italian opera” (1998:8). In an effort to de-essentialize what he perceives to be essentialized origin-narratives of Hiphop culture, he misinterprets Afrika Bambaataa as implying that Hiphop’s roots are “a multicultural hybrid” rather than “an expression of African-American monoculture” because “there were also a few white kids around, too” (1998:4).29 This

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28 For an excellent example of the type of engagement that I am proposing, see Gilroy’s discussion concerning scholars’ analysis and lack of analysis regarding Luther Campbell (2000:180-181).

29 I asked Afrika Bambaataa about this and showed him the reference at the Hiphop Archive’s Hiphop Education and Community Activism Roundtable at Harvard University on September 28, 2002, and Bambaataa maintains that he was misquoted and is often misquoted by academicians who have their own political interests when writing about Hiphop. Bambaataa celebrates Hiphop as springing from a dialogue that is rooted in the African diaspora, a culture
conclusion restricts the political possibilities that the origin-narratives surrounding Hiphop provide for the very youth he describes. Most disturbing of Mitchell’s analysis is his situating of African Americans as derivational to a (white?) American norm, as he differentiates between US-based and African-American scholars (1998:1). For example, Mitchell writes, “A number of US and African-American academics have argued…” (Mitchell 1998). The previous statement reveals thinking that racially marks African-American Hiphop scholars as other compared to a perceived European American norm. His preoccupation with racial identities of Hiphop scholars in conjunction with his research agenda that seeks to disconnect Hiphop from its cultural genesis among African Americans weaken his contribution to studying Hiphop cultural production outside of the United States (see also Basu and Lemelle 2006, for similar critique of Mitchell).

Given the existing problematics concerning Hiphop scholarship of nonblack populations previously outlined, it is clear why there is a crisis regarding ethnographic description that attends to race and its intersectionalities with other state regulated identities (Harrison 1995:65). Hence, it is important that current studies illuminate how our fields of inquiry are inscribed with diasporic memories and racialized hierarchies that are wrought with power inequities and are, therefore, politically constituted “ethnoscapes” (Appadurai 1996; see also “racialscapes” in Harrison 1995:49). Such a task is not easy, for as Steven Gregory remarks, “racial meanings are implicated in discourses, institutional power arrangements, and social practices that may or may not be marked as explicitly ‘racial’” (Gregory 1993:25). In addition, as Kesha Fikes observes, “history-centered race studies that globally situate identity hierarchies, in relation to the possibilities of movement—within and after colonial governance—have yet to emerge” (2000:38). In response to this crisis in ethnographic literature, Fikes recommends drawing from born in the Bronx; it is not limited to any “race”—not even the human race, for like Gilroy (2000:2) he contends that the Universal Zulu Nation is yearning for a ‘planetary humanism’.

Upon close examination, one can uncover oppositional performative strategies within Hiphop rhetoric. The subject utilizes subjection as a resource to resignify something about power (Butler 1997b). However, while Hiphop in America is occasionally acknowledged as an “authentic” cultural production, Hiphop in Japan is often relegated to “copycat” practice at best and “blackface” at worst, and thus, its political significance gets lost.30 I posit that Japanese Hiphop is not mere mimicry31, for Hiphop culture is simultaneously transnational and autochthonous; it represents a common literacy and identity across the globe as well as local nuances and cultural relevancy (Fischer and White 2002).32 The transnationality in this cultural form (Hiphop) that is often dismissed as mere “entertainment” has intriguing promise for solidarity building that aids its constitution and utility as a potential transnational social movement. As Lahusen (2001:191) observes, “entertainment isn’t necessarily alien to social

30 These are actual utterances from certain Hiphop artists, journalists and scholars. That is, if when black people perform black culture it is “authentic,” then what about when nonblack, yet racially marked bodies operationalize black cultural production?

31 See the work of Ian Condary (2000) and Kozo Okumura (1998) for more discussion.

32 In the case of Japan, the political rhetoric of proletariat *tanka*, the “vulgarity” of certain *haikai*, the collective composition of *ren ga*, or the performative innovation of lyrical word play such as *honkadori*, *yoojo*, and *kakekotoba* are salient. Of equal importance is the parallel and strikingly similar aspects of these literary aesthetics to cultural aesthetics that abound in oral performance from the African Diaspora—*Hiphop included* (cf., Ueda 1999). Indeed, Hiphop occurring on either side of the Pacific is simultaneously transnational and autochthonous.
movements, in that mockery and irony have always served as a weapon of political protest and subversion” (cf., Babcock-Abrahams 1984; Lahusen 1996). This idea is comparable to the uses of pleasure as political resistance (cf., Bhabha 1994; Dent 1998; Kondo 1997; Lorde 1984).

Lahusen continues,

> Ultimately, advocacy work is submitted to entertainment formats and values, as has happened with what has come to be called infotainment or edutainment. This “advotainment” is part of the manifold interrelations between social movements and popular music…it may be of interest to explore the meaning and function of “advotainment” in regard to political mobilization and solidaristic activism. [2001:191]33

Lahusen challenges social scientists to consider advotainment as a new repertoire of transnational activism (2001:194). TSMOs (Transnational Social Movement Organizations) like the International Movement Against Discrimination and Racism (IMADR) and the Universal Zulu Nation (UZN) present primary sites for such analyses, since they participate in “edutainment” and seek to dismantle racialization.

With bases in Japan, the aforementioned TSMOs are of particular interest. African-American movement building around race has served as a template for relational movement building within these organizations. Indeed, for years, scholars have acknowledged the exportation of racist rhetoric beyond the United States and throughout the world (Bunche 1936; Butler 1999; Dover 1947; Harrison 2002; Trouillot 2003). The global ascriptions of race to subordinated populations provided shared activist frames when these populations began to resist and organize against these state-induced ascribing processes. Furthermore, building on Rochon (1988), Eterovic and Smith (2001) identify two key components in the processes of solidarity-building: (1) interaction among participating groups that creates a common shared experience

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33 See Chaney (2002:115) for the specific role of artists and celebrities as representatives of social movements “expected to articulate a moral vision for social and public order”; see also Monaco et al (1978:14).
and (2) unified frames that allow for shared interpretation of events (2001:200). As people experiencing injustices associate their disenfranchisement with the American experience of being “blackened” (Ong 1996), the concepts of blackness and related racialized categories and tropes realize new meanings in social justice programs of action. The shared experience of being subalternized or blackened holds important implications for understanding movement strategies, and it offers interesting insight into the conscious choice of nonblack cultural workers to utilize Hiphop rhetoric that is rooted in African-American discourse styles in their articulations of various social-movement building processes. Here we find expressions of autochthonous experiences interwoven into transnational narratives concerning social change.

Analyzing utterances like “Hiphop is black power” can illuminate the uses of knowledge about black experiences—though conceptualized through Hiphop—to nonblack cultural workers who, like many others all over the globe, are grappling with postcolonial residue concerning race, class, gender, and citizenship. Thus, the opportunity to participate in and perform Hiphop, that is, to “borrow” blackness (Bucholtz 1997a) could possibly present one example of how postcolonial subjects can resist within and against the cultural forms that oppress them. Eterovic and Smith comment that:

As the world’s political and economic institutions become increasingly integrated globally, shared activist frames are crucial for addressing the underlying injustices that are perpetuated or exacerbated by globalizing processes. But this requires ideological work to overcome both inertia as well as the prevalence of what in some cases may be competing nationalist framing of global problems. [2001:214]

Could the homogenized identities produced by Hiphop origins narratives and the activities organized by Hiphop artists as organic intellectuals provide the very ideological work needed for the social groups in question (Anderson 1991; Gramsci 1997; Hall and Donald 1986; Hall and Jefferson1976)? And if so, what is the counterhegemonic promise of the shared activist frames facilitated by a common literacy of Hiphop origins narratives and the practice and activity they
inspire? As Hauser observes, “rhetorical resistance in a subterranean arena can foster a level of consensus so great that that this counterpublic sphere may eventually displace the official arena as the locus of legitimation” (2001:37). Though optimistic, if Hauser is correct, utterances like the following from a Japanese Hiphop pioneer addressing an audience of hundreds of youth at an outdoor Hiphop festival speak to the promise of such work: “I want you all to do more activism as Hiphoppers, to raise a revolution. I’ll be looking out [with protective and supportive intentions, believing in your success/mimoru]. That’s how I feel.”

**Race as Political Imaginary and Social Strategy**

The political imaginaries presented in Hiphop have often been ignored due to its association with another marginalized world group: youth (UN Report on Youth)\(^{34}\). Though at a cursory glance, youth cultural production is often viewed as “nihilistic,” worthy of moral panic (Dimitriadis, Weaver and Daspi 2001) or filed as debauchery (West 1993; hooks 1992), some studies of youth subculture have revealed that this production can indeed effect positive social change. Dick Hebdige (1979) calls this “recuperation,” and Henry Giroux (1994), Stuart Hall (Hall and Donald 1986; Hall and Jefferson 1976, Hall 1997b), Isaac Julien (1991), Marcyliena Morgan (2001, 2002, 2008), David Scott (1999), and Jon Yasin (1999) have documented how this occurs with youth (sub)cultural production. In each of the aforementioned studies, youth transform dominant cultural constraints through performance in an effort to renegotiate more equitable conceptualizations of selves. Such renegotiation is relational to the concept of disidentification (Butler 1993; Muñoz 1999; see also Seshadri-Crooks 2000:33), and central to a

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\(^{34}\) As stated earlier in this chapter, the main consumer audience of the cultural workers researched for this project are post-Hiphop generation youth, and the cultural workers are Hiphop generation or older. Despite the age of the cultural workers producing the art, Hiphop is still considered a “youth-centered” cultural production because of the bulk of its topic matter and also because of its origins narrative (Chuck D personal communication; Chang 2005; Kitwana 2005; Morgan 2008).
contemporary understanding of how youth reconceptualize concepts of race and blackness as
tropes central to movement building and social change. Gina Dent (1998), Paul Gilroy (2000),
Stuart Hall and Donald Jefferson (1976), Isaac Julien (1991), Kobena Mercer (1994, 1996), and
cultural production utilizes pleasure as a site for resistance and possibility for securing justice.

The use of tropes for creating narratives of transgression and the corresponding dialogue
that inspires a social literacy for increased rights is brought about through the strategic use of
language and performance (Butler 1997b; Freire 2002). However, the effects of such movement
building are real and reflective of the lived experiences of subaltern youth in our modern times.
For example, the storming of the Brazilian National Congress by youth led by the National
Movement of Street Boys and Girls (Movimento Nacional de Meninos e Meninas de Rua—
MNMMR), which resulted in the Congress’s adoption of increased protections for children and
youth in the Brazilian constitution in 1989, demonstrated that even “the most marginalized
groups of young people can influence decision-makers at the highest levels of power, when give
the right kinds of support from youth workers and educators” (James and McGillicuddy 2001).
We see the further effects of youth cultural movements on larger governing bodies as well.

Consider the United Nations’ move to incorporate and engage Hiphop at the World
Conference against Racism in 2001. In this case, Hiphop was identified as the most
transformative youth cultural production necessary for supporting transnational collaborative
efforts toward dismantling racism (and other injustices) while using the trope of race as one of its
unifying mechanisms. Thus, Hiphop is being utilized for global movement building and as a
strategy for redressing injustice. To further understand the implications of such phenomena, we
must continue to rise to Harrison’s (2002) challenge and incorporate ethnographic analyses of
race and racism as an effort to transgress global apartheid—the deepening disparities of wealth, health, life expectancy, et cetera, that are developing on a global scale. Researching the intersection of race and Hiphop as a movement strategy can offer important insight regarding global racial hierarchies as well as the uses of race in solidarity building for social change.

Therefore, the ultimate goal is, as Gilroy asserts, to “confront rather than evade the comprehensive manner in which previous incarnations of exclusionary humanity were tailored to racializing codes and qualified by the operation of colonial and imperial power” in the hopes that we might arrive at an “alternative version of humanism” (2000:30). The opportunity to engage the future—youth who identify with Hiphop’s cultural workers as part of their political and intellectual project, which attends to their generation’s human rights agenda—pushes scholarship toward the utopian alternative proposed by Gilroy (2000) and Harrison (2002). In summary, the research presented here builds on the foundations laid by anthropologists applying critical theory to issues surrounding social inequality in our postcolonial era (Fikes 2000; Heckenberger 2004; Harrison 2002; Kondo 1997; McClaurin 1995, 2001; Morgan 2008) by offering linguistic and cultural evidence from transnationally positioned Hiphop cultural workers.

**Ethnographic Significance**

Following Hall (1996d), the utilization of black as a political category is evident of strategic essentialism; however, in order to elucidate why disidentificatory practice is necessary with this particular population (the trans-Pacific Hiphop community in question), one must

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35 Recall the South African National NGO Coalition’s (SANGOCO) appeal to global Hiphop artists to mobilize intellectualism and activism among youth at the UN WCAR 2001 as well as Bakari Kitwana and Jeff Chang’s scholarship on this matter for UNESCO along with Kitwana’s organization of “Hiphop Generation” voting blocks for the 2004, 2006, and 2008 US elections; see also http://www.hiphopconvention.org or http://www.2006hiphopconvention.org.
understand identificatory practices of the Japanese and US states and related strategies of
disidentification (Caplan 2001). Hall explains that “Popular culture is where we discover and
play with the identifications of ourselves, where we are imagined, where we are represented, not
only to the audiences out there who do not get the message, but to ourselves for the first time…. [T]hough the terrain of the popular looks as if it is constructed with single binaries, it is not”
(Hall 1996d: 474). Referencing Freud, he reminds us that sex and representation (including race)
take place in our minds, and warns against conceptualizing popular culture as being constructed
with single binaries (1996d:474; see also Fanon 1967). Through this observation by Hall, I
connect the recuperative theories of Butler (1997b) and Césaire (2000) that relate mental
emancipation to deliverance from political subjection, and explore the relationship between black
popular culture and decolonization. The ethnographic chapters, the fourth and fifth chapters
previously introduced, initiate a conversation between cultural workers as major players in the
production of popular culture, and social theory that explores mental decolonization as a political
strategy for social change as well as eradicating injustice. Like Fikes (2000), Kondo (1990),
Ulysse (2007), and Visweswaran (1994), I intertwine the narratives and ethnographic
descriptions of shared experiences and observations that have taken place over the past 13 years
among my research consultants with the story of my repeated entry and re-entry into the various
spaces that comprise our transnational Hiphop community. Our stories reveal current work to
produce alternative representations and to combat existing representations in popular culture and
global media. Like Hall (1996d) observes, our stories are told not so much to discuss Hiphop in
particular, but to express and play with identifications pertaining to race, gender, class,
citizenship, and sexuality.
In this vein, consider Hiphop as a window to studying social reality as described by the cultural workers (re)presented. Hiphop is a point of entry, a site of inquiry, for understanding how race, gender, class, and citizenship affect these cultural workers in their everyday lived experiences. More importantly, documenting Hiphop as a trope for blackness and its related status to the US and Japanese states helps to illustrate how blackness is utilized as a strategically essentialized political tool to displace and assuage the essentializing political processes operationalized by states to categorize and control bodies that are politicized. Therefore, I am not only gleaning insight into how cultural workers cope and recuperate (Butler 1997b; Hall 1996d; Hebdige 1979), but also how the state legitimates hierarchicalizing apparatuses, and how these cultural workers subsequently make sense of this and resist when able.

The reporting strategy of this project is to organize ideas and data in a manner that clarify contemporary productions and performances of racialized scripts among Japanese Hiphop cultural workers. The present chapter outlines a theoretical argument that centrally positions discursive practice, particularly the use of AAE, among Hiphop’s cultural workers as a unit of analysis for understanding race as lived experience as well as an organizing principle. It elucidates Hiphop’s historical connection to blackness, black vernacular language, and black popular culture. Its purpose is to emphasize Hiphop cultural practice as a racialized discourse—a point which has been contested in Hiphop journalism and scholarship. Therefore, this chapter explains Hiphop culture within a framework of disidentificatory practice in an effort to illustrate how Hiphop, as part of popular culture, interacts with governmental identificatory practice (Corrigan and Sayer 1985). Defining Hiphop in terms of disidentification and identification helps to reveal how Hiphop cultural practice can be in some instances read as utilizing racialized scripts for the purpose of being anti-racial.
The following chapters focus on contextualizing the data presented in the ethnographic chapters. The second chapter builds on this argument by introducing methodological considerations and fieldwork experiences as explanation for the context under which I collected data. The implications and impact of my identity on collecting information about identifications and disidentifications are illuminated. Autoethnographic reflections narrate my multiple entries into the community, which informs the perspectives that I report on in the ethnographic chapters. The types of data collected and the process under which I analyzed the data are described. The third chapter situates Japan’s relationship to the West and the United States, in particular, within a racialized and postcolonial context. It explores Japan as a geopolitical entity that has been simultaneously racialized by the West as well as a racializer within an East Asian geopolitical sphere. This chapter uncovers Japan’s domestic racial policy and historical racial theories in order to historically situate the racialized contexts that the successive chapters’ ethnographic descriptions take place.

The next three chapters consider cultural workers’ assertions that Hip hop constitutes a transnational social movement. Here cultural products, discourse and practice are analyzed in an effort to untangle how discourse surrounding Hip hop as a social movement intersects with nationalist discourse from the Japanese government in the transnational space of a popular cultural genre. The fourth chapter explores whether Hip hop is indeed a transnational social movement or not through the presentation of ethnographic descriptions and data collected in interaction with Hip hop cultural workers and Hip hop organizations.

By decoding song lyrics, excerpts from conversations, public performances, and personal experiences when interacting with cultural workers and their relational organizations, the fourth chapter describes the political rhetoric and practices that the cultural workers employ as they
create and maintain a Hiphop movement and presence in Japan (cf., Hall 1993 on decoding). Likewise, the fifth chapter entails a critical analysis of gender politics within the movement that Hiphop cultural workers purport to build. While the fourth chapter analyzes cultural productions within a framework that emphasizes critiques of race and class, the fifth chapter revisits the political practice and rhetoric of Japan’s Hiphop cultural workers as well as their international allies, and outlines shortcomings in terms of gender and sexual equality. Ethnographic reflections drawn from interviews and experiences with women and men who work in and around Hiphop politics are emphasized. Popular cultural narratives in conjunction with the author’s autoethnographic reflections from doing gender equality work in Hiphop’s purported transnational social movement are illuminated.

The concluding chapter explores Hiphop and human equality further. It synthesizes the data collected and discusses the implications for new directions in Hiphop cultural research and practice. This final discussion is framed in a manner that connects the three main research and theoretical themes of this project: (1) the state/ governmental practice, (2) transnational social movements and (3) international black popular culture.

**Transnational as Translational**

While Hiphop is transnational, it is also simultaneously autochthonous because we cannot discount the agency and innovation of individuals positioned at the peripheries of its cultural and linguistic production (outside of the Black Atlantic). Despite occupying disparate spatial locations, those who identify with Hiphop cultural production are often temporally intertwined and linked through a common literacy (Anderson 1991; hooks 1992) that seeks to destabilize the status quo—whatever that may be in any given culture—and this practice seems to encompass a goal of dehierarchalizing social relations (Fujita 1996; Gilroy 1993b; Morgan 2002; Prevos 2001; Urla 2001). Hence, Hiphop cultural production not only represents the articulation of
critical theory (Beebe 2002; Dyson 2001; Grossberg 1997; hooks 1992), but it also relates to the postcolonial intellectual project that Homi Bhabha described as “the transnational as translational” (1993:172). By concomitantly signifying blackness and disrupting racial stasis, Hiphop’s significance to potential social-movement building is transnational (“hiphop is black power”) as well as translational (“kobushi agero! [=raise your fist!]”). That is, this transnational genre is translatable in a metonymical sense, as its liberatory message is carried from one place to another and serves to describe the condition of our contemporary world from a specific, formally silenced perspective.
CHAPTER 2
AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC REFLECTION: ENTRY POINTS, METHODOLOGIES, AND BLACK BODY POLITICS

“Racing Research, Researching Race”

If race is a social construct constituted through biological origins narratives and related discursive practices, how can ethnographers discuss race without reifying it as a biological, fixed entity? Moreover, how do ethnographers record the uses of race for political identity and social movement building that seek to disrupt the goals of racism and racialization?¹ In the 1990s, anthropologists blazed trails in the social sciences, as the final biological investments in race were dismantled with evidence from genetics (Gould 1996; Templeton 2002). However, cultural anthropology then found itself amidst an analytical crisis (Harrison 1998, 1995). Ethnographic reporting on race as a research variable began to decline, and discussions of ethnicities served as a poor proxy. Cultural phenomena must be analyzed in all of their realizations by agents who produce it: that means race in addition to gender or sex, ethnicity, citizenship, class, and other interlocking identifications must be inspected (Harrison 2002).

Though race has no biological basis, institutions have been built over history based on the contrary belief (Mbembe 2002; Mudimbe 1988; Pratt 1992). In response, humans have innovated cultural adaptations to cope with racializing ascriptions as well as other colonizing experiences (Bhabha 1994; Fanon 1967; Hall 1997c; Mercer 2000; D. Scott 1999). Therefore, ethnographers witness subaltern populations utilizing subaltern ascriptions as a strategy for redressing social injustice and inequity (e.g., Brown 2000; Harrison 2002; Herzfeld 1997; Fikes 2000; Kondo 1997; Morgan 2002; Ulysse 2007). Such cultural and narrative performances (Bauman 1992:41) include stereotypes and other homogenizing identifications such as race; hence, race is used as a

¹ The subheading title is taken from F. Winnddance Twine and J. Warren’s (2000) edited volume, which also attends to this particular research question.
strategy to build movements against the very essentializing agencies that ascribe race according to hierarchy.

**Significance of Focusing on Linguistic Data**

Race is brought into being through speech acts and partially maintained through discursive practice. If race is a lived discourse and that discourse is being exploited in particular contexts to constitute a political identity through an African-diasporic imaginary, certain words, phrases, metonyms and narratives are of specific analytical interest (Bhabha 1994; Kondo 1997; Hall 1996d; Mercer 2000; Morgan 2008). If international Hiphop language is based on standards associated with African-American language varieties (Labov 1972; Mitchell-Kernan 1972; Morgan 2001; Rickford and Rickford 2000; Smitherman 1997; Yasin 1999), what does it mean when Japanese nationals consciously choose to privilege African-American speech styles over standard English language varieties? What does it mean when artists routinely codeswitch using African American English (AAE) linguistic features in Japanese Hiphop narrative performances? Speech choices in addition to conspicuous cultural performances add important layers of meaning to heteroglossic interventions concerning race and Hiphop (Bakhtin 1981:288-300). Following Butler (1997b:17), the documentation of the strategies described contributes to understandings of how subjects might take an oppositional relation to power that is rooted in the very power one is attempting to oppose.

Using critical discourse analysis, I uncover Japanese cultural workers’ connections to Hiphop language ideology, which is linked to AAE language ideology, history, and culture (Morgan 2002, 2008). The analysis of this ideology through critical discourse analysis (van Dijk 1995, 2001) explores implications of Japanese Hiphop cultural workers’ use of African-American language and culture in defense of their own indigenous identities and lifestyles that are generally not supported by Japanese dominant societal values or government practice.
Similarly, referencing Gottlob Frege (1977) and J. L. Austin (1962) and also drawing from her own research concerning youth and Hiphop language ideology (Morgan 2001, 2005), Marcyliena Morgan offers the following summary:

In many respects, hiphop’s language ideology addresses attempts to resolve how individuals interpret utterances, referents and meanings while simultaneously recognizing that there are different senses and therefore possible interpretations of referents…. But it goes even further. Youth recognize that their voices are routinely marginalized, and thus their language ideology is one that assumes agency and power reside in the ability to produce this discourse as proof of hiphop’s existence and its ability to infiltrate and interfere with dominant culture. Youth are not concerned with sustaining a system hidden from dominant culture but one that is a strategic in-your-face anti-language. [Morgan 2008:94-95]

Attending to an Analytic Conundrum

The ethnographic challenge is to capture the experience of how cultural workers utilize race without inadvertently re-inscribing racialized categories on such agents. I recorded and analyzed data collected from my participation and observations with a trans-Pacific Hiphop community primarily located in major metropolitan areas of Japan. I entered this community as a teenager in 1994, and I have worked with various cultural workers in this community for the past 13 years. I have had the opportunity to interact with some of them in both the US and Japan for industry-related business or political work. The primary data collected for analysis include linguistic materials that were recorded during conversations, interviews, surveys, and postings found in online fora. I enlisted research consultants to assist with the recording and interpreting of such data, particularly in instances where identifications such as my sex and citizenship might affect the rhetoric associated with discussion topics. In addition, archival materials, policy papers, and popular political publications were collected and coded according to relevance for references that attend to the research agenda: ascertaining the uses of race in Hiphop cultural discursive practices in Japan. My fieldwork and previous community entry experiences are described below in phases.
Context and Experience Entering a Longitudinal Ethnographic Relationship

Phase One: First Contact

In 1994, I spent my summer in Nagoya as part of a youth exchange program. My mother had also received a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) grant that year to study ethnic minority dances and cultures in China and Japan. Therefore, the latter part of my summer included trips to the Tokyo metropolitan area, including adjacent cities such as Kawasaki, to accompany my mother. I observed her conducting interviews, videotaping and other interactions with minority activists and artists, as well as non-minority Japanese activist artists, photographers, and writers who did cultural work related to my mother’s subject of inquiry. The community that my mother introduced me to turned out to be a vanguard of progressive Japanese cultural workers and many have served as mentors during my repeat visits back to the island of Honshu.

These elders, being my mother’s generation, also comprise a relational group to the US’s civil rights and black-power movement brokers, as they have done their share of agitation in Japan and East Asia, and they have also done intersectional work organizing across geopolitical boundaries with historic agents from the US civil rights, black power, labor, and Asian-American social movements. Mostly women, these cultural workers present a women-centered ideology and practice that, for well documented political reasons, was often left out of US-based women’s movement building efforts. This aspect of past social movements is one of many elements that these Japanese cultural workers had in common with my mother and her generation of African-American social movement cultural workers. That is, women of color and also women of lower socioeconomic status were often marginalized in women’s social movement building.

During this period, I also had my first contact with Japanese Hiphop pioneers, and I entered an aspect of the transnational Hiphop community that I later returned to study. I met two
African-descendant singers who toured with a reggae artist who was turning his genre to Japanese Rap. As black women,\textsuperscript{2} we were elated to run into one another in an atmosphere that, at the time, was largely nonblack, and we shared experiences that we perceived as alienating as well as sexually and racially harassing. They invited me to come to their show, and put me on a VIP list to visit them backstage after their show. I met a lot of Japanese national Hiphop, reggae, ska, and soul fans at their show. The outfit that I wore, a Nigerian pant suit with a matching kufi made from colorful pink and purple themed cloth\textsuperscript{3}, invited a lot of political commentary and conversation from both the audience and performers. I spoke with the performing artist for a long time in Japanese about his views concerning blackness, African identities, reggae music, and his choice to switch to Hiphop. He was a kind gentleman whom I perceived as erudite and elder, though an entertainer.

What struck me about the bilingual conversations that took place backstage was that the Japanese national participants in that space seemed genuinely committed to blackness as an important political category, and they found ways to tie black identities and experiences into their own Japanese identities and experiences during our conversations. The African-descendant entertainers who toured with the Japanese performers often buttressed their arguments when the

\textsuperscript{2} I suppose that technically, I was a girl, since I was 17 years old.

\textsuperscript{3} This outfit was akin to a man’s buba, but the shirt was cut at my hips, and the sleeves were more “dolphin style.” Cross-dressing at that time was a popular dress choice for woman-centered Hiphop heads. Like popular artists including Bo$$, Yo Yo, Queen Latifah, and Left Eye of TLC, I wore extra, extra large men’s clothing with men’s boxer shorts and white ribbed tank shirts that are referred to in signifying yet sexist vernacular as “wife-beaters” that showed underneath a larger outer shirt, but covered my own women’s undergarments. As an avid Afrocentrist at the time, I also wore men’s clothing in African styles, in addition to women’s African clothing like dresses or skirt suits. In Japan, I could only express myself in these clothes when I went out to clubs or met friends after school hours for food or shopping. At school and for many after-school functions, we wore a skirt jumper and button-up shirt as part of our school uniform. I wore printed dresses and skirt sets (a mid-1990s, Midwestern fashion staple that would be called “church clothes”) when out with my host family.
conversation was in English. That one night affected my entire summer because it introduced me to a community of other adolescents whom I had met at the concert and who, unlike many of my other age-mates I had met prior to this evening at my high school or at shopping malls, were interested and committed to learning about black cultural practice in addition to notions of “traditional” Japanese culture. Looking back, I would categorize our thinking as coinciding with cultural nationalist thought. Cultural nationalism, and black nationalism in particular, marked an important aspect of how we rebelled against control, identification, and dominant cultural society. Individual nationalist notions of “purity” and general excellence when compared to whiteness marked shared aesthetics and common appreciation of music and other related cultural productions (cf., Afrocentricity in Hip hop, Rastafari ideology in roots reggae). This was a community that was key to helping me fully understand complicated relationships between African Americans and Japanese nationals that are often under-reported in popular media and academic press.

Phase Two: Back Again

During the summer of 2001, I benefited from a Japan Foundation summer program that was geared toward assisting postgraduates in the social sciences with language study and social science research in Japan. We were housed outside of Osaka in a suburban community adjacent to an outlet mall town and very close to the Kansai Airport. My brother and his wife were also living in Japan at the time. They split their time between three major cities: Yokosuka, Yokohama, and Tokyo. My brother is a medical doctor and naval officer who was practicing at the Yokosuka naval base hospital, and his wife was a lawyer who worked for a multinational corporation with offices in Tokyo. They had a naval-base townhouse in Yokohama, and a splendid apartment in the middle of Tokyo, within walking distance of Tokyo Tower and Roppongi’s club district as well as countless other famous hotels, museums, and shrines. When I
wasn’t studying at the Japan Foundation Language Institute or doing ethnography among cultural workers in the Kansai region, I spent my time that summer at either of my brother and his wife’s domiciles documenting scenes in that region. I found the location of the Tokyo apartment quite fortuitous because I was able to walk to recording studios, radio station locations, and night clubs or lounges without having to spend train fare or having to worry about being forced to stay out all night and catch the first train in the morning. Doing ethnography in Tokyo also placed me close to all of the mentors I had met with my mother during her research years earlier. My mother had made several subsequent visits to work with anti-racist NGOs, and her peer group was quite bonded. They were extremely helpful and available to help me think through political issues and questions that arose during my fieldwork.

My schedule at the Japan Foundation was rigorous. I spent my mornings in intensive language study, and my afternoons doing archival, library, internet, and discipline-specific research as it related to my topic. I studied and did language homework before and after dinner, and just before the last train left, I would get dressed in club clothes (black pants, a sparkly tank top, and uncomfortable heeled sandals) and go observe at a Hiphop venue. I had just completed my first year of graduate school, and I was meticulous about recording everything I saw and experienced. In most of the Osaka scenes that I frequented there were general trends with club owners, promoters, and deejays being either African-national or Afro-Caribbean-descent. Many of these individuals “passed” as being African American in an effort to avoid anti-African racism from some Japanese citizens, European Americans, and European visitors, but others were open about their country of origin. Toward the end of the nights when I did language study, research, and venue observation, I would generally settle at a corner table, fighting sleep, while I waited for the time of the first train to arrive. I might have time for a short nap before having to get
ready to go to language class the next day. Even when I began to do observations only on
Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, there was a set schedule for the Language Institute
participants, and even if I didn’t have to get up for class, I would have to get up and be prepared
for some form of Japanese cultural tour or weekend culture class. This aspect of the program
frustrated many of the graduate students, who were anxious to spend free time delving into their
subjects of interest rather than practicing the tea ceremony, with which most of us by that time
had at least some familiarity because we all had previously studied Japanese language and
culture.

The Language Institute allowed for scheduled trips to do “self-guided study,” and I took
these opportunities to go to Tokyo and follow up on interview leads. A US-based Hiphop pioneer
made necessary introductions for me to meet and study with Japan’s Hiphop pioneers who were
part of his transnational organization. The US pioneer was worried when one of my academic
mentors and coincidently his good friend mentioned that I was going to do “club ethnography”
observing nightclubs by myself in Japan. The US pioneer thought this was dangerous (and in
retrospect, despite the many claims that Japan is safer than the US, he was right). It wasn’t until a
few years later that I found out that certain pioneers were asked to chaperone me and make sure
that I was safe during my interviews. I spent that summer in Tokyo developing relationships with
these people, friends with whom I continue to work.

A key aspect of that visit would be salvaging lost language abilities, as it had been many
years since I was immersed in a Japanese speech community. I learned key social-science terms
that were helpful to my study, and I had help from Institute staff formulating surveys in Japanese
and researching Japanese library databases (see Appendix for a copy of a survey created during
this period). My project was amusing to them to say the least. The people I interviewed for my
project turned out to be regularly played artists on video channels, and they were on covers of popular music and Hip hop magazines while I was there. It was at times difficult to explain and justify how this was academic, social-science research. Once a well-known author and friend of my mother’s had to call the Institute to explain the academic rigor of my project when it was suggested by staff that I was not doing research but instead using research money to “hang out with stars.”

During this summer I began to appreciate Japanese Hip hop as autochthonous. I began to discern different aesthetic trends in cultural work being done in Japan versus the US. I recorded and analyzed countless music videos. I sat through hours of emcee, deejay, and bboy\textsuperscript{4} battles. I spent hours watching people in clubs and attempting to initiate interviews about their experiences. I found that interviewing women in bathrooms was a useful tool to get more candid reactions about gender politics in the club and Hip hop scene. I gained a better comprehension of African-descendants’ roles in Japan’s Hip hop cultural work. Finally, I began to build my long relationship with a key recording studio and transnational social movement organization—as well as all the artists associated with it—during that summer.

**Phase Three: Filmmaking**

No matter how hard I tried to paint an ethnographic picture of the multiple worlds that I experienced in 2001, not many people seemed to agree with my perspective or experience. Other ethnographers of Japanese Hip hop seemed not to see the many African-nationals I had shadowed. Fellow doctoral students who had lived in Japan for personal reasons or work didn’t buy that there was some huge underground Japanese Hip hop scene where blackness was privileged or valued. Teachers seemed confused about what exactly I was trying to study: blacks

\textsuperscript{4} “Bboy” is a generic masculine term that is used to refer to dance competitions in Hip hop that do not exclusively include male participants. This term is explored more in Chapter Five.
in Japanese Hiphop or Japanese in Japanese Hiphop. To be frank, I was unclear. I had experienced so much in time-limited slots, and I didn’t know how to express it. I thought that if I went back and filmed it, people would get a better idea of what I was trying to explain. An opportunity arose when Professor Marcyliena Morgan graciously contributed an initial $6,700 to make a film about Hiphop in Japan for the Hiphop Archive that she directs, which was then at Harvard University. The prior spring semester, I had taken a course in Theoretical Approaches to Black Cultural Studies from Professor Mark Reid. This was a special and intimate course in which many of the participants, all but two of whom were people of color, debated multiple sensitive issues in black cultural studies. One of my colleagues, Bianca White, held a unique and critical analysis of Hiphop culture and Japan as a country. She had significant experience through professional work with world famous Hiphop cultural workers and she had an informed perspective of the “industry” aspects of Hiphop. She also had lived in Japan as an adolescent with her mother who was teaching English as a second language. Bianca is my African-American sister, and despite all of our debating and disagreement concerning my topic, we were very close friends. She is an amazing critical theorist and an award-winning filmmaker, so when Professor Morgan released funds to do a film on Japanese Hiphop, I chose her as my sister warrior, my colleague, to document the scene.

I knew how to conduct ethnographic documentation using digital media, but I did not know filmmaking, so Bianca was indispensable. As an ethnographer, not a visual ethnographer but as a traditional ethnographer, I was not concerned about potential audience experience or clear and steady shots. I was into recording by any means necessary, even if the image was not in the camera and we just got the dialogue (because we could transcribe it and analyze it later). Through Bianca I learned important technical skills as well as how to produce a product that is
optimal for audience experience. Bianca made *Nihon Style* a beautiful and artistic piece with her superb directing and editing.

Many people did not think that we could go and make a film on a week’s notice for under $7,000. I would agree that in most cases, one cannot, but we had access to a network that made it happen. Our airline tickets consumed most of the budget and our equipment needs took most of the rest. We stayed at my brother and his wife’s Tokyo apartment, and my graduate stipend paid for our train rides and meals. My network graciously allowed us access and VIP status to most events so we did not have to pay entrance fees, and we also had intimate access to do long interviews with key people in the Hiphop scene. We worked approximately 20 hour days for ten days and then left.

The joint transcription process that ensued was a learning experience as well. As an ethnographer, I was accustomed to having to make sense of data alone. But in this case, I not only had Bianca to sit in as we played and replayed quotes we thought were salient, but I also had important conversations with my brother, his wife, her mother (who is a biological anthropologist), and my ex-husband (a US Hiphop expert), who had an extended visit with me in Japan in 2001. My colleagues, Nakamura Mutsuo in linguistics and Fujino Yuko in sociology at the University of Florida, were also very helpful as we mulled over the data collected. By November 2002, we had a short edited. I showed it at the AAA annual meeting along with a paper that I read, and for the first time, I felt that the data were beginning to make sense to people. Hiphop, including Japanese Hiphop, entails much diversity. There is codeswitching (with Japanese and AAE as well as GAE). It is international, multilingual, and multiracial. It is gendered, but all genders and sexual orientations are often present in some form or another in the cultural productions. There was so much going on in the Hiphop community we documented.
Capturing it on film helped me to finally begin to organize my thoughts, my experiences, and my other data. Copies of the film and the footage are housed at the Hiphop Archive.

**Phase Four: Winter in Tokyo**

I spent my first winter in Tokyo in January 2003. I was splitting my time between negotiating family (this time my mother was there, too, as she and my father had just come back from visiting China with my brother and his wife), obligatory meetings with family friends, and meetings with my ethnographic consultants and friends. This visit exposed me to the conundrum of balancing everyday life with research pursuits. My mother’s close friend didn’t care if it was Friday night or that there was a big event I felt compelled to document at a club; she cooked and I better be on a train at 8 p.m. sharp to the remote suburbs and her subsidized housing complex to spend a freezing night with her and her cats, talking about black political movements and Alice Walker’s recent visit. This was an emotionally difficult visit because I had just finalized my divorce with my husband who everyone in my Hiphop community knew. Therefore, my ethnographic agenda was often shaped by comments like, “Now what happened? You two were so good together! He really loved Hiphop!” I realized that my ethnographic consultants weren’t research participants or subjects. They were friends and fictive kin, as some of them had known me since I was seventeen, and just as I followed them around intimate scenes with annoying handheld mini-cassette recorders (which I thought at the time were inconspicuous), they had the right to “get in my business” and assess whether I had made the right decision at 24 years of age.

Looking back, this experience furthered my understanding of Japan’s Hiphop’s generation’s ideas concerning traditional gender roles. Though my marriage was considered to be “young” and “early” by many of my friends and family in the United States, I was “on time” in Japan. The stigma of divorce is harsh, however, and I learned a great deal about cultural
attitudes concerning divorce, and my friends’ concern about me being branded with that stigma was heart-warming to say the least.

**Phase Five: Substantiating Postcolonial Identities**

I was scheduled to go back during the summer of 2003, and I did a great deal of organizing with Japanese Hiphop cultural workers in the US and, over the internet, with Japanese cultural workers in Japan for a 2003 annual Hiphop festival. However, my mother suffered a stroke in early June and I decided not to return until things were more stable at home. I did not return until the summer of 2004. Having just completed the written portion of my qualification exam, I was committed to obtaining data for which I felt there were gaps in the literature: I was looking for evidence of whiteness in Japan. I also had the opportunity to travel to China that summer and document the post-colonial complexity of whiteness and neo-colonial relationships from that vantage point as well. Below is a collage of pictures I took during one innocent walk down an unassuming street in Kamakura that summer.

![Image of advertisements](image)

*Figure 2-1  Advertisements along a stroll down one small city block (less than 100 feet in length) in Kamakura, Japan in 2004*
My entire family except for my eldest brother and his wife and newborn came to visit that summer, and upon learning what I was doing, they got into the experience of “spotting whiteness.” Once they opened their eyes to look for it, they saw it was everywhere, even to the point where one week into the exercise I tired and concluded that I had enough white images to take back to the United States. I caught up with my research friends and I continued to go to the same Hiphop venues and document our experiences.5

This trip was significant in that I noticed what mainstream Hiphop had become in the ten years since my initial contact with the community. The underground scene seemed integrated with more commercial art and the older cultural nationalist ideas that were so prevalent in 1994 had been replaced with the ideology of “bling, bling” or conspicuous consumption and materialism. However the underground had not disappeared. It just had company: commercial company. This could obscure one’s view of Hiphop in Japan if background knowledge is missing. With this shift, I saw some of my old friends leave the underground scene for the more lucrative and “fast” lifestyle of commercial Hiphop, and this included working harder to promote more African-American Hiphop artists in Japan.

Phase Six: The Gender Mission

When I returned to the Tokyo metropolitan area in 2005, I began to notice the effects of my earlier visits on the local Hiphop scenes. Papers and memos that I had written and shared earlier were now circulated in certain circles, and much of the time I allotted to do research,

5 I recently had a similar experience while visiting with a research assistant and friend. My friend was showing me pictures from a visit to Japan in July 2007. He took random pictures of buildings, billboards, traffic crossings, and other signs of urban life on a popular street in the Harajuku shopping district of Tokyo. Before he opened up his electronic file of pictures to show me, I jokingly asked, “Are there still large images of white women everywhere in advertisements, or has that changed?” By the time I made my utterance, the file opened, and to both of our surprise, he had unintentionally captured several images of whiteness in advertising, as almost every building hosted an advertisement that featured a white model.
additional interviews, and examine material culture was battling new requests from my research friends to talk and work with them on reproducing some of the work that they had seen me doing in the US. By this time, I was known as a cofounder for the National Hip Hop Political Convention, I had been on a few Hiphop and politics shows on BET, and I was living and working in a well-known recording studio in the US. I also had been sure to put all of my US-based Hiphop cultural worker friends in touch with their Japanese counterparts, so unconsciously we had all created a transnational Hiphop political community⁶, made up of specific players who supported a particular social-justice agenda. I no longer only heard from people through my own contact, but artists who I worked with in the US who were formerly not part of the aforementioned Japanese Hiphop scene would now pass on messages from their recent trips and tours to the country. Likewise, people with whom I worked in Japan frequented areas where I lived and worked in the US and it now seemed that anyone in this community could be in any specific spot in the world at any given time.

The more closely I worked with cultural workers, the more I began to identify what my feminist colleagues were trying to tell me years earlier concerning the “touring culture” of entertainers in general. I began to gain a better understanding of critiques of sexism in Hiphop culture, as I found myself in situations where I was seeing more and more violation of women, even among self-proclaimed “socially conscious” and nonsexist Hiphop cultural workers. By this time I had done more reading and more personal work to better understand earlier experiences that I had in Japan, and I was able to analyze these experiences through a critical gender lens as well as a critical race lens. Being older—I was now 28 and no longer a 17-year-old adolescent—the prevalence of child pornography on the streets of Tokyo became more apparent to me than it

⁶ The new community that I refer to here includes those of us who worked with a transnational social movement organization that uses Hiphop.
had been before. As an adolescent I viewed this as general pornographic material but as I aged, I began to see that many of these images were not just subjugated women, they were subjugated girls.

Thus, when I returned in 2005, I became more aggressive than before in my agenda to speak with women cultural workers. I also spent significant time speaking to female consumers. I remember being asked to give a talk about race and Hiphop at a college, and I talked instead about the intersection of racialization and sexualization that I experienced. Though I was told several times that publicly talking about that topic in some circles was taboo, many young women came and spoke to me privately after my talk, all open to sharing their stories of being sexually harassed while riding public transportation as well as stories concerning sexual abuse in general. Seeing the urgency of this issue all over the world, not just in the US and Japan, I began to question where this urgency was in Hiphop, which purported to be building a social-justice agenda at the time. The ethnography I collected during this time reflects these issues.

**Phase Seven: The “Ethnographic Present”**

At present I continue to work with my research friends on the various political agendas that we have initiated over the years. Some of these individuals have known me for 13 years now, and vice versa. I have seen people get married, get divorced, have children, experience the loss of loved ones, and change careers. Likewise, they have seen me go through similar changes. I feel confident about the quality of the data that I have collected over the years and analyzed with my research friends. However, it has been hard to write our stories because the research is so personal. I assume this is a discomfort most ethnographers experience, for, as Cheryl Mwaria (2001) says, we live our anthropology.
Data Collection Process

In accordance with critical discourse analysis (cf., Goffman 1974; Morgan 2002; van Dijk 2001), I recorded the narratives of diverse Hiphop cultural workers in Japan. Following Charles Briggs (1986), I at times conducted “social science interviews” in order to collect information from key actors who produce Hiphop culture in Japan and (when relevant) the United States. I refer to two types of interviews in my data collection. One type consists of “short interviews” which lasted three to fifteen minutes. These interviews were impromptu data collected on the street at a venue with workers and patrons. The “long interview” follows Grant McCracken’s definition (1988) and refers to interviews that lasted anywhere from over thirty minutes to three hours. Samples of interview questions are similar to the survey queries presented in the in the Appendix, but as one will see from dialogues presented in Chapters Four and Five, the interviews were quite informal and similar to conversational analysis (Psathas 1995). Examples of early interview questions would be “How do you define Hiphop?” or “Describe some of the projects that [your transnational social movement organization] is currently working on?” I mainly followed the natural flow of conversation during recording periods.

The fieldnotes from the conversations and participant-observation7 periods provide sufficient data to offer insight regarding current practices related to how race is conceptualized through language and performance. Participant observation allowed me to focus on documenting daily rituals and cultural practice in interpersonal conversation, professional experiences, popular media, and other cultural productions (e.g., Hiphop songs) that frame race and racialization in Japan.

7 Participant observation could be defined as gaining insight into a “way of life by taking part as fully as [one]… can in a group’s social activities, as well as observing those activities as outsiders” (Lavenda and Schultz 2000:5).
The pictures that I took while doing observations, the album art that I collected and the many other cultural products that I felt were salient to this research project comprise a third category of data collection. The processes under which I collected these data are outlined below.

Finally, the people to whom I refer as research consultants, friends, and cultural workers are the people who shared information about their way of life with me. The “research consultants” differ from the research assistants, who were the people who collaborated and assisted me with transcription or translation and interpretation of data. Some of these research assistants were paid, and others were close friends with whom I traded services.

**Background**

I previously described seven phases, with each phase having a different entry purpose or experience that informs the perspective from which I now write. I alluded to the many interviews and observations I experienced during each trip in my descriptions of each entry phase. Although my first phase did not entail formal interviews, I accompanied my mother to many, listening and at times participating in her formal interviews with her research participants and friends. I accompanied my mother during four formal interviews that each lasted from 30 minutes to an hour each. Although she interviewed most interviewees more than once, I accompanied her on only four of these. After interviewing each participant, she videotaped them or their dancers performing. While I was with her, I witnessed my mother interviewing a Korean civil rights leader, a Korean dance teacher, a Ryukyuan dance teacher, and an Ainu visual and craft artist. In addition, she engaged in several interview-like conversations with her Japanese artist and activist friends who deal with the subject matter of ethnic minority rights in Japan. I would call her method very similar to discourse analysis, except that these interviews were not taped. Nonetheless, I learned a great deal of information from observing in this setting.
Doctoral Research

In 2001, during my second entry phase, I began recording my own data, as a graduate student with approval from the University of Florida Institutional Review Board. As explained earlier in Phase Two, I observed Hiphop venues (clubs, lounges, parties, and performances) three to six nights a week for a six-week period in the Osaka metropolitan area during the summer of 2001. There, I interviewed mainly African-national and Caribbean descent Hiphop promoters, venue organizers, and artists. I also interviewed Japanese-national and African-American artists. I took pictures at the venues. I usually took pictures of deejay booths and dance floor set ups. I counted the numbers of people present and attempted to identify them according to Japanese demographic categories. This process would usually involve asking people how they identify themselves. I wrote notes about playlists, and noted which songs were most popular among venue patrons. I judged the latter by how many people got on the dance floor to dance, and also by people’s commentary about songs’ popularity.

While at the venues, I conducted at least one to three short taped interviews (i.e., 3 to 15 minutes) with venue owners and promoters, but because they were working, these were not the most focused interviews. I carried a digital camera, a minicassette recorder, and consent forms in a small purse at all times, so that at any moment, I could record a moment or conversation that seemed relevant to my topic of interest. Some research respondents found this behavior eccentric, but not entirely unexpected from a foreigner who’s expected to be eccentric. Others told me that they did not find my behavior odd, but that they assumed I really wanted to be a journalist or singer, thus my avid interest in their work. Even though I explained to everyone I was a graduate student studying Hiphop and race, the general assumption seemed to be that no one cares that much or is so organized about one’s work unless they want to be in the industry. I recorded seven long conversational interviews with participants in the Osaka metropolitan area.
that summer, and one key consultant was recorded five times. This key consultant was a Kenyan national who had just completed his degree in civil engineering. He sold African art and goods at an outdoor market close to the Language Institute, though he lived in an urban part of Osaka and also promoted Hiphop events. I visited him at the market several times a week and spoke with him regularly. Of my seven recorded interviewees, one was a Japanese-national female, two were Japanese-national males, and four were African-descent males.

I conducted similar observations in Tokyo and adjacent cities for a cumulative total of three weeks that summer. As stated earlier, I would spend a week in the region when I was afforded “self-study” time at the Language Institute. In the Tokyo metropolitan area, I recorded the same kind of data that I did in Osaka, except many of the club venues in which I observed were too large to get accurate counts of participants and to talk with all of them about how they identified themselves. In these venues, I would hang out in smaller settings within the larger setting, such as the women’s bathroom or the VIP lounge in an effort to get and record more intimate data. I recorded eleven “long” conversational style interviews in Tokyo, and established the beginning of a long friendship with many of these people. Unlike in the Osaka metropolitan region, my general consultants in the Tokyo metropolitan region were mostly Japanese citizens, although there were seven African-American male consultants, three of whom lived primarily in Japan, two of whom traveled back and forth, and two of whom were US-based artists who frequently toured in Japan. Of those whom I recorded in long interviews, seven identified as Japanese citizens\(^8\) and four were African-American. The African Americans were all male, and of the Japanese interviewees, only one was female.

\(^8\) See chart (Figure 2-2) at the end of this section and Chapter Four for more detail. Some of the “Japanese-national” cultural workers identified in dual ways, as both Japanese and as having “mixed” heritage, such as having Chinese or Filipino mothers and Japanese fathers.
The male dominance in the Japanese Hiphop communities that I documented that summer was a marked difference from my experience seven years earlier. As a high school student, I frequented mostly all-female peer groups, and with the exception of the visiting artists and one other African-American female exchange student in my sate (Aichi-ken), all of my interlocutors in Nagoya were Japanese nationals. Thus, most of my conversations about Hiphop in 1994 were bilingual, with fellow adolescent Japanese females, who were not necessarily cultural workers, but consumers. The exception would be the conversations that I had with elder artists and activists who were my mother’s friends during my visits to Tokyo. When I returned for subsequent visits, focused on interviewing cultural workers, many of my respondents were male. That is, like in the United States, many of the people with the money and structural support to own the means of production in cultural work—as in owning the venue, the label, or the studio—are males. As Marcyliena Morgan notes in her ethnography on Project Blowed (2008), that does not mean that only men are doing the work. Many females, who were not available to me for interviews until I forced the issue in 2005, were indeed the primary workers holding the artistic production and organizational structure together.

As stated earlier, in 2002, about 20 hours of each day were spent documenting Japanese Hiphop culture through film, camera, or minicassette. In 2003, I recorded seven interviews (five Japanese citizens and two African-American males) with people whom I had begun working with in 2001. I also recorded two new African-American male cultural workers who were promoters during that year, but who have since left the scene. In 2004, I interviewed 17 cultural workers with whom I had previously worked. These people included two Japanese-national females, eleven Japanese-national males and four African-American males. As mentioned earlier, I spent a lot of my time documenting white images in the public sphere using a digital...
still camera. In 2005, I interviewed six Japanese-national female cultural workers, four Japanese-national male cultural workers, and two African-American male cultural workers. Since then, my relationships with many of the people that I have traditionally recorded have changed in a way that there hasn’t been the need for me to record them like before (Fikes 2000; Mwaria 2001). We exchange e-mail, message each other at social networking sites, call each other on the telephone, and visit with one another in a way that marks our relationship as less research, but more a joint Hiphop political and cultural work endeavor. At the Hiphop Archive, I have been working with undergraduate and graduate researchers who are interested in collecting this type of data. These are the people whom I usually connect with my research friends to document or record data now for archiving and other academic project purposes.

Table 2-1 Numbers of long recorded interviews described in the Data Collection Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total # of recorded “long interviews”</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # of women interviewed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # of men interviewed</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Japanese-national women</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Japanese-national men</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of African-descendant men</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Chinese-Japanese nationals</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Filipino-Japanese nationals</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of ‘Persian’-Puerto Rican-Japanese nationals</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The year of 2002 is not included because almost the entire time was spent recording various aspects of Hiphop cultural work. The chart is organized according to demographic constructions of gender identification as well as self-reported ethnic/racial and national identifications.

Data Analysis Process

I described earlier how and with whom I collected data from 2001 to 2005. The types of data that I collected over the years include conversations from interviews, music, art, and other cultural products such as compact disc covers, promotional flyers, videos of live performances, music videos played in television, magazine articles, and website postings. The pictures and notes that I took during venue observations were very useful as well. As I organized the types of
data (e.g., interviews, album art, video-taped performances, etc.), I created five major categories for analysis. These categories are: (1) how Japanese national identity is referenced, represented, or manifested in the utterance or cultural product, (2) how blackness is referenced, represented, or manifested in the utterance or cultural product, (3) how whiteness is referenced, represented, or manifested in the utterance or cultural product, (4) how gender identity is referenced, represented, or manifested in the utterance or cultural product, and (5) how Hip hop cultural aesthetics are referenced, represented, or manifested in the utterance or cultural product.

When transcribing (and in some cases translating) recorded conversations or Hip hop lyrics, I often enlisted the assistance of a secondary research assistant, who was usually a male fluent in vernacular and speech style of masculine adolescent popular speech. I did this for several reasons. One reason was to increase researcher translation reliability. The other translator or transcriptionist and I would meet several times to talk about the significance of the data in question. Another reason was that, during my most communicatively competent times in Japanese speech communities, I engaged in intimate and vernacular conversations with females in my same age group, or females in my mother’s age group, but rarely did I speak with men using non-distal styles of speech. I am therefore not communicatively competent in adolescent male speech varieties. An example of how this works in Hip hop research in English would be that a researcher who is born in Oakland, California, and part of an Oakland-specific AAE speech community, might have trouble understanding the accent, lexicon, and even grammar of a Hip hop artist’s production who uses a speech variety that is native to a rural Alabama AAE speech community. It would not be the case that the researcher does not know General English or even African-American English, but the speech community’s specific phonetic and syntactic difference may be beyond one’s capabilities to adequately analyze linguistic data without
translation assistance. The speech from the Japanese cultural workers whom I recorded was often not only direct style, but it included many vernacular and masculine-specific communicative styles as well. There also was often substantial US English Hiphop lexicon and syntax used as well. Any understanding of US Hiphop language requires knowledge of African American English linguistics. Therefore, my research assistants who, except for one, were not communicatively competent in African American English or US Hiphop language, had to work closely with me to transcribe and translate linguistic data that often included a lot of codeswitching.

Once transcripts were produced, I abstracted utterances of significance according to the five analytic categories described. I discussed these utterances of interest with my research assistants (who helped to transcribe and translate data), and I also discussed the utterances with the cultural workers who produced them. I did the latter for multiple reasons. One reason was to afford the cultural workers agency in how I was interpreting and representing their speech in my research. Together we discussed and co-constructed meaning from our conversations in an effort to avoid and reproduce unequal power dynamics that could occur in ethnographic relationships in which the ethnography holds the ultimate power of how one’s research subjects are finally represented. Our conversations helped me to feel secure that I was documenting them and interpreting them in the manner in which they also saw themselves. As long as we were discussing race we were often in agreement. However, when I began to inquire about ideas concerning gender politics, this particular ethnographic strategy created discomfort because of a general sentiment that conscious or political Hiphop is nonexist, or not misogynistic, so it is often considered rude or unnecessary to inquire about sexism in this transnational Hiphop cultural space (cf., Collins 2006; Russ 1984). I explore this situation in detail in Chapter Five.
Similar approaches—extensive consultation with cultural workers from whom cultural products were collected in an attempt to co-construct meaning—were applied to the analysis of the nonlinguistic material documented. As I organized significant album art, videos of live performances, song lyrics, music videos, pictures of venues, and people’s fashion aesthetic within those venues according to the five aforementioned analytic categories, I consulted whenever possible with the cultural workers who produced them. Significant cultural products, utterances, and observations that I recorded in the field are presented in Chapters Four and Five. I present a synthesis of my own analysis of these products and conversations as well as those of my research assistants and the cultural workers themselves. This process is presented in the ethnographic chapters to avoid the imposition of exogenous meaning. In *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, Emerson, Fretz and Shaw caution ethnographers from presenting accounts that “obscure or suppress members’ meanings by imposing outside understandings of events” (Emerson et al 1995:109). The authors call on ethnographers to focus on “how members construct meaning through interactions with other members of the group, how they actually interpret and organize their own and other’s actions” (1995:140).

On one hand, I provide an emic perspective on Hiphop cultural practice that was readily recognized and welcomed from the research consultants who worked with me. I grew up a Hiphop cultural “native,” though I am in no way an artist. I practiced major elements of Hiphop culture in my daily life from early childhood. My family supported this cultural development. I used Hiphop to teach, to organize, and as therapy. I worked with various Hiphop artists in the US and abroad in these endeavors. The artists with whom I worked ranged from unknown street performers to world-famous entertainers and pioneers. Because some of my Japanese Hiphop network had its introduction to me through these pioneers, our level of conversation began at an
in-group status. Other cultural workers whom I met by happenstance embraced a level of intimacy based upon an assumption of my blackness and their ideas about Hiphop.

Some cultural workers, however, did not read my body as black, or black-American enough, and those people initially categorized me as having an etic perspective until they got to know me intimately. Because I do have an emic perspective, or “native anthropological” knowledge of at least US Hiphop, I was already familiar with and using some of the terms the people in the Hiphop community that I studied were using. Our joint venture of analyzing and interpreting recorded interactions in the analysis process further inserted emic perspectives and members’ interpretations of culturally recorded phenomena. My etic, or outsider’s perspective of masculine vernacular speech varieties and cultural practice was mediated not only through constant consultation with the cultural workers, but also by working with the transcription research assistants who self-identified as being in-group.

The collection of data from (1) participant-observation fieldnotes, (2) recorded conversations (interviews), (3) cultural products of the cultural workers (e.g., album art, lyrics, venue pictures, or performances), and (4) footage from an ethnographic film project represent methodological triangulation, as I utilize a research design that draws from a variety of methods to collect and interpret data (Arksey and Knight 1999:23). Specifically, I employ “between-method triangulation” (cf., Denzin 1970), by drawing from my fieldnotes, the products, and the interviews. I also consider my analysis process with the cultural workers and research assistants “investigator triangulation.” Hilary Arksey and Peter Knight explain:

Investigator triangulation is where different researchers, interviewers or observers with a shared interest in the focus of study are employed. This strategy is deemed advantageous on various grounds. For instance, team members are likely to have intellectual and methodological backgrounds in different disciplinary areas, and can bring a diversity of expertise to bear on the research problem. At the same time, investigator triangulation can remove any potential bias generated by a single researcher. [1999:23]
While I do not believe that my collaboration with the cultural workers and research assistants remove all cultural bias, I do believe that the synthesis of our perspectives and analysis produces a richer ethnographic account, in which all participants had a chance to co-construct our representation at some point in the ethnographic experience.

Another way that I attempt to balance the power dynamic between ethnographer and research consultant is through the utilization of autoethnographic reflection. The longevity and the intimacy that I experienced in the field mandates that I analyze data collected through a conspicuous ethnographic lens that situates the politics that my black, female, and at times underage body brought to the research inquiry process. As mentioned earlier, at times my blackness was read as immediate membership within a transnational Hiphop community. In addition, at other times my pigmentation, hair texture, perceived class or education, perceived age (assumptions that I was older), and marital status hindered immediate entry, and raised questions about my presence, in the very same community (see also Harrison 1991 and Ulysse 2007 on their similar experiences of “continual negotiation of role expectations”). People’s willingness to work with me, immediate and extensive types of access (e.g., VIP privilege to cultural workers’ events), and the forms of speech and topics of communication that ensued (e.g., black nationalism or Nihonjinron) require an analysis that references the effect my body’s political reading and interpretation from my various interlocutors as well as the international community as a whole had on our daily lived experiences (cf., Ulysse 2007). The added dimensions of my family members being present and interacting with me in the field as well as the length of time that I have known certain people in this Hiphop community also require autobiographical contextualization. Finally, my public and sustained participation in US-based Hiphop industry and community activist work, which has been chronicled in popular media and
easily accessed by the people I work with in Japan, also informs how we interpreted and dealt with each other. Even when conversing in specific bounded Japanese geopolitical spaces, this history requires that I reference my memory and experience working with Hiphop movement building—activities that now affect all transnational spaces within a specific transnational social movement agenda.

Synthesizing all of this and injecting it into the data analysis and report constitutes an autoethnographic methodology. Irma McClaurin describes autoethnography as the “layering and use of experience as a critical point of departure for both the production of the text and the interpretation of ethnographic data” (2001:68). An exemplary instance of this methodology can be found in Faye Harrison’s “Ethnography as Politics” (1991). McClaurin concurs, citing how Harrison’s experience growing up in the midst of the civil rights movement as well as her student activism around freeing political prisoners like Angela Davis informed her ethnographic work in Jamaica’s specific political climate:

Harrison’s autobiographical memory authenticates an autoethnographic research rationale. I would assert then that all autoethnography, which I view as not simply a highly reflexive form but as a particular kind of reflexive form, is simultaneously autobiographical and communal, as the Self encounters the Collective. Further, the legitimation of data (or its validation) resides not in conventional scholarly requirements and standards but in self-referencing. [2001:69; see also Caldwell 2006; Simmons 2001; Slocum 2001; Twine 2000]

Indeed, Harrison reworked conventional wisdom by inflecting personal and communal politics in her methodological framework. Autoethnography as part of a feminist methodological repertoire builds on traditional uses of autobiography as activism by women seeking to elucidate social inequality in both the public and private spheres (Tanaka 1987; Perkins 2000). Yukiko Tanaka (1987) discusses this in terms of shishosetsu (=“I-novel,” or autobiographical fiction), which allowed women writers throughout history in Japan to safely critique gender equality by speaking candidly about injustice under the shelter of “fiction” or art. Margo Perkins (2000)
shares a similar perspective in her analysis of the autobiographies of Elaine Brown, Angela Davis, and Assata Shakur. Perkins contends that these women’s narratives are pedagogical as they introduce readers to injustice in the United States that altered their lives and ultimately influenced their decisions toward political engagement. My understanding of autoethnography takes this tradition of “autobiography as activism” a step further as a methodological consideration by including not only personal reflection and acknowledgement of how one’s body and critical memory impacts field encounters and research agendas, but also it allows for the inclusion of community-based, co-constructed descriptions and analysis concerning shared experiences from a range of people who undergo similar identifications as well as life trajectories. Autoethnography is simultaneously reflexive and dialogic, and therefore buttresses a “meta-ethnographic” agenda through the narration and analysis of multiple stories (Noblit and Hare 1988).

In “Feminist Methodology as a Tool for Ethnographic Inquiry on Globalization,” Faye Harrison further elucidates the “intellectual and sociopolitical value of women’s stories and practices” (Harrison In press:26). Whereas interpretive and qualitative research methods have been dismissed as less accurate or useful for policy than numerical data and statistical calculations, Faye Harrison observes that “sociocultural anthropologists understand that stories can be a rich and invaluable source of knowledge and theory” (Harrison In press:26, emphasis added). She explains:

For example, in accessible non-elitist language, Ann Kingsolver has written that “theory can be viewed as ‘the stories we tell ourselves to make sense of life and to determine where we are as we navigate social space’ (Kingsolver 2001:4). All human beings, from social science and policy experts to ordinary folk, narrate socially situated yet differentially empowered (2001:24) stories. Anthropologists are “ethnographic listener[s] and storyteller[s]” who weave together larger patterns of stories to develop social analyses, often those that link complex macrostructural forces to the intricate micropolitics of everyday lived experiences (2001:25). [Harrison In press:267]
Harrison’s explanation of ethnography as being “conceptualized and deployed as a feminist methodology” (2007:26) in addition to her recognition of the democratizing effects of storytelling and autochthonous assertions of self as well as communally constructed sense-making coincides with Hiphop language ideology and philosophy that situates its cultural workers in an organic intellectual framework. Rappers’ “stories” seek to comment on and make sense of social structures as well as individual experience.

What might seem to be a simple narrative of one’s experience in life is usually a commentary on shared knowledge of how social structures impact individual lives. For example, Mia X’s “Mommie’s Angels” (1997) is not just a personal reflection on her plight as a single mother and struggling rap artist, but it also shares insight about a common situation of single mothers worldwide and particularly black women in America who are marked as “welfare queens,” “whores,” and other derogatory identifications that degrade their humanity and ignore their struggles to provide for their families. Mos Def’s “Mr. Nigga” (1999) is not just about his own experiences with racial profiling in the US and abroad as well as everyday racist encounters; he also connects his experiences to people in the public sphere (e.g., Michael Jackson) as well as unknown individuals. Following this narrative tradition of both Hiphop and AAE language ideology, K Dub Shine flexes his cultural critique through storytelling in “Save The Children” as he adopts the trope of rapper as savior (Chapter Four for more details) and builds from knowledge he collected growing up, observing in communities, to “call out” issues of rampant domestic abuse and child abuse in Japanese society. This particular style of storytelling in Hiphop (as well as other AAE narrative performances) reveals yet another way that globalized black popular culture is operationalized to address social inequality outside of the United States.
This narrative strategy, to connect one’s life to the shared experiences of one’s imagined community as a strategy to politically engage and theorize about the intersections of “macrostructural forces” and “micropolitics of everyday lived experiences,” (cf., Harrison In press:267) is relational to St. Clair Drake’s discussion of vindication in “Anthropology and the Black Experience” (1980). In this vein, like Gramsci’s organic intellectuals, the pioneers that I work with seem to be building theory, or “liberation ideology.” John Gwaltney (1980) offers similar remarks on the narratives that he collected in the field, doing work identified as “native anthropology” among even his own family members at times. He says:

From these narratives—these analyses of the heavens, nature and humanity—it is evident that black people are building theory on every conceivable level….These people not only know the troubles they’ve seen, but have profound insight into the meaning of those vicissitudes. [1980: xxvi]

Gwaltney goes on to state that the “core black culture” he documents “is more than ad hoc synchronic adaptive survival” and he critiques “the expectations and canons of core black culture” for confining conceptions of blackness to “walking that walk, talking that talk…” (c.f., Labov 1972); he maintains that “these people live, move and have their being in their particular variation on the human theme” (1980:xxvi-xxvii). Like Drake, he asserts that “beyond the black experience lies the human experience” (Drake 1980: 31). Both scholars seem to want to move beyond “the essential black subject” and they seem to recognize the analytic importance of “naming” experience through narrative. Perhaps the task of Hiphop-generation ethnographers is to move the ethnographic reporting language to match the political agenda of the methodological framework, as we strive to create reports that simultaneously analyze and criticize racialization processes.

Thus, my use of autoethnography in this text is not only one aspect of triangulating my research, but it also complements emic perspectives of knowledge construction within Hiphop,
feminist ethnography, as well as “native” ethnography. Like Gwaltney (1980) my ethnographic work at times included both fictive and biological kin. In addition, like Gina Ulysse (2003, 2007), I occupy a peculiar status as a “native anthropologist” in that “I am Hiphop”\(^9\)—a “native” who cut her teeth in a “golden age” of “raptivism,” “edutainment,” and Hiphop politics. I can also at times be an outsider to the indigenous Japanese Hiphop community, as I am a citizen of the United States. My skin color and other phenotypic expressions mark me as different from a white “American” norm and my gender marginalizes me in the global world order. The intersection of my race, gender, and pigmentation sexualizes my identity in specific historical ways (e.g., the oversexualized black female or mulatta; see Chapter Three for more). The political marking of my body as black actually thrusts me into an imagined community with Japanese Hiphop artists, though I maintain an etic perspective on the Japanese aspect of Japanese Hiphop. However, because Hiphop occupies a shared internationalist frame based on international language ideology and socialization processes that are based in African-American speech communities as well as cultural practice and performance, my Japanese Hiphop interlocutors share a simultaneous emic perspective with me as we are all participants in a transnational social movement and imagined community.

These ideas are akin to reflexivity in ethnographic projects. Gina Ulysse (2007) theorizes reflexivity as becoming

a new mode of academic activism, which seeks to interrupt the problem of ethnographic authority that arises when the focus is on the subject only… Put another way, by choosing to tell how the ethnographer comes to know what she knows, the tailored suit or

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\(^9\) See Morgan (2008) for more. “I am Hiphop” is a phrase popularized by KRS-ONE that petitions Fred Hampton, Sr. and Jesse Jackson, Sr.’s phrase “I am somebody”—an assertion of existence and humanity. As Hiphop struggles against the fate of black popular musical genres such as rock and jazz to remain connected to black identities, the assertion of “I am Hiphop” references a particular political agenda within Hiphop activism as well as Hiphop philosophy that commands its cultural workers “keep it [Hiphop] real.”
monograph is exposed to be not as seamless as it appears. Rather, it is various pieces held together by all sorts of stitches, as a quilt. Reflexivity allows me to unmask the political content of my encounter. [2007: 6]

She introduces an innovative theoretical frame of the alter(ed)native perspective in anthropology. Ulysse writes:

This ethnography is a counternarrative articulated from what I call an alter(ed)native perspective to the conventionalities of the dominant discourse within anthropology. It is alter as in other and native as I was born in the region and am ascribed that identity. It is alter(ed) because of how my approach to this project has been modified both by my training and by my encounter with ICIs [her research consultants]. The term connotes an anti- and postcolonial stance, with a conscious understanding that the continuities of history mean that there is no clean break with the past. With that in mind, alter(ed)native projects do not offer a new riposte or alternative view; rather they engage existing ones, though these have been altered. Alter(ed)native perspectives are those in which tools of domination are co-opted and manipulated to serve particular anti- and postcolonial goals. [Ulysse 2007:7]

The goals of an alter(ed)native project in anthropology relate to the disidentificatory practice of Hiphop cultural workers introduced in Chapter One. Both engage a political agenda that works simultaneously within and against the grain by invoking performativity and “flippin the script” on traditional and dominant cultural narratives that position non-white male ethnographers as peripheral to canons of art and ethnographic theory. As part of my contribution to Ulysse’s alter(ed)native theoretical framework, I utilize autoethnography, what McClaurin deems an “innovative strategy of knowledge production” (2001:71) to contextualize how and why the research collected and presented in this dissertation differ from and yet contribute to previous ethnographies of Hiphop in Japan.

**Reporting Process**

Throughout the entire research, writing, and related data collection processes, all ethical considerations were made in accord with the American Anthropological Association’s Code of Ethics (see [http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethics.htm](http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethics.htm)). Research consultants’ names and associated identifiers are withheld in this write up through the use of generic pseudonyms.
that were chosen to minimize valuation, imagination, and identification (e.g., Rapper, Pioneer 3, cultural worker, etc.). I chose this level of generality because many of the people that I worked with live their lives in the public sphere; and I thought that if I were to use a pseudonym of “Tanaka-san” or “MC K” for an artist, for example, there could be too much room for guessing about who that person might be. Therefore, many of the well-known cultural workers that I worked with are referred to in general terms and other details such as dates and specific geographic locations are left ambiguous. I chose to use general popular names (e.g., Makoto) for my descriptions of consumers as well as one cultural worker who also worked with me on research projects because these individuals are not living publicly documented lives, and it is unlikely that one could figure out their identities given the small amount of information shared about them. Furthermore, in the case that a public event is analyzed, such as a public forum, a concert, or a conference, generally pseudonyms or descriptions are still used; however, if an official name is being used, efforts to obtain permission from persons reported on were made. Published materials, such as albums or song lyrics, are referred to in-text and cited accordingly. In my write up, I attempted to weave together a “story” collected from fieldnotes, transcribed linguistic data, print media, and other Hiphop cultural productions. This story is mediated through conversations with research consultants in an effort to collectively co-author a narrative of race as experienced by Hiphop cultural workers in Japan.
CHAPTER 3
“RACE,” ETHNICITY, AND POSTCOLONIAL IDENTITIES IN CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE STUDIES

If we have penetrated the question of “race,” we must deny the very existence of human races and the concomitant hotchpotch of theories about racially inherited qualities, susceptibilities and memories. We must combat racialism, and its attendant inhumanity and degeneration, wherever we meet it, whether it comes from the Great Race or ourselves….That is to say we must be “racial” and anti-racial at the same time.

--Cedric Dover (1947:25; emphasis added)

Racism must be understood to be a nexus of material relations within which social and discursive practices perpetuate oppressive power relations between populations presumed to be essentially different….Therefore, race still matters in the world today because the contradictory realities of racism are being reproduced in the disjunctures of the late twentieth-century world.

--Faye Harrison (1995:65)

Introduction to “Race” in Japan

Race remains an important site of inquiry for social scientists and educators who are interested in effecting social change toward a more equitable global society. The introductory observations from two anthropologists—though separated by almost fifty years—attend to an analytic crisis that was also fervently engaged by Franz Boas earlier in the 20th century (Boas 1906, 1911; Trouillot 2003; Willis 1974). As a large part of earth’s population still believes in the myth of race that was constructed long ago (cf., Foucault 1970; Mudimbe 1988; Pratt 1992; Smedley 1993; Trouillot 2003), there is a great amount of educational and documentary work that needs to be done in order to eradicate outmoded notions that perpetuate divisions of power and subsequent social subordination. Documenting and analyzing efforts against race that simultaneously use race—as called for by Cedric Dover and Faye Harrison—marks an important trend in activist scholarship. The relationship between Hiphop and race is not outside of this research agenda. Though fairly divided in their theoretical frames, a number of scholars of anthropology, cultural studies, and linguistics have studied the significance of Hiphop in regard
to its participants’ efforts to dismantle global racialization (Dimitriadis 2001; Forman 2002; Gilroy 1993a, 1993b, 2000; Kelley 1997; Keyes 2002; Kitwana 2005; Morgan 1998, 2001, 2002, forthcoming; Potter 1995; Prevos 2001; Urla 2001). However, the significance of these efforts has not been studied among nonblack populations outside of the United States. In studies regarding nonblack Hiphop communities outside of the United States, the concepts of race and racialization have largely been evaded in preference of privileging analyses that focus on the interface of economics, US hegemony, and globalization (e.g., Condry 1999; Mitchell 1998, 2001). Such studies are incomplete without overt and detailed attention to the historical situation of race and racialization, and they do a disservice to the social science of Hiphop, which as many scholars have noted, seeks to disrupt racism as it currently exists around the globe (cf., Chang 2005; Kitwana 2002; Urla 2001).

When specifically addressing race in regard to Japan, analyses become more complex as Japan represents a site of inquiry that has multi-layered racializing and colonizing histories when analyzed in a global context. As John G. Russell (1991a, 1991b), Nina Cornyetz (1994), John Davis (2000), and Yasuko Takezawa (2006) contend, analyses regarding race and racialization, especially racialization in popular culture, are long overdue in Japanese studies. Russell (1991b) documents racist stereotyping of blackened images presented in Japanese mass culture; Cornyetz (1994) problematizes what she perceives to be the fetishization of blackness among Japanese Hiphop aficionados; Davis (2000) studies the racialization of ethnic minorities in Japan; and Takezawa (2006) theorizes about origins of race theories in Japan. In much of the remaining literature there is little social scientific attention paid to the specific ways in which race and racialization become realized through the daily practices of people living in Japan and by the Japanese state.
What makes Japan a complex case in regard to studies of race is that it is a country predominantly comprising people who were once designated as a “yellow” or “Mongoloid” race by raciologists\(^1\) (e.g., Bigland 1816; Blumenbach 1795; Coon 1981 [1950]; US FBI papers surveilling Takahashi Satohata under the direction of J. Edgar Hoover; Hooten 1946; Linnaeus 1735).\(^2\) Gerald Horne documents how Japanese people were further situated as such after WWII in the peace treaty (2002). He explains this within a context of Japanese people being marked as people of color, as there was no reference to race in the peace treaty negotiated with Germany. Horne remarks that Japanese people were specifically punished for believing their race to be superior to “the white race” (Horne 2002:37; see also Dower 1986). John Dower (1986, 1999) and Mark Gallachio (2000) also document further racialism\(^3\) toward Japanese people from the US government during WWII. FBI papers documenting US government surveillance of solidarity movements between African Americans and Japanese nationals also mark such racialization (cf., Allen 1994). Other scholars have continued to document current acts of racialization of Asians from Western sources (cf., Befu et al. 2000; Cho 1993; Dover 1947; Dower 1986; Harrison 1995; Kim 1993; Kondo 1997; Lie 2001; Okihiro 2006; Ong 1996; Widener 2003).

An example of a virulent racist act, aimed at the racialization of Japanese people, was the killing of Vincent Chin, a Chinese American murdered by white men in Michigan, who mistook

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\(^1\) Gilroy defines raciology as “the lore that brings the virtual realities of ‘race’ to dismal and destructive life” (2000:11).

\(^2\) For an anthology of similar descriptions see Augstein (1996).

\(^3\) As in Cedric Dover’s usage (1947) referenced, racialism is a synonym for racism in that is a British variant on the term. However, racialism also differs from racism as a term in that is also holds a connotation of racial considerations that are based on policy, legislation or another structural formulation of racism. “Racism” as a term is generally used throughout this text; however, I use “racialism” twice when describing two specific instances of historic racialization in government policy, following Dover.
Mr. Chin for a Japanese person, and hence representative of the threat of Japanese automobile businesses to American automobile business interests (Choy and Tajima 1989; Kim 1993). Even today, Japanese Hiphop artists can recall similar threats and racializing speech acts targeted toward them during their tenure in the United States. For example, two different Japanese Hiphop cultural workers recall trying out for commercials while living in Los Angeles and hearing those in charge of selecting actresses and actors telling everyone who is not blonde haired and blue-eyed to go home.

To further complicate racialism in a global context, recall that Japan has a complex colonial history in that it is a former colonizer (of parts of China, Korea, and Indonesia, for example)—with (depending on whose perspective one is sympathetic towards—Islanders or Mainlanders) psuedo-colonial relationships with islands that are now incorporated into its national territory, such as the Ryukyu Islands, or Okinawa (see Figure 3-1). The nation has also experienced periods of occupation in the distant past (e.g., with China) as well as more recently with the United States. This physical occupation coupled with questionable (white) Western over-representation in popular media is seen to some as a “pseudo-neo-colonial” relationship with the West (Fischer and White 2002; Life 2004). Finally, any discussion of Japanese culture should acknowledge the rise of social science literature regarding Nihonjinron (Japanese “uniqueness” theory), a discourse purporting a pure and unchanging Japanese culture, which was utilized by the state to legitimize and justify the regulation of power relations (cf., Herzfeld 1997; Weber 1968). In response, scholars (Befu 2001; Dale 1986; Goodman 1990; Lie 2001; Ryang 2004) have critiqued assumptions that Japan is composed of a socially and culturally homogenous people. In addition, there are NGOs such as IMADR-JC (International Movement Against Discrimination and Racism—Japan Committee) and the Buraku Liberation League that
monitor ICERD (the United Nations’ International Convention on the Elimination of Racism and Discrimination) enforcement in Japan (Yamanaka 2002, for an example and more discussion) and publish literature that documents racialization and discrimination (e.g., IMADR 2003; Buraku Kaiho Kenkyusho 1994; see Davis 2000 for more discussion in English).

Negroid and Mongoloid: Race as Shared Experience

Just as scholars such as Edward Said (1979) have written about the creation of the Orient in the European imagination, scholars such as V. Y. Mudimbe (1988) have written in a similar manner (elucidating genealogies of knowledge) about the invention of Africa in the Western imaginary. Likewise, the same raciologists who invented the fixed Mongoloid category also invented the static Negroid conception (e.g., Bigland 1816; Blumenbach 1795; Coon 1981 [1950]; Hooten 1946; Linnaeus 1735). Countless scholars have documented the effects of racialization and colonization as well as trans-Atlantic slavery and legacies of apartheid. Some scholars have considered the significance of studying the intersection of the African and Asian racialization over time. In an effort to differentiate and celebrate African and Asian peoples against European peoples, some of these studies have reified notions of race and essentialized difference (e.g., Rashidi and Van Sertima 1987; Smythe 1953). Some of these studies seek to raise awareness of some Japanese peoples’ ideations that reify Western constructions of black races (e.g., Cornyetz 1994; Russell 1991a, 1991b; Yamashita 1996; J. Wood 1997). Some studies

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problematize inter-racial relationships that seem to be situated around Western constructions of racial stereotypes—of both African-descendants and Asians (e.g., Kelsky 2001); others seek to unproblematize interracial relationships, while documenting the problem of racialization along the lines of Western constructions of race for children who are born of interracial relationships (e.g., Life 1995).

Other studies attempt to focus on the promise of political solidarity and transcendence of subordinating raciology by documenting various political alliances between Japanese nationals, Japanese Americans and African-descendants in the United States against white supremacy over time (Allen 1944; Dover 1947; Dower 1986; Du Bois 1990 [1903]; Fujino 1997; Horne 2002; Koshiro 2003; Nakazawa 1998; Ogbar 2001; Smythe 1953; Yoshida 1979 [1967]). Moreover, there are other studies problematizing black-white binaries that serve to perpetuate white supremacy by dividing potential political allies who are racially marked in America (Aoki 1997; Cho 1993; Dover 1947; Dower 1986; Hellwig 1977; Kim 1993; Kondo 1997). Finally, there are scholars who study popular culture as a way of gaining insight regarding processes of destabilizing racialization and raising critical cultural awareness (Atkins 2000, 2001; Kondo 1990, 1997; Sterling 2003).

Examples of Racialization of Japanese People in US Print Media

The following images were collected by John Dower and can be found in his book War without Mercy (1986:185, 187; see also Dower 1993). The links provided (Objects 3-2, 3-3 and 3-4) below are adapted from http://w00.middlebury.edu/ID085A/film/gallery2.html. The caption to Object 3-2 reads: “Cartoonist unidentified. British cartoon reprinted in a mid-1923 issue of the New York Times Magazine.”

Object 3-2 Japanese people as “brutal,” “savage,” and not human
The caption to Object 3-3 reads: “Cartoonist unidentified. Cartoon in the April 1943 New York Times, captioned ‘Let the punishment fit the crime’ (a quote from Gilbert and Sullivan’s *The Mikado*) in response to the execution of captured American fliers.”

**Object 3-3 Japanese people as “apes” or “savages” in need of “civilizing”**

The caption to Object 3-4 reads: “Cartoonist unidentified. Cartoon in the U.S. Marine monthly Leatherneck from March 1945.”

**Object 3-4 Japanese people as not human and akin to lice**

All of these images situate Japanese people as a unitary, fixed subject that is not only violent and dangerous, but also savage and not human. The imagery and language that associates the Japanese soldiers as apes is interestingly similar to imagery that was used to racialize African-descendants in historical as well as modern popular media. The image of the lice character with large front “buck” teeth is similar to racialization of other Asian nationals, such as Chinese nationals, by US popular media. These images are provided as an example of how race can be constructed as shared experience across categorizations of racial identities. Though “Asians” and “Blacks/Negroes/Africans” are racialized into different categories by raciologists, the experience of being homogenized and situated as not human can be similar (e.g., being depicted as an ape). Thus, these images, a function of nationalist discourse as well as WWII combat strategy, may help to explain why methods to resist racialization, that is, the use of black popular culture, are shared and utilized across these constructed boundaries.

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**Treatments of “Race” and “Racism” in Japanese Studies**

There are myriad approaches to the concepts of race and racism in Japanese studies. This chapter discusses dominant trends regarding race research in Japan that are characterized by: (1)
non-treatments of race that, by avoidance, risk furthering raciologist\(^6\) agendas, (2) Nihonjinron or anti-Nihonjinron literatures and other analyses of nationalist discourses, and (3) critical race studies. Some of the literatures I examine follow more than one of the aforementioned trends in their analytic approaches, and I attempt to reveal these intersections in my synthesis. I characterize the first grouping of literature as studies that do not centrally situate race as an analytical category for research and criticism (e.g., Allison 1994; Hearn 1905; Takao 1992; Varley 1984; Yoshimi 2000). The second grouping is characterized by complex (offensive–defensive) subversive strategies of simultaneously problematizing and affirming notions of racial purity, often without explicit discourse around the topics of race, racialization, and racism (e.g., Befu 2001; Creighton 2003; Dale 1986; Lie 2001; Weiner 1997, Yoshino 1992). The critical race research that I review centrally locates race as an analytical category (e.g., Dower 1986; Kondo 1997; Koshiro 1999; Horne 2004; Russell 1991b). These studies distinguish the complicated, interlocking dynamics of race from other constructions such as citizenship, class, and gender in research topics ranging from war to fashion in a manner that ultimately fleshes out issues concerning identity and power. Below, I historically situate these literatures with a short commentary, outlining major events and notable periods from just before the Meiji Restoration to present times.

On July 8, 1853, under US President Millard Fillmore, Commodore Matthew Perry led four ships loaded with guns and other artillery on a mission to force trade with Japan, which had been characterized as having a closed shogun-run government, known as bakufu. Trade with foreign Western countries, particularly European countries, was forbidden. Though trade with Asia, namely Korea and China, continued with special governmental permissions, trade with

\(^6\) “Raciologist” is the term that Paul Gilroy coins for racist race theorists, particularly those from the 18\(^{th}\) Century (Gilroy 2000).
European nations was confined to a small island off the coast of Nagasaki (Dejima), and then only with a few Dutch merchants. This trade was supposedly characterized by strong bakufu control, as the merchants were entertained and interrogated by the shogunate once a year, signs of settling were reversed and all academic studies of the Dutch closely monitored. This closed government is often reported as the result of governmental fear of colonization by a European nation, as was occurring in many Asian national neighbors (cf., the Philippines, Macao).

In 1603, the bakufu expelled European missionaries and foreign traders, and the government forbade native peoples to leave the country. All contact with foreigners was monitored and a sort of panopticism took effect (Befu 2000; Cullen 2003). Furthermore, academic studies of foreign peoples and lands were taken up for strategic purposes. It is argued that the threat of colonization by Europeans, coupled with information concerning early race theories from Europe (i.e., Mongoloid, Negroid, Caucasoid, Wild Man and Monstroid distinction; see Augstein 1996) influenced the manner in which the Meiji period government “remade” Japan in a conceptually “western” national image (cf., Dower 1993). This marks a transition in the ways that race was documented. That is, prior to this period there were folk theories of peoples, native and nonnative, but the emergence of three major races, and their hierarchical assignments, develops in literatures that emerge alongside or against the threat of colonization. For example, Lafciado Hearn documents folk theories of whiteness as threatening barbarism (Hearn 1905; Lie 2001). Likewise, John Dower observes that white Westerners were conceived as devils in different ways. He writes:

“Devilish Anglo-Americans” (kichiku Ei-Bei) was the most familiar epithet for the white foe. In graphic arts the most common depiction of Americans or British was a horned Roosevelt or Churchill, drawn exactly like the demons (oni, akuma) found in Japanese folklore and folk religion. As a metaphor for dehumanization, the demonic white man was the counterpart of the Japanese monkeyman in Western thinking, but the parallel was by no
means exact….Not all demons had to be killed; indeed, some could be won over and turned from menaces to guardians. [Dower 1993:275]

Dower continues to explain that the image of devils as well as blue-eyed barbarians from across the sea, threatening societal well-being linked with earlier conceptions of race concerning whiteness, and an essentialized notion of “Yamato-race” was invoked “from the Heavens” to fight for the eternal peace of the world (Dower 1993:276). These ideas were supported by state-led research, the construction of cultural aesthetics, and manipulations of spiritualities (namely the state-sponsored Shinto religion) with a little help from the West, in the form of German raciologist Karl Haushofer’s theories (Dower 1993:278).

State-regulated identity in Japan is very much influenced by European imperialist inventions of race that, according to Japanese historians and state documents, were communicated to government officials by at least the 17th century (Koshiro 2003). Some scholars write that missionaries brought with them the threat of colonization by European countries as early as the 16th century (cf., Befu 2000). Other scholars have produced testimonies and survey results that suggest that members of Japanese society conceptualize race in a way that is homologous to the notorious theories of three races (Augstein 1996) that evolved along with the need to industrialize and colonize (cf., Honda 1993; Koshiro 2003; Lie 2001). Therefore, one might assume that race in Japan is popularly understood through the lens of Western conventions (i.e., Mongoloid, Negroid, Caucasoid), with few discursive variations.

Ethnicity is a different matter, and it seems to be constructed by the state’s historically strategic alienation, isolation, and differentiation of particular groups of people for particular political purposes. Certain ethnic groups are at times considered to be a part of Japanese society and at other times their existence is completely ignored or denied by the Japanese state. For example, Korean identities have ranged from being ostensibly racially disparate from Japanese to
being genetically similar “cousins” to Yamato “purity” in times when Korean labor was needed for development during conspicuous colonization of Korea by Japan. Such fluctuations in nationalist discourse occur at varying moments in Japanese history, and they are usually linked to a national agenda regarding colonial policy and political expansion or seclusion. These ethnic groupings will be discussed along with race in my research, because it has been argued that ethnic groups are racialized in Japan (Befu 2000; Davis 2000; Dower 1993; Honda 1993; Koshiro 1999; Lie 2001), and my research consultants who self-identify as being part of these groups report their life experiences in racialized terms and use race metaphors.

Some scholars write that Japan’s racial and ethnic groups were identified by the government at different periods in history for the purpose of increasing legitimacy and efficacy of citizen control (Dower 1993; Koshiro 2003; Horne 2004). In modern times, the people identified as ethnic or “different” from “normal” Japanese citizens are ascribed as such in a similar manner to other former colonized peoples living in a country where their (former) colonizer is in power. For example, identity papers were not only utilized for non-whites in South Africa and the United States, but also for those identified as “non-Japanese” Japanese citizens in Japan (Lee 1994). Investigating how traditional Western (particularly US-based) Japanese studies have eschewed race issues in research, exploring official national discourses on race, i.e., Nihonjinshugi and Nihonjinron, as well as reviewing scholarship that deciphers these national discourses’ complicated connections to colonization, citizenship and socio-economic class uncovers the multilayered narratives of subjection according to ascriptions of race and racialized ethnicity.

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7 Research consultant Pioneer 5 speaks in detail about his experiences with identity papers in Chapter Four.
The studies that elide race through discourse that privileges nationality, religion, ideology, and gender seem to describe hierarchically situated difference in a manner that naturalizes power or in a way that takes social constructions of history for granted. In these studies, aberrations to norms are invisible or footnotes to other analyses. The general idea was that Japanese “Others” or “non-Japanese” Japanese people constituted such a minority that analysis of their experience would be unsustainable with data (cf., Plath and Smith 1992). In some cases euphemisms such as “ethnicity,” “caste,” “immigrant,” or “social deviant” are evoked in these evasions of racializing inter-state and intra-state identity regulation processes (cf., Plath and Smith 1992; Allison 1994; Condry 1999). David Plath (Plath and Smith 1992) prides himself on his sensitivity to diversity issues as he insisted on briefly mentioning the Burakumin in a documentary film for which he was a consultant. In many of these cases, the existence of “non-Japanese” Japanese are briefly mentioned in a page or two that critiques essentialism and often personal reactions to experiences of perceived xenophobia, then discussions of diversity are forgone in an effort to (perhaps unwittingly) homogenize one’s field site or cultural topic through the unmentioning of difference, except as it exists between the reporter and her or his unitary subject.

The general tone of these studies contributes to a fixed Japanese culture. Comments like “the Japanese seek beauty in nature not in what is enduring or permanent, but in the fragile, the fleeting, and the perishable. Above all, their feelings about nature have from earliest times been absorbed by the changes brought by seasons,” by Paul Varley (1984:43) reify singular nationalist identities without explicitly identifying with nationalist (Nihonjinron—anti-Nihonjinron) discourse (see also Kondo’s critique of ethnographers’ use of “the Japanese” 1990:46). Indeed, Varley’s text evades all discussions concerning the controversial topic, preferring instead to focus on a construction of a pre-modern “modern” Japanese cultural aesthetic that privileges
international stereotypes like *chanoyu* (tea ceremony), *ikebana* (flower arranging), and *haiku* (poetry). Varley’s text is considered part of the canon, at least in Japanese studies at American universities, as it is usually required reading for introductory classes. Thus, without mentioning racial world orders, or even orientalisms, scholars are free to perpetuate culturally political, racially imbued notions by not attending to these very subjects.

Some scholars (Allison 1994; Condry 1999; Yoshimi 2000) critique nationalist discourses, policies, and practices regarding homogeneity, but they do not directly report on issues of race and ethnicity in their ethnography and, therefore, their reportage, though theoretically useful (e.g., Allison’s 1994 Lacanian analysis of the construction of gender in hostess clubs), seems to take for granted the idea of Japan as a homogenous society or as a realistic and viable norm. For example, when I have come into contact with nonnative Japanese ethnographers, I am often asked how I am able to do fieldwork in Japan, since “Japan is racist.”8 In defense of this generalization, people cite the racist statements9 from Prime Minister Nakasone or the Congressional Black Caucus’s activism following similar racist comments from a number of state officials in the 1990s. Outside of identifications that position Japanese people in opposition

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8 I now have a witty soundbite or response from Chuck D that is on par with Erving Goffman’s observation (1963:136) regarding society and spoiled identities, which is, “Somebody says Japan is racist? That’s like saying Africa is backward. You gotta consider the source” (Chuck D, Interview 9/2003).

9 For example, on September 21, 1990, Mr. Kajiyama made the following declaration after visiting a district in Tokyo mainly populated by Japanese sex workers: “It is like a bad currency driving out a good currency…It is like in America when neighborhoods become mixed because blacks move in and whites are forced out…they ruin the neighborhood in the same way.” (Russell 1992:230-231). During a speech in 1986, Mr. Nakasone remarked, “in America, there are many blacks, Puerto Ricans and Mexicans, and on average America’s level (of intelligence) is still extremely low” (Ivy 1989:22).
to foreigners—and black people in particular\textsuperscript{10}—“othernesses” inside Japan seem invisible to some researchers (aside from a “shout out” here and there). This could be because many racialized bodies in Japan “pass” (cf., Butler 1993; Muñoz 1999), obscure, or hide their state-regulated identities (Lie 2001). However, like Paul Varley (1984), the language of reportage appears fixed and thus, it undermines the few critiques within the texts that attend to the “myths” of Japanese racial purity. Japan, as a singular geopolitical entity (Kondo 1997), was the Other in question, what Harumi Befu (1992) calls \textit{Japonica Exotica}, the intellectual explorer’s final frontier, and homogenizing its state-served Western imperial efforts in a specific Cold War era. Perhaps by identifying other “Others” within the Other, the Other ceases to exist—as it can no longer be homogenized and fixed into being. The construction and perpetuation of a unified Other serves particular political purposes that benefit a global economy built on exploitation.

Despite the multiple claims from official representatives of the Japanese state as well as various scholars who specialize in Japanese studies and even some of the cultural workers cited in later chapters, Japan does not constitute a “monoethnic” or “homogenous” society. Like most former colonies and colonizers, the state is quite diverse, marked with cultural, economic, geopolitical, sexual, and socially constructed racial differences that are situated in an explicit, though not always “official,” hierarchical manner. Some scholars attempt to substantiate their claims for Japan’s quintessential monolithic society by pointing to fixed tropes such as “the salaryman” (\textit{=sarariman}) image promoted in popular media or highlighting the pre-Meiji sakoku (closed government) policy (Reischauer 1989), while others maintain that the construction of Japan as a homogenous society is a 20th century phenomenon (Dower 1993; Honda 1993; Lie 2001; Weiner 1997). The latter perspective posits that narratives of homogeneity were

\textsuperscript{10} This premise assumes, for example, that there are not ‘black’ (UN-defined African-descendant) Japanese citizens, for that matter.
constructed to serve the nation-building efforts and to address the state-identity crisis that ensued after the people of Japan survived two atomic bomb attacks (=near genocide?), a confusing post-World War II war crimes trial, governmental restructuring, and US occupation (Dower 1999; Lie 2001).

While there were official policies in place to assimilate diverse interests into one dominant perspective that particularly supported the welfare and state leadership of a dominant group—the so-called Yamato clan—this was done in an effort to build a unified nation during the Tokugawa era as well as to build an empire during the Meiji Restoration (cf., Anderson 1991). Despite an official “closed government” (=sakoku) policy during the Tokugawa era, the ruling class engaged in active trade with neighboring nations such as Taiwan, Ryukyu, et cetera (Lie 2001). Because of strict hierarchic social class strata and regional variety, linguistic and cultural diversity abounded and difference was interpreted through an imported lens of race (Koshiro 2003:203-204) for the purpose of legitimizing control. European theorists’ ideas of purity and national identity were translated through discursive turns that excavated “ancient” texts that told Japan’s national genealogy through poetry and prose (cf., the Kojiki 712 AD and Nihonshiki 720 AD). Most notable is the story of the sun goddess, Amaterasu, from whom the imperial family is purportedly descended. By rallying unity around nostalgic entertainment (cf., waka, tanka, and haiku) we see the conjunction of constructed cultural aesthetics, domestic citizen control, and colonial expansionist efforts.  

The pre-World War version of this discourse is termed Nihonshugi, and the highly performative “rebirth” of the Emperor Matsuhito and the re-centering of Shinto (as opposed to Buddhism) as an almost singular nationalist religion emerges to support this ideology (Lie 2001).

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11 I found it noteworthy that discourse utilized by the Japanese government for citizen control, raciology, and colonial pursuits is the same discourse introduced as “authentic” Japan in introductory undergraduate Japanese studies texts (c.f., Varley 1984).
The later version of constructed cultural aestheticism to partner with nationalist discourse in a post WWII era, *Nihonjinron*, can be observed in the novels of Junichiro Tanizaki (e.g., *In Praise of Shadows*) and Yukio Mishima (e.g., *Mediocrity*). The proletarian women’s journal *Seito* was constructed during the Taisho period in an effort to voice dissent to nationalizing efforts that seemed to be premised on the subjugation of Asian neighbors via invasion and occupation (Tanaka 1987). According to Harumi Befu’s view of this history:

As soon as Japan began to acquire colonies—Taiwan in the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-95, Sakhalin Island as a result of the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-1905, and Korea in 1905 through a rather dubious treaty—these colonies began to be peopled by the Japanese…Japanese dispersal also took place in areas occupied by the Japanese army, including Manchuria, where they established a puppet government, coastal China, and insular and continental Southeast Asia. Some went as farmers, as in Manchuria, recruited from eastern and northern Japan through the enticement of the Japanese government, only to be betrayed and to suffer unimaginable hardship at the end of the War [WWII]. By 1945, millions of Japanese were residing over a vast expanse of Asia. Even the coastal cities of Siberia had Japanese communities with thousands of residents….Resource-poor Japan felt that it needed to secure territories rich in resources in order for its own capitalism to flourish. [2000:23-24]

It should be noted that this capitalist, colonial expansion and occupation spanned to the Malay Peninsula, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam (Befu 2000). In times of intense colonial pursuits, national discourse was ambivalent toward notions of homogeneity in that multi-nationalism in the spirit of nationalist “empire-building” was considered for the good of the people of Japan. The Japanese government at these times also boasted ethnic diversity and increased efforts to incorporate “racial others” under its state control through active colonization of Korea, Taiwan, Manchuria, Ezoku (now Hokkaido, the northern most island in the Japanese archipelago), and Ryukyu Islands (namely Okinawa) during the Meiji Restoration (Dower 1986). For example, the state identification that once dehumanized Koreans switched to an idea that the two nationalities “were not so different after all” (the lore was that long ago they were descended from the same bloodline). This was done through market-driven policy based on labor shortages
and the need for the exchange of bodies across Korean and Japanese borders (Lie 2001). At this time, the official nationalizing discourse not only situated Japan as the superior leader of its Asian “siblings” (e.g., the East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere), but it also secured Japan as playing an active role in “dismantling white supremacy” by uniting the “darker races” of the world (Allen 1994; Dower 1986, 1993; Gallachio 2000; Horne 2002, 2004; Koshiro 1999, 2003; Lie 2001).

Such nationalizing discourse uses imported notions of race from the West to simultaneously legitimize imperial control of neighboring Asian nations as well as to stave off impending imperial control from the United States and other European nations (Dower 1993, Horne 2004). Researching and cataloging information on other colonized peoples of the world in research documents such as *An Investigation of Global Policy with Yamato Race as Nucleus* was part of this project (Dower 1986, 1993). Therefore, the national discourse not only challenged the stasis of the Western construction of “yellowness,” but it also sought to displace other color stratifications on the racial hierarchy (including “other Asians” and “Negroes”), all the while reproducing the supremacy of “whiteness” as “not-quite whiteness” as the goal (Kondo 1997). Thus, the nationalizing discourse seems to allude to a sort of conscious and not-so-conscious conversation between the Japan and Western imperial nations. That is, the rhetoric regarding race in Japan was clearly marked at specific moments in time in reaction to interaction with the West, and it continues to echo aspects of this highly racialized relationship in current times.

As a result of colonial pursuits, US-occupation, Western European buyouts of major companies, and increased immigrant labor due to increases in labor shortages, the Japanese

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12 This sentiment is almost identical to the American government’s ambivalence regarding Japanese during occupation. As Dower succinctly outlines the changing Japanese national discourse toward Korean identity, Japanese people went from “yellow peril” and “monkey men” to “little misbehaving brothers” in need of guidance and control (Dower 1999:185).
government has very recently (2003) moved to identify more national “minorities”—who are discussed by many scholars via ethnicity or class though these people live a very racialized experience (Davis 2000; Honda 1993; Lie 2001). The government identifies Chinese, Korean, Nikkei (specifically, Japanese Peruvians or Japanese Brazilians), Burakumin, Filipinos, Okinawans, and Ainu (Kashiwazaki 2002; Linger 2001; Tsuda 2003; Weiner 1997). According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in 2000, approximately 1,686,444 foreigners resided in Japan. This means that 2% of the population of Japan was “foreigner” (see Figure 3-5 at the end of this chapter). This does not include numbers of Japanese people who do not enjoy full citizenship rights (e.g., Buraku Japanese, Chinese Japanese, Korean Japanese, Ainu Japanese, Okinawan/Ryukyuan Japanese, etc.). Though recently legally secured, those who enforce the law are slow to respond (see Pioneer 5’s story in the next chapter). However, activists who fight against racial discrimination in Japan have been innovative in securing rights for those who reside in Japan’s counterpublic sphere. The recent triumph of the law suit filed by Brazilian journalist and legal resident of Japan, Ana Bortz, regarding ethnic discrimination based on the United Nations’ ICERD declaration that Japan signed in 1995, presents much promise for the future of educational and social equity for racialized peoples in Japan (Yamanaka 2002). This case demonstrates that people may not have to rely solely on the Japanese government for change.

13 The use of “Japanese” as part of a compound word with these ethnic identifications (e.g., Korean Japanese) is contested. In general, younger people (under 19 years of age in 2007) I have worked with refer to themselves using ethnic identifications with and without “Japanese” tacked on the end. My age mates and older who do not “pass” tend not to attach “Japanese.”

14 (International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination)

15 Article 14 of the Japanese Constitution states a premise similar to ICERD, “All of the people are equal under the law and there shall be no discrimination in political, economic, or social relations because of race, creed, sex, social status, or family origin” (quoted in Koshiro
John Lie (2001) regards Japanese categorizations of people as Japanese people (Nihonjin) and foreign people (gaijin). He differentiates Japanese racialized thinking from his understanding of Western racialized thinking in that “everyone is some sort of jin [=people]” (2001:145), but he also notes that this premise is not always repeated in practice by the Japanese state, by not allowing citizenship, not guaranteeing full civil rights in areas such as law and education, nor recognizing historical relationships. Not all citizens are linguistically marked as jin in Japanese (e.g., Ainu, Okinawa no hito, Burakumin), and they are therefore not really conceptualized as some sort of jin, perhaps because they are considered a lesser part of the greater Japanese race. Lie cites racial thinking collected from his sociological surveys that echo raciological premises:

Blacks (kokujin) are distinguished from Americans because Amerikajin are taken to be white. Although many people are aware that blacks in Japan are often African Americans, the dominant ethnoracial classification consigns them to a different category of peoplehood. The same confusion occurs at times for Jewish Americans, who are often referred to as yudayajin (Jews). Some Japanese divide the world into three major races white (hakujin), black (kokujin) and yellow (ooshokujin), but they are often not very consistent in applying this racial scheme. Although they may be comfortable about dividing foreigners into these three races, they are reluctant to cast Japanese people into any of them. [2001:147]

Indeed, John G. Russell not only emphasizes a similar lack of serious racial critique in Japanese Studies, but he also catalogues the correspondence between governmental officials and civil rights activists who protested such comments by these Japanese governmental officials (Russell 1991a, 1991b). Though most likely for propagandist efforts, this has not always been the case in historical narratives. Indeed, scholars note how state-regulated discourses have also represented victimized national identities (e.g., after denial of the racial equality proposal by the League of 1999:106). However, like similar laws in the United States that posit human equality, Article 14 is routinely ignored and not practiced, thus the experiences of discrimination described in this research project.
Nations, in the Hiroshima aftermath, etc.; see Dower 1993; Koshiro 2003; Iida 2002; Shimazu
1998). Naoko Shimazu comments:

Prime Minister Hara, who came into power in September 1918, was determined that Japan
should adopt a pro-Western (obei kyocho) foreign policy at the forthcoming peace
conference. This was due to the fact that the previous wartime governments under Prime
Ministers Okuma and Terauchi had followed expansionist policies, which had the effect of
alienating Japan from the United States and Britain. In order to steer Japan back to the
West, Hara was determined to support the creation of the League of Nations at the peace
conference in spite of the not insignificant degree of skepticism expressed towards it
domestically….In light of the situation, it can be reasonably constructed that the racial
equality proposal had the role of appeasing these opponents by making Japan’s acceptance
of the League conditional on having a racial equality clause inserted into the covenant of

Yukiko Koshiro (1999, 2003) is confident that not all of Japan’s international moves for racial
equality and solidarity are without substance, and she echoes modern sentiments concerning
globalization-from-below. Regarding coalitions for movement building, she cites transnational
Marxist movements, and critiques the subversion of these literatures, which document such
movement-building processes, by pro-capitalist governments, like the US State Department. For
example, consider the near erasure of E.H. Norman’s oeuvre in Japanese studies. With the
exception of a few anthologies (e.g., Bowen 1987; Dower 1975) and websites (e.g., University of
Victoria E. H. Norman Digital Archive http://web.uvic.ca/ehnorman/index.html) dedicated to
excavating Norman’s scholastic and diplomatic contributions, Norman was generally reduced to
da discussion of his politics, exile, and eventual suicide (1957), which was attributed to stress he
was under after seven years of being targeted by McCarthyism—he was accused of being
communist and a spy (cf., Harootunian 1988; Plath and Smith 1992). While more information
concerning Norman’s scholarship is available for students of Japanese studies in more recent
years, the trend to emphasize pro-capitalist political economic studies of Japan over alternative
views—be they through academic funding or frequent appearances on syllabi—still prevails.
Koshiro (1999, 2003) considers whether some of the absence of reports and literature concerning
Japanese national and African-American solidarity movement building could be due to the anti-capitalist sentiments of the organizers and spokespeople involved. Indeed, during many interviews with Japanese national activists from salient social movements in Japan (such as the peace movement and Ryukyu/Okinawa anti-base social movements), I asked where I can find literature to cite that tells their stories, and most replied that there wasn’t any or that they don’t exist yet (=nai). One commented that one could receive social and economic discrimination from writing about such topics because they often coincide with other anti-capitalist movements of the time (the 1960s and 1970s). An exception to these reports is the Burakamin social movement which has published a lot of literature documenting their discrimination and movement building processes (cf., Buraku Liberation Research Institute 1994). Many of activists who cut their political teeth in the 1960s and 1970s in various student- and other social movements said that they were inspired to build social movements in Japan that were in solidarity with their understanding of pre-existing black social movements in the Americas, specifically the US. Many state that they were inspired not only by narratives regarding enslaved African revolts, but also the work and rhetoric of groups like the Black Panther Party. A few elder activists that I interviewed remembered reading about African-American leaders ranging from Elijah Muhammad to W. E. B. Du Bois, and they expressed a shared experience of “tyranny from the US” as well as promises of success securing social equality if Japanese nationals and African Americans were to “organize together politically.” Regarding this imagined promise of African-American and Japanese national solidarity, Koshiro states the following:

In 1923, critic Akamatsu Katsumaro predicted in Kaizo [Reconstruction], Japan’s leading intellectual journal, that African Americans would eventually help overthrow Japan’s Pan-Asianism as part of their racial-proletarian movement. Nationalistic struggles in the contemporary world were by nature racial, he argued. Because Japan’s Pan-Asianism was a mere disguise for Japan’s dogma of its own racial supremacy, he claimed, it was time for Asia to wage its true racial fight—one both anti-imperial and proletarian. To do so,
according to Akamatsu, the alliance with African Americans was indispensable. [2003:192]

Due to recent publications by historians such as John Dower (1999), Gerald Horne (2004) and Yukiko Koshiro (2003), more critical race research and information is reaching a broader academic audience. Social scientists are also critiquing the aforementioned trend to promote English-centered and economic-based studies of Japan, that often do not take into account the intricate ways that race works across geopolitical and linguistic boundaries. Citing trends toward English-centered, capitalist-biased, race-evaded research dominance in Japanese studies, Susan Klein offers the following advice concerning scholars’ “overcoming the traditional Eurocentrist perspective” in the field. She writes:

Since its encounter with the West, Japan has tended to be viewed as “alien,” “exotic,” or just “different.” The same biased attitude has been common in studies of Japan’s foreign policy. So far there are only very few Western studies of Japan’s international role that have based their observations and conclusions on material written by Japanese in the Japanese language and have dealt with how the Japanese perceive their country’s international position and role. [2002:178; see also Williams 199]

I would add that with the exception of a few scholars (Kondo 1997), much of the ethnographic work in English concerning Japan does not seriously or adequately consider race as analytical category—though issues of orientalism, racism, and linguicism (as part of a postcolonial condition) are present in many of these analyses. The bulk of social science literature regarding Japan emerged around the World Wars—particularly in the form of national character studies from scholars in the United States (e.g., Benedict 1946; Gorer 1953). These national character studies explicitly served government intelligence purposes and have been critiqued for being not only at times wrongheaded, but also ethnocentric, if not racist (Neiburg and Goldman 1998; Kelly 1991). It has been argued that these works supported the basic premise of domination in times of war—especially wars in which racial rhetoric plays an important role (for Japan terms like “monkey men” are of salience, see Dower 1999). The core of Japan specialists were trained
during the post-WWII occupation era, and their studies were largely influenced by pro-capitalist ideologies and evolutionary ideas of culture. Studies that did not fit this trend were marginalized, as Dower points out in his introduction to E. H. Norman’s work (Dower 1975) explaining how this particular scholar was the target of McCarthyism and his work—which was not necessarily capitalist-centered—was ignored and almost erased from Japanese studies.

Western research concerning Japan is often divided into two categories, Japanese studies of the United States, Canada, and Britain, and Japanology of continental Europe (Befu 1992). It is argued that scholars from non-Western countries (e.g., Korea, India, Kenya, Brazil) are often trained by elite Western-centered institutions in their native countries or they study Japan from departments abroad (Befu 1992).\(^{16}\) Japanology is differentiated from Japanese studies in that the former is considered more philological in frame. The Japanese studies category has been criticized for having a political economic (and thus, strategic) approach to even the most banal topics of study (Befu 1992; Williams 1996). Furthermore, the bulk of these studies has been problematized due to lack of linguistic and cultural knowledge of fieldworkers to collect sufficient data that supports proposed paradigms (Befu 1992; Lie 2001). Moreover, how is it possible to engage in one social construction, i.e., gender or citizenship, without investigating how this concept intersects with overarching identifications such as race? That is, Japan, fixed as a geo-political entity in dominant Western imaginaries, is racialized just as it is feminized in the global world order and in public, policy, and academic discourse: it was “penetrated” by the West; the “Yellow Peril” is out of control, et cetera. With many of these factors (post-War conqueror-dominated relationship, lack of linguistic and cultural relevancy, political-economic bias) affecting the bulk of modern Western scholarship on Japan, it should be no surprise that

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\(^{16}\) This has not been my experience, but I suppose I represent a different generation of scholars than those discussed in such syntheses (cf., Befu 1992).
nationalist discourses of racial, ethnic, and linguistic homogeneity, tropes of Japan as an exotic “Other,” and Japan as “late-developer” or NIC are reproduced manifold in Western treatments of Japan, even when the authors of such research intend or purport to avoid such subjects.

From Burakumin to Blackface: The Performance of Race and Promise of Transcendence

Japan’s domestic practice concerning racialization has historically been an underreported phenomenon; however, recent scholarship attends to these issues (Davis 2000; Horne 2004; Kondo 1997; Koshiro 1999; Lie 2001; Weiner 1997). As mentioned before, underneath the layer of Japan’s racialization as a geopolitical entity, lies its own domestic racial policy concerning the construction of alienated groups that range from former colonial subjects (e.g., Koreans, Chinese, Ryukyuans, Filipinos, and Ainu people) to historically disenfranchised people (e.g., Burakumin) and racially mixed individuals or foreigners (e.g., Japanese-Brazilians, Japanese-Peruvians, daaburu individuals [people with multiple ethnoracial heritages], as well as other Asian- and African-nationals). The current educational debates surrounding Japanese as a Second Language curriculum for Nikkei and the former unequal treatment of Korean high-school graduates wishing to take college entrance exams without first taking a high-school equivalency exam (daiken) are just a few of the social justice issues that reach print media.

The aforementioned alienated groups experience discrimination that ranges from the structural to the personal. The Korean schools previously mentioned were some of many schools affected by the Japanese government’s decision to exempt Western non-Japanese schools from taking a high school equivalency examination (daiken) before taking college entrance examinations, whereas non-Western (Asian) ethnic minority schools did not enjoy the same exemption. After much protest, the government extended the exemption to the non-Western ones as well; however, the media coverage surrounding these events afforded cultural workers and others the opportunity to learn about gross disparities between ethnic minority schools and other
Japanese public schools as well as the lack of much-needed funding to keep these schools running and to extend much-needed social welfare programs to their constituents. Furthermore, there are countless stories of young children and adolescents experiencing persistent harassment and instances of physical brutality during integrative efforts into Japanese schools or society from Japanese-citizen schoolmates and other persons in their communities. Some of the people I have worked with remain scarred, both emotionally and physically, from such egregious and often unpunished attacks. When discussing my research topic with a fellow activist and agemate who is of Korean descent yet born in Japan, I was told that although some of the people I work with who share her heritage may call themselves “Korean-Japanese,” she maintains that she is “Korean” despite being born in Japan. She recounted several instances of abuse she endured growing up Korean and showed me several scars from wounds that she received as well.

Another popular print media topic concerning race and racism in Japan is the reportage covering the subcultures of people who alter their bodies through tanning, lip collagen injections and adopting kinky hair styles and the entertainers who actually apply blackface and body make-up as they perform music or dance associated with African-American culture (usually soul or gospel). These people, the *ganguro* (the former) and blackface performers (the latter), are often read as not necessarily mocking blackness, but also not fully understanding and respecting black diasporic experiences, a prerequisite for full participation in authentic or real Hiphop culture, according to dominant origins narratives. Those who are considered mocking blackness (such as news anchors or talk show hosts in government-run television from the 1980s and 1990s who donned blackface), are shunned and described as racists who are common enemies to Japanese national Hiphop artists. *Ganguro* subculture and the entertainers who wear blackface do not receive a uniform response from the cultural workers I interviewed, however. Some artists
described the trends as racist, and others explained that while these subcultural choices do not appeal to their personal aesthetics, they think that the people who participate in it actually respect black culture—that *ganguro* and entertainers’ attempts to *embody* what they perceive as black culture is indicative of their rejection of white culture. One African-American cultural worker who lives in Japan described *ganguro* as follows:

I think it’s kind of fading away a little bit…. And it’s not even focused toward trying to be black anymore as much. I mean, they’re not even from this planet anymore. They just like—they got the dark skin, they got like some kind of fluorescent, kind of like, make-up on, you know the little sparkles or stuff like that…. So it’s not even so much about them trying to be black anymore. It’s just about them trying to be different. You know? Yeah, that’s what it’s all about. At first, it might have been because they wanted to try to be black, but now, because Hiphop has grown so much in Japan and that has become a subculture, in and of itself, they don’t want to associate with that, if they’re not part of that. They just wanna have their own thing, so the *ganguro* have taken it to a new level.

Another resident African-American cultural worker asked why people in the US were very interested in *ganguro*, but were not questioning the persistent presence of white characters in *anime* (=cartoons) and *manga* (=comics). Indeed, it seems that in popular print media in the US, *ganguro* have not been differentiated from the performers who actually don black paint, either on television or in live entertainment. In addition, the *ganguro* phenomenon is discussed in problematic terms, while the pervasive white images in cartoons are left unmarked and unproblematized. There are others who are not exactly fully within either subgroup of racist popular cultural figures performing minstrelsy on television, *ganguro*, or the entertainers who wear blackface. These individuals might wear a hairstyle borrowed from African-American style, such as locs, afros, or braids, or they may wear certain clothing associated with African-American style and these individuals are usually described as honoring African-American culture, trying to be different from dominant Japanese culture, or performing fashion in a strategic attempt to reject whiteness (e.g., wearing braids to protest a popular trend that situates blond hair as optimal).
While cultural workers whom I have worked with claim to fight against the performance of blackface, some of them have been loosely affiliated with Hiphop dance groups that at one point in their careers have donned blackface and performed slowed or slurred Japanese speech, which I understood to be similar to US representations of “Sambo” and “Stepin Fetchit” among other negative stereotypes (Russell 1991b). Such affiliations have been difficult to uncover during this research. While, to my knowledge, no one whom I’ve ever worked with actually put on blackface, it seems that certain peoples’ crews were affiliated with those who did at least 15 years ago. Recently, I was appalled to find that two Hiphop dancers/choreographers whose crew is “down” or on positive acquaintance terms with a pioneer’s dance crew that I interviewed were on Japanese national television in the early 1990s performing Hiphop dance styles with dark brown makeup on their face and using explicitly slow and slurred Japanese speech, as if they were Japanese language performances of Step’n Fetchit characters. I had explicitly asked the pioneer about blackface when we spoke, and he never mentioned any affiliation with this group. This particular pioneer spoke against such performances, but also explained that not everybody who did them understood the historical racist implications of what it was that they were doing. Instead of a hate crime, he said these people viewed themselves as comedic, and they needed to be taught or reeducated not to do such things. It is disheartening to learn of a possible affiliation between these groups rather than to be told upfront, but it also seems that these performances are the source of deep shame and embarrassment. This recent discovery reminds me of when European American US Hiphop artist Eminem’s adolescent recordings of him referring to black people as “niggers” and black women as “bitches” in a rap were discovered and disseminated by The Source magazine with commentary from Nikki Giovanni and Bob Law in February 2004.17

17 The exact quotes from Eminem are that he had an aversion to “girls” with large behinds
It took so many by surprise because Eminem had stated so many times to the press that he doesn’t use the pejorative “N” word and that he would never use the pejorative “N” word in a song lyric. Like Eminem, many artists that I worked with reject blackface performance and other disrespectful actions toward black people, so it was surprising to find that someone that I talked to about it has at least a crew affiliation with people who have performed in this manner in the past.

Alternatively, this discovery also reminds me of the first rapper I met in 1994 who absolutely did not condone this form of minstrelsy, and was upfront about the continued presence of such occurrences on television during my stay that year. This artist recommended that I read the work of John G. Russell (1991b) that discussed this phenomenon. This artist’s verbal commitment to academic and activist work against this phenomenon (via his reference to Russell’s book and his organization, JAFA—Japan African-American Friends Association) further helped me to not homogenize all performances of blackness as denigrating African-descent identities. Nevertheless, while more recent (2006-2007) manifestations of blackface have occurred among gospel and soul step performers, I can attest that this was part of the practice among some self-identified Hiphop artists as late as the 1990s.

Blackface and other symbols of minstrelsy on television, consumer products and advertisement are not the only forms of racism against African Americans in Japan. Honda Katsuichi comments, “Whether it is a stereotype about blacks or whites, the Japanese people have been brainwashed by the perspective of the white world” (1993:103). He explains, “When a white GI gets drunk and makes a scene, the Japanese people say, ‘The GI is getting drunk!’ But because “that’s some nigger shit.” He also says the following lines referring to black women: “black girls only want your money ’cause they’re dumb chicks,” “black girls and white girls just don’t mix because black girls are dumb and white girls are good shit,” and “get straight to the point, black girls are bitches.”
if it is a black GI, they think, ‘The black is getting drunk!!’” (1993:102). Though Honda’s own language tends to homogenize and totalize Japanese people as all being racist, his criticism is astute in that the racial marking through language that he reveals in his story also abounds in the US and other parts of the world. Honda shares another narrative to bring home how the racialization of Koreans in Japan is relational to antiblack racism:

At one time, the white female student was teaching English to office workers in a bank. Once, she introduced her roommate to one of the male office workers. Confused after finding out that her roommate was a black woman, he asked the white woman, “How am I supposed to treat her? Should I treat her like a servant, or should I treat her in the same way a Japanese would treat a Korean?” In this way, the white student inadvertently found out that this office worker also harbored extreme racial prejudice against Koreans. [Honda 1993]

Honda published this account in 1971, and there are probably individuals and even government officials who exist in various countries that share the sentiments of the racist office worker. The stories presented in Chapters Four and Five serve to offer alternative perspectives than those generally reported on in the media. There are numerous accounts of self-hate as well as hatred of “others” recorded in popular media, but stories of solidarity building among racialized “others” does not seem to be as popular (cf. Bandung). The story of Hiphop is at times a story of solidarity and social movement-building among racialized “others” or those who are articulating an opposition to worldwide racism and other forms of injustice (such as classism and xenophobia). Before continuing with the often untold stories of unity, I summarize below accounts concerning racism experienced by myself as well as other African-descendants that I have interviewed over the years. Thus, the bulk of the research presented through this project is not shared in an effort to evade anti-African-descendant sentiments by some Japanese people or even structural laws that do not uphold social equality for African-descendants.

I have recorded stories of struggles from both African Americans as well as African-descendants as they strive to obtain work visas or immigrate to Japan for entrepreneurial
purposes. Understanding that Japan’s immigration policy is closed in general, my white American and Canadian colleagues and artisans have not experienced the same difficulties that my African and African-American colleagues have. Many African-American Hiphop professionals have described the grueling experience of having to leave and come back every 90 days in order to do their work as choreographers or teachers because of difficulties obtaining work visas. Many have described experiences of being harassed at Narita Airport about their business in Japan. One African-American Hiphop professional explained that his experience became more friendly when he cut off his long locs (=hairstyle) and began to don a more “conservative” look. This Hiphop professional talked about coded rhetoric against “blackened” peoples in the media that was similar to what we experience in the United States, in that “when a black person does a crime, they also mention that the person was black, but if the person is Japanese or white they don’t mark them like that.” I have noticed similar practices toward Koreans and other racialized “others” in Japan. African-American corporate professionals have recounted hearing insulting speech from colleagues that seems to question their humanity (e.g., “Do you bruise?”) as well as difficulty receiving help from governmental officials such as the police when crimes have been committed against them or their family members living in Japan. Another account of “everyday racism” from a Hiphop professional was his observation of people’s unwillingness to sit next to him even when trains were crowded (in non metropolitan areas), and people, usually children, pointing at him and saying “kowai” (=scary). Finally, everyone complains about the taxis in metropolitan areas. It can be very difficult to get a taxi if one is dressed in nonconservative attire.

Do any of the experiences previously explained sound familiar? Africans-nationals explained that they had difficulty immigrating to Japan. African-descendants shared that they
experienced (1) lack of assistance from police, (2) difficulty catching taxis, (3) difficulty receiving work permits or government assistance on entrepreneurial efforts, (4) harassment at airports, (5) character assassination and racial marking through language in the media, (6) public epithets, and (7) fear of black bodies, especially touching black bodies. Academicians such as Gerald Early and actors such as Danny Glover have written about experiencing these same things in the United States. Early writes about being harassed by police in Frontenac shopping mall, and Danny Glover was unable to hail a taxi. Both situate their experience as antiblack racism. Rapper Mos Def says that airport harassment is so common that he gives the process a name: “world nigga law.” He raps:

They stay on nigga patrol on American roads
And when you travel abroad they got world nigga law
Some folks get on a plane go as they please
But I go over seas and I get over-seized
London, Heathrow, me and my people
They think that illegal's a synonym for Negro
Far away places, customs agents flagrant
They think the dark face is smugglin weight in they cases
Bags inspected, now we arrested
Attention directed to contents of our intestines
Urinalysis followed by X-rays
Interrogated and detained til damn near the next day
No evidence, no apology and no regard
Even for the big American rap star
For us especially, us most especially
A “Mr Nigga” VIP jail cell just for me
“If I knew you were coming I’d have baked a cake”
[Instead] Just got some shoe-polish and painted my face"
They say they want you successful, but then they make it stressful
You start keepin pace, they start changin up the tempo [Mos Def 1999; emphasis added]

Indeed, though the African-nationals and African Americans that I interviewed in Japan admit that they have experienced racism, most state that it is not different from what they generally experience in other parts of the world, especially the United States. Interestingly, many compare the accounts of racism they experience in Japan to racism that they experience in the United
States. Many state that what they experience in Japan is more benign or less psychically violent, and they have chosen to become permanent residents of Japan based on this idea. These individuals generally state that the experiences of discrimination that they have experienced are minimal and that their overall experiences in Japan have been welcoming and affirming enough for them to move their homes permanently. This view is an important one that is often left out of the “Japan is racist” narrative.

My own experiences have been a mix of those recounted. As I age, perform different classes, and obtain more degrees, my treatment by those outside of the Hip hop community has changed. When I first arrived in Japan in 1994, I immediately noticed a difference from my home community, which was then located in the Ozarks region of Missouri in the United States, in that black popular music was playing everywhere. I heard it in shopping malls, coffee shops, restaurants and even from stores that one passes by as one walks down the street. Black popular culture was banned from much of the public sphere where I grew up in the US. Radio stations rarely played anything other than white country, rock, and Christian music. There was even a law that banned my agemates and me from driving down the streets playing rap music too loudly. We were not harassed if we played country music, but we were pulled over immediately if we played rap music.

Despite the obvious popularity of black popular music, my everyday experience was marked with a substantial amount of racial and sexual harassment in Japan. As I commuted to school, I experienced verbal and physical sexual harassment. When I asked elders in my community why I was experiencing such horrible things, I was told that there was a large number of sex workers from the Philippines, Brazil, and Dominican Republic who look like me, and that the culprits must be mistaking me for one of them because of my skin tone and the fact
that my uniform was extremely tight and short, ill-fitting on my body. I was appalled and unsatisfied with this explanation. However, my identification as a possible sex worker rather than an exchange student did not dissolve until about eight years later. When I was conducting fieldwork at clubs, it would be difficult to get taxis in certain areas. My colleague Bianca White experienced this with me as well when we were filming, and it was very frustrating. In addition, many taxi drivers refused to believe that I was staying where I was staying because my brother and his wife lived in a very affluent area of Minato-ku, Tokyo. Taxi drivers would waste my money driving around, ignoring my instructions in Japanese because they didn’t believe that I could possibly live where I said I did. One taxi driver insinuated that I was a sex worker going to visit a client and that’s why I wanted to go to this certain neighborhood. Because of these numerous experiences, I began entering taxis with a pre-prepared speech in Japanese about my purpose for being in Japan and why I stay where I stay. When I was too tired or irritated to give this speech, I would simply perform the eccentric foreign tourist script and ask to be taken to the shrine next door to my residence, even if it was afterhours.

Oddly, subsequent visits did not include such experiences. I attribute some of this to my aging, and changes in fashion choices (slacks and button up shirts rather than jeans and casual or club shirts). Rather than being suspiciously grilled about my line of work, taxi drivers began to ask in friendly tones if I was a model or a business executive. As I have aged, my perceived class has changed. I also spend less time outside of my Hiphop enclave, which has always served as a “safezone” from racial and sexual harassment. Indeed, the reason I sought out and found this community in the first place was in an effort to seek shelter from experiences of racism and sexism in Japan in 1994. However, it is important to note that my experiences of racism and sexism have diminished in Japan over time, and at no point were they any more egregious than
the violations that I experience in the United States as well as in many countries in Europe and even parts of the Caribbean, such as Cuba.

I share the stories of the people I’ve worked with to offer an alternative narrative to those we hear in the public sphere. I wish to share insights from a Hiphop community that are different from Nakasone’s comments or even the performers of blackface that occupy media attention so often. I hope to resist the totalizing trope of “Japan as racist” or even “Japan as sexist.” My experiences in Japan reflect many of those told to me by African-national and African Americans living in Japan. While these experiences involve encounters of racism that are very painful and upsetting, our experiences are generally no different from encounters of racism and sexism in other parts of the world, including the United States. Moreover, our collective experiences in the Hiphop community have been positive and solid. Indeed, often the very racism and sexism that I have experienced as a black woman in Japan, Europe, or the United States attacks my Japanese interlocutors in similar ways.

Cultural workers whom I have interviewed explain racism through claims that many members of the Japanese government as well as its citizenry are “brainwashed” by the West (the US in particular) to hate their global racial identity that is read as “yellowness,” and love US and certain European racial identities read as “whiteness.” These cultural workers posit that the Japanese government and citizenry therefore denigrate “blackness” in an effort to elevate “yellowness.” That is, it is argued that other global racial identities that are positioned in a hierarchical manner below their own racial identity (e.g., “blackness”) are hyperracialized in media and policy to draw attention away from Japan’s own racialization as non-White. The cultural workers I interviewed eschew this as a viable antiracist strategy. They argue that the love of “whiteness” and hatred of “blackness” is exactly what “their” Hiphop is resisting. They desire
a love for “yellowness” (who they are) without having to put down blackness or elevate whiteness. Therefore, these artists often criticize such public attacks of racism against black people (such as Channels, a Hiphop dance duo). One Japanese national cultural worker purported that he used to wait outside the stations to “beat up” the blackface performers who embarrassed them and their culture (meaning Hiphop as well as Japanese national identity). The performance of blackness in their case serves to resist whiteness. The performance of blackness is also part of a transition to a performance of yellowness, which unfortunately leads us back to our homogenized Japanese national character that reinforces notions of *Nihonjinron* that could be considered psychologically violent to the multi-ethnic consumers of Japanese Hiphop.

For example, at an annual Hiphop festival in a major metropolitan area of Japan in 2002, hundreds of youth gathered around a stage usually utilized for musical performances in order to see some of their favorite Hiphop pioneers as well as currently popular artists and journalists present at a panel dedicated to the “knowledge” element of Hiphop. After over an hour of origins narratives and related discussion regarding the social and historical significance of Hiphop as a “revolutionary” art form, a panelist opened up the floor for questioning. Youth eagerly lined up to a microphone seeking further elucidation of contradictions concerning “authenticity”18 and the uses of Hiphop (as a strategy) in everyday resistance. Among the inquisitive was a self-identified Korean-Japanese youth who asked the panel what their thoughts were on anti-Korean discrimination in Japan, and what he—as a Hiphopper—could do to redress this social problem. This posed an interesting intervention because earlier a pioneer had boasted that Japan did not have the same racialized politics that plague the US due to its (purported) homogenous

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population, and yet another pioneer alluded to the activist utility of Hiphop, stating that Hiphop offers an opportunity to assuage social inequality in Japan.

The youth were quick to utilize this moment to expose a common contradiction. That is, how can Japan be without race problems, but also experience social inequality? The contradiction of the former pioneer’s obvious Nihonjinron sentiments with the other pioneer’s commitment to social change seemed to puzzle yet positively challenge these youth to make sense of Hiphop and its political relevance to their generation. One pioneer responded that he should be proud to be Korean-descent and that “some of the best Hiphop comes out of Korea.” He continued that the experiences of discrimination and its related pain contribute to “soulful” productions of Hiphop that heal and present opportunities to bring oppositional people together. He related the experience of anti-Korean discrimination in Japan to antiblack discrimination in the United States, and reminded the young man of “black people’s perseverance.” He concluded that it was every Hiphopper’s responsibility to address such issues in the Japanese Hiphop community.

While the pioneer’s comments to the Korean-descent youth were meant to encourage him and support social justice efforts, his sentiments unfortunately also situated the youth in a derivative status to a Japanese norm. The comment concerning “some of the best Hiphop comes out of Korea” reminded me of a statement often heard concerning US racial relations: “I’m not racist; some of my best friends are black.” Teun van Dijk (1995:27) comments on this phenomenon:

Underlying ideologies also control communicative contexts, and hence the self-definition and impression management of speakers, who will generally try to make a good impression or avoid a bad impression...This is particularly clear in the strategic use of disclaimers. Examples of such semantic strategies in our own research on the reproduction of racism in discourse of such semantic strategies are well-known and comprise such classical moves as the disclaimers of the apparent denial (“I have nothing against Blacks,
but …”, “Refugees will always be able to count on our hospitality, but …”), the *apparent concession* (“There are of course a few small racist groups in the Netherlands, but on the whole …”) or *blame transfer* (“I have no problem with minorities in the shop, but my customers …”).

The irony of the comment is that if one is not racist, one would not politically mark one’s friends with state-regulated identities. In addition, the comment elides any inspection of how one might participate in racism and racializing processes. I interpreted the exchange between the youth and the pioneer in a similar manner. I think that the youth was being marked as Korean, though he was marked in a flattering, culturally chauvinist way. However, in this instance his being racially marked actually brought him closer to being authentically tied to Hiphop, as his predicament was related to the experience of those accredited with originating Hiphop: African Americans.

What makes this exchange important in regard to public discourse about race within Japan is not the details of the exchange between the pioneer and the youth. It is the very idea of Korean racialization being acknowledged and discussed in a public intergenerational dialogue that was striking to me. The pioneer obviously showed shortcomings in the manner that he handled this youth’s question, but his remarks are far beyond what one could find in mainstream media at that time: and thus, it is no wonder that Hiphop was attracting so many youth as well as cultural workers who are politically marked as other in Japan at that time. In this case, Hiphop was offering something that they couldn’t find in government policy, national media, or other popular culture. Hiphop offered them a starting point for a conversation about acceptance, humanity, harmony, and unity. Indeed, throughout the entire panel, another pioneer repeated this mantra learned from Afrika Bambaataa; he said, “Hiphop is about peace, love, unity, harmony.” After the event, this pioneer turned to me and said, “That’s what Bam taught me; that’s what we must do. That’s our work: peace, love, unity, harmony.” His sentiments reflect what the youth were looking for when they attended the panel.
NIHON-STYLE

Over the past decade, there has been an increasing move by cultural workers who are community-ascribed pioneers in varying aspects of Hiphop culture, to acquiesce to a dominant Hiphop origins narrative and operational definition of Hiphop culture for the purpose of creating a common literacy that is useful in making the transition from a cultural movement to a political one. This move—to allow Afrika Bambaataa’s Universal Zulu Nation (UZN) the authority to dictate history and KRS-ONE’s Temple of Hiphop to police the parameters of the culture’s “refinition” (=definition), for example, is indicative of a strategy by other pioneers (e.g., DJ Yutaka and Crazy A or Kool Herc and Crazy Legs) to invent a united front in a protracted struggle for socio-economic change. Indeed, theorists have argued that a common literacy and invented homogeneity can spark public identification with nationalist political rhetoric, and that is precisely what Hiphop’s cultural workers, its pivotal pioneers, have constructed across the world (Anderson 1991; hooks 1992). Whether it was conscious or not, whether it reveals truth or not, the interviews and public narratives reproduced in various print and visual media have served as the building blocks for a dominant cultural narrative regarding Hiphop as a particular resource for potential social movement building. The pioneers’ world travels spread knowledge, inspirational life histories, and organizational structures in key areas around the globe that perhaps now demonstrate worthiness, unity, numbers and committed people—what Charles Tilly calls WUNC—the characteristics of a social movement (2002:88). Many scholars have documented the pioneers’ narratives and key activities initiated by cultural workers that illustrate how Hiphop politics have continued to raise awareness about issues (e.g., race and class) that former movements brought into public discourse (Bynoe 2004; Chang 2005; Chuck D 1997; Fujita 1996; Goto 1997; Jinno 2003; Keyes 2002; Kitwana 2002; Morgan 2008; Pipitone 2006; Shomari 1995; Urta 2001; Wimsatt 2008).
This chapter summarized recent Japanese historical narratives and dominant theories concerning scholarship’s relationship to racialization and colonization. The research presented in this project positions Japan as a geopolitical entity that is part of a global racialized order in a post-war and post-colonial condition. Japan’s post-colonial condition is multiphrenic in that it is both colonizer and, as I argued, it has in effect been colonized. Race and gender identities (among others) are forged from both national sentiments and international sensibilities. The popularity (cf., RIAJ charts summary in Appendix) and performance of Hiphop in Japan brings this multidirectional aspect of racialized and gendered identity formation into popular cultural memory. The United States’ policies of social inequality are stirred into the public sphere through African-American resistance narratives in US Hiphop that is popularly consumed. Japan’s own contentious relationship with US social inequality is brought back into question and the agency to assert oneself as equal or worthy is presented and enjoyed in Japanese performances of Hiphop. Finally, Hiphop in Japan offers the space to dialogue about other injustices (e.g., domestic racialization, gender discrimination, child abuse), as Hiphop aesthetics feature ideas of peace, harmony, social equality, and saviors (cf., Morgan 2008). Thus understanding the US-based narrative of Hiphop’s origins is imperative, as key players in US Hiphop history are de facto pivotal figures in Japanese Hiphop history, and their interfacing with Japanese Hiphop cultural workers assigns these artists the right to control and authenticate Japanese popular discourse on the subject as it relates to race and other identificatory practice. The next chapter explains this phenomenon in detail.
Table 3-1 Population chart of registered foreigners in Japan from 1996 to 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Registered Foreigners</th>
<th>平成8年</th>
<th>平成9年</th>
<th>平成10年</th>
<th>平成11年</th>
<th>平成12年</th>
<th>平成13年</th>
<th>平成14年</th>
<th>平成15年</th>
<th>平成16年</th>
<th>平成17年</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>総数</td>
<td>1,415,136</td>
<td>1,482,707</td>
<td>1,512,116</td>
<td>1,556,113</td>
<td>1,686,444</td>
<td>1,778,462</td>
<td>1,851,758</td>
<td>1,915,030</td>
<td>1,973,747</td>
<td>2,011,555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>韓国・朝鮮 (N. &amp; S. Korea)</td>
<td>657,159</td>
<td>645,373</td>
<td>638,828</td>
<td>636,548</td>
<td>635,269</td>
<td>632,405</td>
<td>625,422</td>
<td>613,791</td>
<td>607,419</td>
<td>598,687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>構成比 (%)</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>29.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>中国 (China)</td>
<td>234,264</td>
<td>252,164</td>
<td>272,230</td>
<td>294,201</td>
<td>335,575</td>
<td>381,225</td>
<td>424,282</td>
<td>462,396</td>
<td>487,570</td>
<td>519,561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>構成比 (%)</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ブラジル (Brazil)</td>
<td>201,795</td>
<td>233,254</td>
<td>222,217</td>
<td>224,299</td>
<td>254,394</td>
<td>265,962</td>
<td>268,332</td>
<td>274,700</td>
<td>286,557</td>
<td>302,080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>構成比 (%)</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>フィリピン (Philippines)</td>
<td>84,509</td>
<td>93,265</td>
<td>105,308</td>
<td>115,685</td>
<td>144,871</td>
<td>156,667</td>
<td>169,359</td>
<td>186,237</td>
<td>199,394</td>
<td>187,261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>構成比 (%)</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ペルー (Peru)</td>
<td>37,099</td>
<td>40,394</td>
<td>41,317</td>
<td>42,773</td>
<td>46,171</td>
<td>50,052</td>
<td>51,772</td>
<td>53,649</td>
<td>55,750</td>
<td>57,728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>構成比 (%)</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>米国 (U.S.A.)</td>
<td>44,168</td>
<td>43,690</td>
<td>42,774</td>
<td>42,802</td>
<td>44,856</td>
<td>46,244</td>
<td>47,970</td>
<td>47,836</td>
<td>48,844</td>
<td>49,390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>構成比 (%)</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>その他 (Others)</td>
<td>156,142</td>
<td>174,567</td>
<td>189,442</td>
<td>199,805</td>
<td>225,308</td>
<td>245,907</td>
<td>264,621</td>
<td>277,421</td>
<td>288,213</td>
<td>296,848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>構成比 (%)</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Japan’s Ministry of Justice, [http://www.moj.go.jp/PRESS/060530-1/060530-1.html](http://www.moj.go.jp/PRESS/060530-1/060530-1.html) (English translations of nationalities/ethnic groups inserted by author). This chart does not take into account nonregistered or undocumented foreigners, US military persons stationed in Japan, or racialized ethnic minorities such as Burakumin, Ainu or Ryukyuan/Okinawan people, who are Japanese citizens but still do not have full citizenship rights or access to citizenship privileges.
Hiphop has saved a lot of people, even me.

—“Pioneer 3” a Japanese national cultural worker

Performing and delivering these rhymes, we’re gonna be saving Japan, and I’m just telling you this is just one way of doing it

—“MC R” a Japanese national cultural worker

Making a Movement: “Building a Hiphop Foundation”

The productions by the cultural workers whom I consulted offer an important site of inquiry regarding the possibility of political movement building using Hiphop. While the basic framework of the Japanese Hiphop aesthetic follows that which was invented in specific African-American speech communities (see the five elements’ operational definition in Chapter One), the lyrics are often sung in Japanese with instances of codeswitching using African American English as well as occasional General American English language varieties. In addition, the artistic production of lyricism and beat production can follow sensibilities of what is considered and labeled as “more traditional” Japanese literary aesthetics (see Ueda 1991 for more on literary and art theories in Japan), and most importantly, the topics and issues introduced in the songs and performances are relevant to national consumer audiences. Furthermore, once cultural workers ascend from the underground Hiphop scene into the more commercial formal music industry, they are at some level dealing with entities that all musicians interface with all over the world, as most music companies are branches from three main multinational corporations. Therefore, Hiphop culture in Japan is like Hiphop culture all over the globe; while its expression is often localized, there are conspicuous ties that are globalized at the levels of distribution, consumption, and production.
The master origins narrative regarding Japanese Hiphop origins petitions a counterhegemonic sentiment that abounds in black American-Japanese political relations. This relationship dates from a pre-WWII era, and it buttresses transgressive and “underground” claims regarding the authenticity and political nature of Hiphop in Japan. Though ethnographers and cultural archivists (Condary 1999; Okumura 1998) place the onset of Hiphop global flow in Japan with the Wild Style tour of 1983, certain pioneers claim to have first heard Hiphop in the 1970s from US military-base acquaintances, and one explains that he then innovated by experimenting with cutting and mixing already popular black American blues, jazz, and soul albums on sale in popular Japanese venues. Recall that prior to these pioneers’ generation, jazz, blues, soul, and reggae were mobilized along with resistance movements against oppressive state policies (Asai 2005; Atkins 2001).

As more information concerning Hiphop reached American popular cultural memory, it traveled to Japan just as it did other countries throughout the world through the assistance of popular print media (e.g., International versions of Time, Newsweek and later, The Source), cinema (e.g., Wild Style, Beat Street, Breakin 1,2 & 3, Krush Groove, House Party 1,2, & 3, Juice, New Jack City, etc.), world famous concert tours (e.g., Public Enemy alongside U2 and Run DMC), people-to-people contact (e.g., military bases and youth and business exchange programs, etc.) and in the 1990s, the Internet. The more attention that Hiphop received in the US from the formal music industry, the more opportunities the Japanese cultural workers had to penetrate the formal Japanese music industry. Another Hiphop pioneer reports that when Hiphop was promoted in the 1980s, it was American Hiphop that dominated the radio waves (based in both US military and Japanese national audiences). In the 1990s, that changed and, along with the rise
of Nihonjinron-influenced\textsuperscript{1} literature, localized Hiphop culture also increased. He observes that in the new millennium, we see Japanese Hiphop cultural producers and consumers who were “born and raised” on Japanese Hiphop. That is, presently there are popular artists who not only grew up listening to US-based Hiphop artists (like Wu Tang Clan, for example), but they also grew up hearing their own domestic artists like Nah-ki, King Giddra and Rappagariya.

Many Japanese cultural workers express their initial attraction to Hiphop because of how it was rooted in black culture. Specifically, many artists report that Hiphop’s significance to them stems from their positive feelings derived from what they believe to be Hiphop’s connection to general black popular cultural genres (e.g., TV shows like \textit{Chappelle’s Show} or \textit{Good Times}), styles (e.g., clothing and jewelry aesthetics), and other imagined black cultural practices (e.g., dances and food preferences), as well as Hiphop’s reference to black historical narratives and people (e.g., Malcolm X and the Black Panther Party). US Hiphop, while directed to and focused on issues relevant to African-American speech communities (e.g., racial profiling, class conflict, etc.), is purported to “speak to” a common opposition for these artists. Therefore, this black cultural product (Hiphop) constructed for local audiences (US region-specific African-American speech communities) holds global significance, as other local cultural workers (Japanese Hiphop artists) were inspired by the oppositional messages in US Hiphop to construct some of their own oppositional messages in their local products (Japanese Hiphop) for their social networks and audiences in Japan.

One such artist whom younger Hiphop consumers grew up listening to and are influenced by is a top-selling, widely-respected Japanese-national Hiphop artist who hails from an urban, non-affluent (relatively impoverished) metropolitan area, and was raised in a single-parent household. Nihonjinron reflects theories of Japanese uniqueness and national identity; it is generally critiqued as being culturally chauvinist and culturally nationalist (Lie 2001).
I’ll call this man Rapper 1, and the following excerpts from one of our conversations is instructive as to how the political rhetoric from African-American social movements found in US-based Hip hop also inspired Japanese artists to draw connections with domestic issues.²

**Rapper 1**: …when I went to the States, black people (.2) they were treated unfairly, it wasn’t because of how you are but who you are, right?

**Ethnographer**: Right.

**Rapper 1**: So I got mad; I was angry about that. Cause before I went to the United States (. the United States was all about the American dream, equality, fairness, freedom, right? When I went there, it was all lies. So it opened my eyes, and I got with Hip hop. All the people in Hip hop taught me a lot of stuff that I could not learn from schools.

**Ethnographer**: Wow.

**Rapper 1**: That was my first stage of being in Hip hop in America. Then I came back to Japan, and I saw Japanese. In Japan, it was economically growing at that time and people were chasing money. I thought (. back then (. the Hip hop in the United States was teaching brothers [African-Americans] where they came from, not they’re from slaves, you know like, real history, real pride and stuff, right?

**Ethnographer**: Uh-huh.

**Rapper 1**: And that taught a lot of brothers to be really not afraid of saying stuff and not afraid of being independent. And I thought we needed that. But when I came back to Japan(. Since we lost World War II, we lost our history. We were driven by Americans. We had to be Americanized. It was, like, fifty years of that. So I got really angry. I thought the minorities in the United States and Japan were parallel. You know like being the victims of the so-called powers that be, you know like white supremacy (.4)

**Ethnographer**: ((shocked)) I-I’m feelin you (. because I feel the same thing and I’m trippin that you’re sayin it.

**Rapper 1**: Then I decided that I had to build a foundation—a Hip hop foundation over here so that we could learn ourselves, we could build our own foundation.

The sentiments communicated by Rapper 1 were repeated by many of the cultural workers with whom I worked. However, I am choosing to share this particular conversation for two reasons. The first reason is that there were other cultural workers present in the studio “cosigning

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² There is a chart of transcription conventions used at the end of this chapter.
on” or agreeing with the ideas that Rapper 1 communicated to me. The other reason is that this rapper is often referred to as the “KRS-ONE”3 of Japanese Hiphop by Japanese national consumers and upcoming artists. In that role, he has the power to shape Hiphop philosophy. He appears in videos that are not his own, wearing clothing that gives respect to African-diasporic symbols (e.g., a red, black, and green outline of a continent of Africa or an ankh symbol akin to the picture to the left—however it was not this exact jewelry) and a particular transnational Hiphop social movement organization. In these videos he preaches and guides popular Hiphop performers to “keep it real” and stay true to the original tenets of the origins narrative.

Figure 4-1 An ankh symbol on a necklace; photograph taken by the author in 2005 at a Japanese recording studio

The transcription excerpt previously presented between Ethnographer and Rapper 1 took place in a recording studio located in the Tokyo metropolitan area in the spring of 2005. In all interviews, cultural workers were invited to speak in Japanese and English, and this cultural worker chose to respond primarily in English. I think part of his choice to do so was to demonstrate to other artists in the studio at the same time as us just how “dope” or talented he is as a Hiphop cultural worker. By using English and publicly referencing our common

3 Recall that KRS-ONE is a leading lyrical pioneer of Hiphop culture, and a self-identified philosopher who regularly writes and lectures about Hiphop culture and philosophy. The operational definition of Hiphop used for this research as well as the spelling of Hiphop is derived from his Refinitions (2000).
acquaintances and friends who are “famous,” he emphasized his transnational authority on
Hiphop cultural and political work. Although the bulk of this particular interaction was in
English, we still generally adhered to Hiphop linguistic codes and Japanese cultural practices.
My body language was submissive, as I bowed low and was positioned below him on the floor,
looking up at him as he spoke for more than an hour. I codeswitched a lot with him, using both
AAE as well as distal and honorific Japanese in addition to regular direct speech styles. My
speech octave was higher than normal in an additional effort to show submission and politeness.
He dominated most of this time speaking, and with the exception of a few explanations or
comments, most of my interaction could be categorized as aizuchi, nodding sounds and words of
agreement (without being bonded to bona fide agreement) to indicate that I am paying attention,
interested, and understanding him (e.g., “mmm,” “ahhh,” “wow,” “uh-huh,” “yeah,” “for real?
(=really?/ hontoo?),” etc; see also Kita and Ide 2007 for more on aizuchi and ideology).
Rapper 1 used kinship terms that indicated his conceptualizing us as in-group members of
(1) people of color or nonwhite people and (2) a transnational Hiphop community. Words like
“brothers” refer to African-American men in general and African-American male rappers in
particular, as well as “sister” to refer to me, his interlocutor, indicated his linguistic participation
in an imagined African-diasporic identity that is made possible through our collaboration in the
name of Hiphop. I did not expect Rapper 1 to actually use words like “white supremacy,”
“Americanized,” and “brainwash program.” He explicitly places Japanese-nationals’ post-WWII
experience as parallel to African Americans’ post-slavery experience. He speaks of his
commitment to building a Hiphop foundation, a foundation that follows the philosophy of the
origins narrative that attends to social justice. His language choices reveal a familiarity with both
Hiphop language ideology (Morgan 2001) and black liberation ideology (cf., Dawson 2003). His
candor and direct speech style, as well as his confidence in his ability to “teach” me the great utility of Hiphop for self-actualization and community liberation revealed interesting themes in regard to how he was thinking about race and politics.

Similar to John Dower’s (1993) observation regarding Japanese nationalist discourse, Rapper 1’s rhetoric recasts Japanese nationals as victims along with their similarly oppressed African-American “cousins”—as both have been subjugated and mentally occupied through “brainwashing” and silencing in the national educational system. Dower documents popular media cartoons and commentary that highlight how the nation has been “dissed” via racialization by the Western “powers that be,” using examples that range from the League of Nations’ dismissal of Japan’s Racial Equality Clause at the 1919 meeting to Japan’s being characterized as “Yellow Peril” and savage apes during WWII to the more recent images of “The Japanese” as a singular, homogenous people, who imitate rather than innovate in the areas of culture and technology, and who also pose a threat to the US’s economic security (Dower 1993:292-298). Rapper 1 explains:

It’s called, like, brainwash program, that kind of thing, right after World War II that the U.S. government had on us. And they changed our constitution, they changed our textbooks, they changed our history books. So we lost our essence. We lost our roots. We lost our originality. I don’t even have to explain [to Ethnographer, who is politically marked as black]. It’s like black people during the last 60 years or 160 years. Even 300 years of history. You didn’t know your roots. That’s what you’ve been trying to do with the Roots movies, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., Hiphop. That’s what you did to be real, to be where you’re coming from. But we forget. I didn’t have to forget because I was in the United States, being Hiphop, learning for myself. But all the people here watching TV forget where they’ve come from. They thought the Americans are better than us. We had to be like Americans.

The preceding commentary illuminates further how Rapper 1 is thinking about race. He eagerly acknowledges Japan’s racialized status in the world order, and he supplies a theory of how this racialization takes place in his country. After all, by his accounts, the Japanese government, which formulates policy and runs national media is the culprit guilty of promoting these images
that cause people to feel alienated. This fuels his fight against the Japanese state as well as his inspiration to use Hiphop to liberate the minds of “his people.” Even though this rapper and others often charge that it was through the exportation of US governmental policy and ideology concerning race that originated the “brainwash” programs (e.g., educational programs) that encourage people to think of themselves in more racialized terms, they argue that it is the Japanese government and media that carry out and maintain such programs and ideologies today. Note that there is a common criticism that Japanese Hiphop artists are sharing with US Hiphop artists. They criticize the US government’s role in exporting racialized identifications worldwide, and they also call for reform and revolution with each domestic government.

**Layers of Race: Samples from Hiphop**

Rapper 1’s designation of difference between black people living in America and general (=white, not black) “Americans” reveals more about how people in Japan are taught to think about race in a global setting. John Lie (2001:147) suggests that like Rapper 1, Japanese nationals whom he surveyed distinguished between Blacks (kokujin) and Amerikajin (who were “taken to be white”). Lie continues that his survey results supported a racial ideology akin to the theory of three races (Negroid/black, Mongoloid/yellow, Caucasoid/white), and that Japanese-nationals were reluctant to place themselves in any of the aforementioned categories (black, yellow, or white). Rapper 1 and many other Japanese-national Hiphop artists are somewhat unique in that they are consciously claiming their “yellowness” as part of their political discourse. Indeed, many Japanese artists who have had the luxury of traveling to the US for music business or a cultural pilgrimage often share stories of anti-Japanese or anti-Asian discrimination that they have suffered at the hands of white Americans, such as police brutality or being the targets of epithets in public. Sharing and analyzing the effects of such experiences allows them to place themselves along with blackness against whiteness, the purported cause of
their psychic pain. Therefore, their voluntary performance of blackness through identification with Hiphop is not necessarily an imitation of a hegemonic American identity; they say it is about claiming race, especially race that is conspicuously positioned in opposition to whiteness.

The following lyrics from a Japanese Hiphop group, Rappagariya, reveal more about the claiming of race in Hiphop. The song debuted on DJ Yutaka’s United Nations album. The album art for this album\(^4\) references Hiphop philosophy and origins narratives associated with space as a place where humans transcend inequality suffered on Earth. Such references draw connections with US Hiphop pioneer Afrika Bambaataa’s Universal Zulu Nation as well as funk legends in Parliament Funkadelic’s “Mothership Connection” performance and jazz innovator Sun Ra’s “Space is the Place.” There is also the reference to “peace” and graffiti-inspired art in the planetary sphere pictured on the album. The title of Rappagariya’s song is “Kobushi” which could translate to “Fist,” and the song’s chorus (pump ya fist, pump ya fist/open up your ears, jump up [＝拳上げろ, 拳上げろ/耳枷をてめえにかける, 飛び跳ねろ]) references another famous Hiphop compilation album from the United States, Pump Ya Fist (Hip Hop inspired by the Black Panthers) (1995).\(^5\) Note not only the claiming of a “yellow” race, but also the references to Hiphop, being Japanese and overall identity:

We are the yellow race with the deadly poisonous shit that will raise the level of the hiphop virus in your blood/ We represent Japan yo! We gonna tell the issues like they are/

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\(^4\) A link to view the album art of DJ Yutaka’s United Nations (2000) is provided in the Appendix.

\(^5\) “Raise Your Fist” is a more literal translation, whereas, “Pump Ya Fist” is more in accordance with AAE and other common Hiphop rhetoric that was published around this time. It petitions a double reference of putting one’s hands in the air to party as well as the “power to the people” or “black power” signal (the fist). The translations in this section are mine, and more literal, the Appendix features selected translations by me as well as a younger research assistant and cultural worker who is more entrenched in the current Japanese Hiphop speech community.
We’re here to make these unacceptable conditions right / Our identity is dope Japanese shit/Until we answer all your needs

“Kobushi” is one of many examples of song and performance that contains rhetoric that is reflective of black nationalist rap from the US of the 1980s, 1990s, and beyond. It contains a thread of cultural chauvinism, which uses positive racialized stereotypes to elevate damaged self-identifications. Rappagariya, for example, may choose to dress up as samurai or perform martial arts moves or “spit” verses like the following (also from “Kobushi”):

We’re like Japanese soldiers in the war/We come at you with a death wish on the microphone/We’re gonna carve facts into history/There ain’t no termination in this culture/Hip hop is the surest way/If you know what we talking about pump ya fist

In this verse, the artists reference controversial images of Japanese masculine “savagery”6 by invoking the stereotype of Japanese military culture (e.g., kamikaze) to demonstrate the venom and vigor with which they defend “knowledge of self” through Hiphop. While the lyrics reference unity via nationalist discourse, this same rhetoric could be interpreted as Nihonjinron (one yellow race), in which cultural chauvinism and cultural nationalism undermine antiracist efforts on a domestic level by reintroducing a singular, homogenous Japanese identity or “national character.” The song includes references to national icons such as hi no maru bento (=lunchbox of rice with pickled plum, ume), baseball (=Tsuyoshi Shinjo, the renowned baseball player), as well as spirits and swords (= “my spirit is real like a Japanese sword”) that could further reference Yamato identity rather than a shared Asian national experience. The hi no maru bento is often interpreted as a reference to the contemporary Japanese national flag, with the reddish plum representing the rising sun and the rice being the white background. It also could

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6 John Dower (1993), Yukiko Koshiro (1999), and Gerald Horne (2004) outline instances of how Japanese people have been racialized by the West. The designation of Japanese people as less-than-human (i.e., Yellow Peril) and popular imagery and words referring to Japanese people as “savage apes” is strikingly similar to the manner in which African-descent populations were racialized by these same geopolitical entities.
reference other traditional sentiments that support nationalist discourse, such as the narrative that suggests soldiers ate these lunches in times of war as well as the idea of *ume* (=plum) being commonly referenced in *waka* (=type or style of poetry that dates as far back as the *Manyoshu*, an anthology of Japanese poetry collected from 686 A.D. to 784 A.D.) that is oft-cited in descriptions of cultural and literary aesthetics (cf. Carter 1993; Varley 1984). However, some consumers do not interpret these references within nationalist frameworks that isolate “non-Yamato” Japanese residents. Instead these consumers refer to Rappagariya’s use of “yellow race” as uniting Japanese identity with a shared Asian identification and thus, racialized experience. Rappagariya’s references do, however, coincide with a World War II agenda that acknowledged shared racialization with other Asians while also situating the Yamato as “nucleus” in this identification as justification for colonization of other Asian nationals (cf., Dower 1993). The artists’ intentions seem noble: they want to utilize Hiphop to fight misinformation and oppression that could cause people to feel low self-esteem. But the particular rhetoric used might not be sustainable for such a political goal, as it was not for their US cultural nationalist Hiphop artist counterparts (e.g., X-clan, Brand Nubian, etc.).

The performance of ultra-masculinity plus the reliance on national stereotypes for power does not allow for much intervention in regard to sexism and racism on a domestic level, thus thwarting their sentiments for a more just reality. Borrowing from this school of political thought allows the artist to insert brilliant social analysis concerning race and class ascriptions as they describe conditions and emotions experienced by their consumer audience. However, just as the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement in the United States as well as the Anti-War and Peace Movements in Japan were not without criticism in regard to raising public awareness around issues of sexuality and gender (e.g., Brown 1993; Honda 1993), cultural products that
build on the political rhetoric of those movements without critique to address the shortcomings of these past movement-building strategies will also fall short of the purported agenda to secure a more just social reality. In summary, by not interrogating the sexism and heterosexism as well as other rhetoric that homogenizes subaltern populations and simply leave out struggles organized along lines of gender and sexuality, the use of Hiphop as an organizational tool, whether in Japan or the US, is not offering anything new to social movement building efforts; rather it is furthering a past political agenda, using similar political tools of past political movements.

Though the absence of issues pertaining to gender and sexuality limits the scope of the uses of Hiphop as a political tool, the artists’ rhetorical allegiance to political reform via the use of cultural chauvinism to fight global racialization at least allows the opportunity for public discourse to address and interrogate problems of Nihonjinron as well as sexist constructions of masculinity in Japan. That is, the lyrics of songs like “Kobushi” further the tradition of resistance to global apartheid which situates humans in a hierarchical racial order (e.g., Negroid, Mongoloid, Caucazoid; see Augstein 1996) by simultaneously claiming and countering the racialization of Japan by foreign geopolitical entities. Lyrics and commentaries from artists like Rappagariya and Rapper 1 could raise their consumer audience’s awareness of issues that affect them, by drawing connections between cartoons and advertising that emphasizes whiteness and historical programs such as the Occupation Force’s political re-education for Japanese nationals, which entailed committing Japanese people to “appreciate and protect the ‘free and democratic’ world under American hegemony” (Tsuchiya 2002: 196). In this way, these artists build on cultural criticism from past domestic and global political movements. The strategic essentialism employed here, however, like past political rhetoric, reinforces a homogenized Japanese male trope. At this point, it is up to both analysts and activists to buttress the political momentum built
from the antiglobal apartheid stance in Japanese Hiphop by redirecting consumer audiences’ attentions to domestic apartheid that is organized along gendered and ethnoracial lines (e.g., sexual harassment and domestic violence against women or anti-Korean discrimination and violence).

Upon studying rhetoric such as that used in the verse previously cited, cultural analysts can continue to identify the political promise in Hiphop cultural production. Recall the commentary from Rapper 1. He generally and sincerely seems concerned about the problem of racialization worldwide. However, his argument might seem more relevant if he included some of the current educational debate surrounding Japanese as a Second Language curriculum for Nikkei and the former unequal treatment of Korean high-school graduates wishing to take college entrance exams without first taking a high school equivalency exam (daiken). Addressing such issues could allude to the domestic practice concerning racialization among non-Western Japanese residents. Underneath the layer of Japan’s racialization as a geopolitical entity lies its own domestic racial policy concerning the construction of alienated groups who range from former colonial subjects (e.g., Koreans, Chinese, Okinawans, Filipinos, and Ainu people) to historically disenfranchised people (e.g., Burakumin) and racially mixed individuals or foreigners (e.g., Japanese-Brazilians, Japanese-Peruvians, “daaburu” or people of multiple ethnoracial heritage, and African-nationals).

The aforementioned alienated groups experience discrimination that ranges from the structural to the personal. The Korean schools mentioned were some of many schools affected by the Japanese governments decision to exempt Western non-Japanese schools from taking a high-school equivalency examination (daiken) before taking college entrance examinations, whereas non-Western, Asian ethnic minority schools did not enjoy the same exemption. After much
protest, the government extended the exemption to the non-Western ones as well; however, the media coverage surrounding these events afforded cultural workers and others the opportunity to learn about gross disparities between ethnic minority schools and other Japanese public schools as well as the lack of much-needed funding to keep these schools running and to extend much-needed social welfare programs to their constituents. Furthermore, there are countless stories of young children and adolescents experiencing persistent harassment and instances of physical brutality during integrative efforts into Japanese schools or society from Japanese-citizen schoolmates and other persons in their communities. Some of the people I have worked with remain scarred, both emotionally and physically, from such egregious and often unpunished attacks.

When I asked Rapper 1 about these topics, he gave a nod of agreement, then there was silence. He agreed that these were things that needed to be worked on, and explained that a lot of people feel that they do not have the correct information to speak out about these issues. In general, when interviewing cultural workers in Japan, there seemed to be discomfort when we were talking about ethnoracial issues at home. There was courage to talk about racial inequity abroad and even on a global level with one’s whole country, but not within the country. In many of my interviews with rappers, a domestic conversation on race went no further than an acknowledgement of official antiblack racism from the government, certain corporations, and government-run media. Such racism is shunned by those who identify with Hiphop. The subcultures of people who alter their bodies through tanning, lip collagen injections, and adopting kinky hair styles as well as the entertainers who actually apply blackface and body makeup as they perform music associated with African-American culture (usually soul or gospel) are criticized by the cultural workers whom I interviewed. Indeed, as mentioned in Chapter
Three, many of the artists with whom I worked communicated embarrassment and anger toward Japanese singers and dancers who don blackface, and in some cases (e.g., Channels, the Hiphop dance duo mentioned in Chapter Three; see Figure 4-3) other racist and stereotypic performances that bring to mind Sambo and Step’n’Fetchit characters from US media (Russell 1991b).

Nevertheless, blackface performers persist in Japan in addition to other parts of the world, and since many modern blackface performers (like Channels, see Figure 4-3) appear under the guise of Hiphop performance, such practice remains a distraction from the productions by cultural workers who sincerely attend to aesthetics brought forth in the Hiphop origins narrative. As a result, performers like Channels receive the bulk of media attention (as these performances should and must be “put on blast,” critiqued, and shut down), while performances by people such as the cultural workers I worked with are often ignored or underreported (except in the scholarship of ethnographers such as Condry 2006; Cleveland 2006; Okumura 1998; Sterling 2003, 2006; see also Steele 2006, for similar cultural work in eastern mainland China).

Object 4-1 Channels performing blackface

This chapter seeks to elucidate performances of blackness that differ from the type of blackface performance that groups like Channels engage in. With the exception of certain academic studies (cf. Condry 2006; Cleveland 2006; Okumura 1998; Sterling 2003, 2006), interest in black American cultures and performances of black popular culture in particular are often misrepresented as minstrelsy. When one pays attention to the details of the performances, for example, how AAE grammars are utilized, as well as other rhetoric and practice that surround the performance, one finds that the Hiphop performance of Channels is quite different from the “bboy” battle competitions at the annual festival I observed, for example. The difference lies in intention, ideology, and respect. Understanding the details of aesthetics utilized in addition to the language ideology that directly relate to a global Hiphop culture, AAE
narrative traditions and black cultural practices also help to differentiate the Hiphop community that I worked with from mainstream performances of blackface. Below, the details of Japanese Hiphop’s cultural aesthetics are described through a description of the concepts of “flow” and “battle,” and also through the descriptions of sample cultural workers and consumers of Hiphop in Japan. However, understanding how the Hiphop aesthetics and language ideology are manifested within Japanese Hiphop culture requires an analysis of how codeswitching works as a discourse strategy among the artists that are communicating these ideas.

**Codeswitching as Discourse Strategy**

In 2001, Morgan theorized Hiphop’s language in terms of language socialization drawing from Bambi Schieffelin and Elinor Ochs (1986). She wrote that:

Participants in Hip Hop must learn the appropriate language for particular social contexts. In a sense, Hip Hop is constructed around the exploitation and subversion of the following tenets of language philosophy and theory:

1. all sounds and objects have specific meanings in culture;
2. all languages have system;
3. all leaks in grammar can be exploited;
4. a society's reference system or indexicality is often political; and
5. meaning is co-constructed and co-authored. [Morgan 2001:190]

Japanese Hiphop artists’ lyrical prowess demonstrate multiple levels of language socialization in that these cultural workers are simultaneously socialized into transnational Hiphop language ideology, which is based on AAE grammatical features. They are also socialized into their own indigenous Hiphop language, which in Japan at least includes reinvented meanings for words (e.g., *kome*, see explanation below) as well as a grammatical style that supports and encourages codeswitching. Susan Romaine defines codeswitching in the following way:

I will use the term “code-switching” in the sense in which Gumperz (1982:59) has defined it as “the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two [or more] different grammatical systems or subsystems”. In code-switched discourse, the items in question form part of the same speech act. They are tied together prosodically as well as by semantic and syntactic relations equivalent to those that join passages in a single speech act. …I use the term “code” there in a general sense to refer not
only to different languages, but also to varieties of the same language as well as styles within a language. This means that on a pragmatic level, all linguistic choices can be seen as indexical of a variety of social relations, rights and obligations which exist and are created between participants in a conversation….An important factor in the present situation is the use of code-mixing and code-switching as a discourse strategy. [Romaine 1995:121]

Of key interest in Romaine’s explanation is her identifying codeswitching as a discourse strategy. The research presented in this project details different strategies of codeswitching to index relationships within domestic and international Hiphop communities. The types of codeswitching that one utilizes could situate one within different international Hiphop genres (e.g., “gangsta” versus “conscious”). The intricacies of the codeswitching within Japanese Hiphop also demonstrate multiple levels of cultural and communicative competence. The emcees are presenting multiple layers of understanding as well as presentation of information through the production of diverse grammatical knowledge in their lyrical performances.

Codeswitching could include borrowed words in katakana form (e.g., borrowing; such as “Hippuhoppu/ヒップホップ (=Hiphop”). Or, as in many of the examples provided below, it could entail complex syntactic risk-taking and mixing to produce beautiful multilingual utterances (see “自由に in da beat” below). In any case, analyzing lyrical codeswitching and excavating the grammatical features of international Hiphop language features that are based in AAE grammatical knowledge within these codeswitched performances help to further identify how Hiphop is utilized as a discourse strategy. Finally, while I critique the gender politics of some of the utterances analyzed below, I enthusiastically celebrate the linguistic genius of the Japanese Hiphop cultural workers. Bi- and multilingualism continue to be stigmatized in many Western epistemes, and as a result codeswitching has been theorized as situating bi- and multilingual individuals as cognitively deficient and delayed. Multiple language users have been taught that codeswitching, and intrasentential codeswitching in particular, signifies less fluency in both
languages rather than a greater knowledge of both languages, as the latter involves greater syntactic risk and thus greater levels of creativity and ingenuity to make the codeswitch intelligible. Just as children of multiple ethnoracial heritages were taught to feel bad about themselves because they might not fit unitary and fixed collective identities, the same arguments have been used with multiple language users, and it is indicative of communicative hegemony when multiple language use is stigmatized rather than honored (cf. Briggs 1986; Romaine 1995).

The codeswitching that occurs in Japanese Hiphop could entail tag-switching, intersentential codeswitching or intrasentential codeswitching (Poplack 1980; Romaine 1995). Hiphop’s “Yo!” is often inserted as a tag (e.g., “Yo! するどく語りだしよ本題を 納得いかない”). Though “yo” is also often utilized as pun because it has meaning in Japanese as well as Hiphop language, and the meaning is relational in that it represents emphasis. Another common tag is “Na’ Mean” or any other representation of “You know what I mean?” in AAE following a completely Japanese utterance. Intersentential codeswitching “involves a switch at a clause or sentence boundary, where the clause is in one language or another” (Romaine 1995:122). In the following sentence the clause is marked by particle /を/ which also marks the language shift:

“It’s da mutherfuckin ’69, Lと Aを支援.” The conjunction/と/ in “Lと A” also marks a codeswitch in the phrase “L and A.” The utterance translates to “It’s da muthafuckin ’69, got the L and the A on lock” in AAE. The GAE gloss could be something like “My car is so wonderful; it is a classic, and [because of that] I am the master of the city I live in [Los Angeles].” Intrasentential codeswitching involves switching language types within the clause or sentence boundary. It allows for not only the mixing of words but also grammars (e.g, “kick the leash 自由に in da beat”). In the latter example, “自由に” could be glossed as “free in” or “free inside” using the word “自由” and the grammatical marker “に” that is blended with the GAE phrase
that has AAE phonological features (e.g., “da,” “beat”[=music]), “in da beat,” to make a full sentence that could be glossed as, “I’m free in the beat.” The codeswitched sentence that could be glossed as, “I’m free in the beat” is mixed with the AAE sentence that comes before it, “kick the leash,” which could be glossed as, “I got rid of my constraints” to form the final utterance, which could be glossed as, “I got rid of my constraints; I’m free in the music.” Another example is: “俺達のアイデンティティ dope Japanese shit 聞き手のニーズにこたえるまるで．”
Which could be glossed as, “Our identity, delivering dope Japanese shit till everybody hears it,” or “Our identity is dope Japanese shit, until we answer all your needs.” The Hiphop language phrase, “dope Japanese shit,” does not neatly fit within clauses or sentence boundaries.

**Hiphop Aesthetics and Language Ideology**

Leading Hiphop linguistic scholar and anthropologist Marcyliena Morgan elucidates Hiphop’s linguistic relationship with AAE grammaticalization (2001, 2002, 2008; see also Alim 2006; Rickford and Rickford 2000; Smitherman 1997; Yasin 1999). Morgan explains that AAE speakers:

> respond to society’s attempt to stigmatize and marginalize AAE usage by their continued innovations within the norms of both dialects⁷ … Consequently, discourse styles, verbal genres, and dialect and language contrasts become tools to not only represent African American culture, but also youth alienation, defiance, and injustice in general. [2008:95]

Building on her seminal work on modern speech communities, Morgan defines the Hiphop speech community and its relationship centered around the concept of the “WORD,” which she describes as “the core of the hiphop nation, the power, trope, message and market all in one” (2008:94). She continues:

> The hiphop speech community is not necessarily linguistically and physically located, but bound by this shared language ideology as part of politics, culture, social condition and
norms, values and attitude. For hiphop, everyday language creativity requires knowledge of a linguistic system as well as how language is used to represent power. It uses language rules to mediate and construct a present, which considers the social and historicized moment as both a transitory and stable place. In this respect, hiphop represents the height of fruition of discursive and symbolic theories of identity and representation. It produces a frenetic dialectic by interspersing and juxtaposing conventions and norms … It incorporates symbols and references based on shared local knowledge. It then introduces contention and contrast by creating ambiguity and a constant shift between knowledge of practices and symbols. Thus, while the hiphop nation is constructed around an ideology that representations and references (signs and symbols) are indexical and create institutional practices, what the signs and symbols index remain fluid and prismatic rather than fixed.

Such is the case in my experience studying Japanese Hiphop. Whereas some ethnographers (e.g., Condry 2006) interpret Japanese lyricists as using GAE (General American English) or a generic American “slang,” I interpret the codeswitching that I have participated in and observed over the past 13 years as utilizing a combination of Japanese direct grammatical style and vernacular lexicon with AAE linguistic features that are now being theorized as Hiphop language (Alim 2006; Morgan 2008).

Discussion with cultural workers concerning their use of AAE in discursive practice has buttressed my commitment to interpreting these acts as such. Moreover, when Japanese cultural workers were employed to translate lyrics for the purpose of comparing them to my own and other academician’s translations, AAE linguistic styles were selected over literal transcription that could have used more of a GAE-related grammar (i.e., compare my translations of “Kobushi” to those that appear in the Appendix by research assistant and cultural worker VSOP and to his translations of popular artists that follow). Furthermore, when different translations were presented to Japanese cultural workers whose work was being translated, they preferred the translations that utilized the most AAE linguistic features. These instances mark an important aspect of my analysis, because they further contribute to an understanding of how Japanese
Hiphop artists are performing blackness. Following the theories explained by Morgan (2008), usage of AAE language indexes oppositional practice and resistance to alienation.

One young Japanese-national research assistant concurs as he wrote to me in an e-mail: “I think slang words (at least in the States) that are in Hip Hop are used [to] create a language that whites don’t understand but people of color can communicate with each other. It’s words that can’t be understood by whites so in Japan, I think slang words among young people is a way of resistance against the adults.” He then listed the following Japanese Hiphop lexicon:

1. **Machigainai** (=fo sho / yea that’s right, used in agreements, to emphasize the agreement)

2. **045** (=refers to Yokohama area also known as the “Bay Area” of Japan.)(And there are lots more numbers and city names to refer to the specific area or city in Japan and represent where they from. 038 usually refers to Tokyo area. same as how we here in the states represent where we from with area codes.)

3. **Ame-ko-** (=a word used towards [white] Americans (usually negative connotation)

4. **Kome** (=rice; putting rice on the table; has money context)

5. **Ikareteru** (=crazy (I guess this isn’t really a slang)

Though this young researcher explains his understanding of AAE and Hiphop language in terms of “slang,” he is obviously engaging in and describing grammatical features. Likewise, there are several African-American “slang” and “Ebonics English” dictionaries that situate AAE and Ebonics as a language variety, as syntax, phonology, lexicon, semantics, and pragmatics (cf., Izumiyama 2005, 2007 [1997]). These texts also situate the study of African-American language, culture, and history as necessary to understanding Hiphop and R&B. Understanding basic AAE features are key to fully elucidating the significance of the “WORD” in Hiphop language

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8 “813” is also used for Tokyo, which interestingly is the same area code as Tampa, Florida, and this relation was often brought to my attention. Examples of area code significance in global Hiphop can be seen in works ranging from David Banner to Big Ron.
ideology. Some rules are summarized below drawing from Morgan (2002:77) as well as Green (2002) when noted, with some of my own examples. Most of the examples below appear with a listing of the AAE grammatical rule (e.g., absence of copula), the general American English (GAE) equivalent (e.g., “Dawn is late.”) Note the use of “is,” or the presence of copula), and finally the example of the AAE grammatical rule (e.g., “Dawn late.”).

**Examples of AAE Phonology**

- Final –ng as –n: *laughing* → *laughin*
- Deletion or vocalization of r after a vowel: *store* → *sto*
- Realization of –ing as –ang: *sing* → *sang* (e.g., *She can sang!*)

**Examples of AAE Syntax**

- Absence of copula: *Dawn is late* → /Dawn late. (=Dawn is late in the present only.)
- Use of invariant /be/ for habitual action: *Dawn is always late* → *Dawn be late.* (=Dawn was late yesterday, today, and everyday in general.)
- Use of invariant /be/ for future: *Dawn will be here soon* → *Dawn be here soon.*
- Use of invariant /bin/: *They made up a long time ago* (and continue to be friendly). → *They been made up.*
- Use of *done* to emphasize the completive nature of a task: *She done divorced him.*
- Use of *had* to mark the simple past: *They had went to the store.*
- Use of *steady* as a verbal marker that precedes a V-(ing): *He steady mobbin.*
- Multiple negation: *Dawn don’t want no man telling her what to do/Ain’t no brotahs goin there.*

**Examples of AAE Lexicon**

- Saditty (=conceited)
- Scrilla (=money)

**Other Morphosyntactic Properties**

- Postvocalic –s deletion or genitive marking: That my mama bed./ He my baby daddy./ That they business. [See also Green 2002:102]
Of particular interest is Morgan’s unique and groundbreaking research (2002) which catalogues the number of instances certain features are realized specifically within Hiphop. She demonstrates particular trends within Hiphop linguistic features of using got(s)/ta, got, and gotta rather than have, have to, or has to in Hiphop verses. For example, US cultural worker Ice Cube used some form of “got” 92% of the time verses “have” 2% of the time in lyrical productions (Morgan 2002:128). Among other Hiphop linguistic features that she outlines is “Ima” rather than “I’m going to” or “I’m gonna.” Morgan explains it is “written Ima reflecting the deletion of /g/. However, Ima does not only refer to future action, but also implies intention and agency of speaker” (2002:127). How these linguistic features intersect with Japanese Hiphop is outlined below in conjunction with other basic concepts of Hiphop language ideology and cultural practice such as the idea of “flow” and the concept of “battle” (cf., Morgan 2005, 2008).

Flow: Can You Feel It?

As Hiphop encompasses many elements, including five fundamental ones (emceeing, deejaying, graffiti art, dance, and knowledge and philosophy), artists’ experiences with flow have varied, depending on the specific genre within Hiphop in which one practices.9 For emcees in Japan, the history of use and innovation concerning flow has been interesting. In the early 1980s, because much of the Hiphop that emcees were consuming was coming from African-American speech communities where AAE abounds, many artists began by interpreting a style that was quite reflective of, if not imitating, African American English rhyming styles. Verses were constructed in ways that either actually used multiple AAE and Hiphop language phrases, or African American English sentences were translated into Japanese and then performed over beats. Condry (1999:106) writes that Japanese is a difficult language to construct simple English-

9 This section is inspired by the work of Marcyliena Morgan (2001, 2005, 2008) on the subject, and I thank her for encouraging me to write about “flow” in Japanese Hiphop.
centered rhymes because of its multisyllabic nature. As one Japanese Hiphop pundit put it, “It doesn’t sound good”: the practice of short and simple rhyme schemes in generic and standard 16-bar rhyming formats. This pundit was signifying that the “flow” of the AAE-centered rhymes that so many Japanese Hiphop fans were enjoying from abroad was missing from these Japanese “translations.”

Local Japanese Hiphop pundits and impresarios were not the only critics of this imitation or “translation” style of verse composition. African-American and African national residents and visitors in Japan in addition to visiting Hiphop artists from the United States (who usually represented the African Diaspora) also criticized the aesthetics of this lyrical practice. Those fluent in African-diasporic oral performance styles, from the oft-cited “griot” to the African-American preaching styles that feature phonemic variation and “whooping” noted that the flow, the product of the word performance of these early Japanese artists, created dissonance, according to their cultural aesthetics (Harmon n.d.).

The difference in production between African-diasporic emcees and Japanese emcees does not mean that there are no indigenous cultural aesthetics that have flow, in Japanese poetic and oral performance (cf., renga, senryu, etc.). To my knowledge, the early emcees did not seem to draw on this tradition. When they did, flow dramatically changed for Japanese emcees. In the 1990s, emcees like K Dub Shine and producers like DJ Yutaka brought cultural and linguistic knowledge of African-American speech communities to Hiphop crews in metropolitan areas like Tokyo. An important aspect of this knowledge was “to keep it real” and attend to autochthonous concerns. Another aspect of this knowledge was the phenomenon of being socialized into a transnational Hiphop cultural and speech community. Cultural national tenets that buttress pride in one’s heritage and fixed ideas of “traditional cultural aesthetics” influenced the artists’ cultural
exchanges. Others built bridges with African Americans in the military and other visitors to
tweak styles as they became introduced to Hiphop knowledge and philosophy. Emcees, in line
with the Hiphop mantra of “keeping it real” began to incorporate dialects and oral traditions
(such as Osaka-ben and Osaka comedy) from their regions into emcee battles and performances.
The rich tradition of Japanese poetry was built upon with modern Hiphop innovations.

Battles have dramatically improved these innovations and creations. There are striking
differences between battles that I observed in 1994 and those I observed postmillennium (2001,
“spitting” of phonemes to the production of a flow that “melts in one’s ears” akin to the revered
verses of Hiphop lyrical guru Pharoah Monche (Alim 2006). An example of such lyrical prowess
would be the flows of MC Kan, a signed artist who was also the First Place winner of the 2002
BBoy Park Emcee Battle. MC Kan produced a lyricism that would be akin to African-American
preaching styles of “whooping” in which one goes into a rhythm and performative mode that is
simultaneously visceral and mental.

The difference between the early lyrical producers and the latter emcees described is one of
confidence and comfort with oral performance, which could also be described in terms of
“spirit.” The latter artists are feeling their own flow; they produce morphemes with passion and
faith that convincingly reflect their purported life experience. The skill is undeniable. Topic and
content continue to be of concern to Japanese Hiphop pioneers, who feel responsible for much of
the cultural brokerage between African-diasporic emcees and Japanese national emcees. Too
much braggadocio as well as focus on a “gangsta lifestyle” that is simply unrealistic for what one
would commonly find in Japan can mar oral performance and interfere with one’s flow, as it
disrespects the basic tenet of “keeping it real” or at least “realistic.” (Not that there aren’t
“gangstas” (=chinpira) in Japan—there certainly are—but they are not a carbon copy of a South Central, Los Angeles video; they have their own version of street gangs and mafia, along with their own rituals and cultural codes and ornament.) Thus, just as in the US and other parts of the world, there is a philosophical battle taking place between pioneers and popular Hiphop artists concerning content, performance, and aesthetics (see Knowledge Panel transcription in Appendix, for example). Marcyliena Morgan describes the struggle between pioneers and popular artists as:

Each hip hop era is marked by philosophical battles over the nature of representing and identity, the notion of recognizing and truth, sense and reference, the notion of comin’ correct, intentionality and power. Similarly, the hip hop mantra “keepin’ it real” represents the quest for the coalescence and interface of ever-shifting art, politics, representation, performance and individual accountability that reflects all aspects of youth experience. [2005: 8]

Morgan further elucidates the relationship between “flow” and the concept of the “battle” in the following passage:

Once the “real” and socially critical context is established, artists may enter what Csikszentmihalyi refers to as flow state as they reach contentment and are fully absorbed in the activity. It is in this sense that Hip hop’s ritual of respect and collaboration undermines and mines the status quo by not only exposing hegemony, but recklessly teasing it as well. On the surface, artists appear to stalk, boast and deride. In reality, they are arguing for inclusion on their terms. Hip hop, and its often-epic quest for what is real, is part of Foucault’s technology of power and a battlefield where symbols, histories, politics, art, life and all aspects of the social system are contested. It is not an endless Nietzschean search for truth, but a determination to expose it and creatively represent all of its manifestation. When an MC flows s/he is creating the highest level of a battle with honor. [2005:5]

Finally, in the past few years, emcees or artists who are “racially mixed” have been thrust into the public sphere in both Hip hop, rap and R&B genres. These artists who may have experienced severe social discrimination in mainstream Japanese society in earlier years (if not living on a military base or a place where such youth were not the minority), are now able to procure capital based on their bi-cultural knowledge and ability to flow between cultures and languages. Perhaps the future champions of the flow and the battle will be those who are flexible
and fluid in not only their lyrical delivery, but also their ability to maneuver among and between such linguistic and cultural knowledges.

“Shinjuku Represent”: A Battle

The following battle, recorded on the occasion of a special anniversary of an annual Hiphop festival, signifies many of the features of aesthetics and ideology concerning flow in Hiphop culture previously described. These emcees were competing for the championship of an emcee battle that had been taking place over the course of three days. Hundreds of contenders had battled before them, and now each battler was facing the other in this final showdown. The two emcees, MC S and MC R, both represented the neighborhood of Shinjuku. They both were known among their largely middle- and high-school-age fan base for performing rebellious attitudes and presenting a “bad boy” image in the public sphere. For example, a few days earlier at the first big battle site, I saw MC R stalking through the backstage crowd with power and influence, his male age-mates configured close as an entourage. Collectively they heckled emcees with poor lyrical skills, and some members of the group boasted about their access to large quantities of high-grade marijuana, one of whom pulled a bag out and slammed it onto the table in front of another hopeful emcee as part of his boastful performance.

Just before the final battle on the third day, I had a similar experience with MC S, as I was almost run down by him as he blazed passed me on his motorbike in reckless haste toward the arena in which the final battle for champion of the festival would take place. As he blazed past, he called out his own emcee name in a rugged, raspy, and yet nasal voice. Others, especially young women, who seemed to admire and support this emcee’s budding career, screamed his name in response. MC S performed his “bad boy” image through other performative antics in forthcoming battles before the final one. He would strike poses that signified simultaneous disinterest and hardness, and during one battle he climbed onto the ropes of the battlers’ ring
(similar to a boxing ring) and hung upside down as if he were bored while his opponent struggled to battle against him. MC S’s expensive Hiphop-based fashion choices and his passionate performatives of arrogance and rebelliousness positioned him in a place of pride and even envy for most of the battle onlookers, myself included. Although I felt he could benefit from the exercise of some discipline (perhaps this is an ageist perspective), I found his behaviors engaging and charismatic.

MC R’s performance was equally charismatic, though different. When I engaged him one-on-one, he differed from MC S who kept up his “bad boy” image as though I were media and not an elder or researcher, whereas MC R codeswitched and was almost shy and quite respectful, using distal speech styles. When I praised his lyrical skills (that continue to mesmerize me to this day), he replied in a humble and reserved manner. Among his peers, and even some industry elders (all of whom were male), he was not so humble, but he remained reserved. He had a “hard” and cold stance, and a critical look in his eyes that signified that he was capable of serious physical defense. I perceived MC R as carrying a “hood” sensibility about him. He seemed serious and “about business,” but he also seemed to represent a distinct Hiphop aesthetic associated with those who come of age in struggling and marginalized communities where crime and injustice abound; these communities are sometimes referred to as “hoods.”

Both emcees represented Shinjuku, and both expressed an authentically menacing capability through body language and other performatives. Interestingly, their respective “hoods” in Shinjuku also hold a symbolic reference to the world in addition to Japan as being especially hybrid, diverse, and therefore “dangerous.” Indeed, former Prime Minister Nakasone’s and Justice Minister Kajiyama’s infamous racist comments were initially targeted toward the area of Shinjuku, an area known for sex workers, gangsters, mafia, and foreign vendors (Africans,
Middle-Easterners and other Asian nationals who are routinely stigmatized and racially marked by the Japanese government). The diversity of the area is read as criminal, and there are indeed *bona fide* criminal activities that occur there; however, I would guess that the “criminal” ascription is more due to policy and policing rather than “diversity” as Kajiyama suggested. Perhaps hailing from such an area carried cultural currency in the traditional Hiphop aesthetic in that it signified that one was a “survivor,” one could “keep it real” (or not be ashamed of one’s roots), and “not give up” as many Hiphop mantras advise.

This battle was significant to me for many different reasons. One is that it signified great lyrical skills, and the emotion and interpersonal drama behind the battle made it interesting for many of the audience participants. Another reason it has remained of interest to me is that these two artists have gone on to enjoy commercially successful careers in Hiphop, and they have worked with Japanese-national artists who are both nationally and internationally iconic in Hiphop as well as J-Pop (=Japanese popular music genre akin to Billboards’ “pop” category). Finally, the rhetoric and topics of choice during the battle reinforced my premise that Hiphop is simultaneously transnational and autochthonous in ways that continue to amaze me.

Three main themes in this battle were (1) the notion of saving Japan through Hiphop and talented lyrical skills, (2) the assertion and protection of masculinity as an identity, and (3) the assertion of Japanese national identity and pride. Those topics coupled with emcees boasting of ways in which they are (1) lyrically talented, (2) “keeping it real,” (3) not giving up and surviving, (4) willing to fight to death, (5) have pride in their background, community, and identity, positioned their lyrical performance well within transnational Hiphop lyrical aesthetics, content, and context. I am not alone in my interest in this particular battle. Excerpts of the battle that appear in my film always elicit positive responses from younger US- and Japan-based
Hiphop consumers. Even when viewers do not understand Japanese, they remain excited and impressed with MC R’s ability to flow by rhythmically uttering phonemes as well as his smooth body movements and sincere passion about his freestyle performance. Likewise, this battle is one of the few battles to-date to be posted on YouTube, and it is more popular than many popular recording artists’ videos on the Internet. At the time of this writing, it had received 103,491 views on YouTube, and approximately 8,000 during the previous week. Many of the fans commenting on their performance seem to be fairly familiar with these emcees, global Hiphop, and Japanese Hiphop. Below is a rough translation of the emcees’ interchange. Lines of ethnographic interest are marked with an arrow (→) and explicated below.

1. **MC S:**

2. This is a stage that I dreamt about standing on since 17

3. and I’ll do this (freestyle) as much as you want.

4. →Following my own values. Right [MC R]? This is how I do it. For real. (yo/.jp)

5. **MC R:**

6. =For real (yo/.jp)

7. **MC S:**

8. This is how I really do it, my battle my way, my values, I’m climbing up the stairs.

9. →My hood is also Shinjuku. Me too, I’m going to come up.

10. You are empty, don’t even try to come up, this battle doesn’t have any meaning.

11. I’m not gonna let you make it.

12. →Mayday, mayday, this is the day that the war ended, you haven’t really even stepped foot 13 in the battle.

16. →They all know, chinpira and all the yakuzas.\textsuperscript{11}

17. →I’m gonna tell you what’s on my mind,

18. →How I do it. I’m a Nippon danji ((signifies pride as a Japanese male))

19. MC R:

20. I’m coming to respond to you, my way.

21. →When I was smoking Ganja, I was thinking about the same thing.

22. If this is what I really want to do.

23. →Who’s real? What’s real. Don’t matter just do it from little by little and work your way up.

25. →Check, check one two, anybody can say that.

26. MC S and MC R, the decision is up to you all.

27. →Doing \textit{pachinko}\textsuperscript{12} when you 20, 30, I’m not gonna be like that, maybe you will.

28. Making a living off of (?) ((unintelligible))

29. I just wanted to rap, I put together a group,

30. maybe I couldn’t have made it all the way here by myself.

31. This is where I’m gonna show you (?)((unintelligible))

32. MC S:

33. You don’t really get what I said huh?

\textsuperscript{10} This is both an AAE narrative style and common Hiphop utterance that uses of a certain explicative to emphasize pride in one’s crew (perhaps by putting down other’s mothers?).

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Chinpira} and \textit{yakuza} are street or “petty” gangsters and mafia respectively.

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Pachinko} is often referred to as a national adult pastime. It is a gaming device and its reference is used to petition images of gaming parlors and the illicit lifestyles that often surround them, including drug use, depression, and gambling.
34. Yo, you first grade b-boy; I can’t lose.

35. → This is a battle between a man and a man. There are no rules.

36. A rap that becomes judged is already dead, stop fucking around judges, that’s a mistake

37. A wack fool that came up as an emcee

38. When you turn on that TV, you decide what’s right and what’s wrong.

39. I’m frustrated and I’m putting those emotions back to you in words, carrying something that’s very important to me.

40. But I might be kind of weak, but I have something special,

41. I’m doing this for no one but myself.

42. This is what I chose to do for a living, right MC R?

43. → Yea I want to fuck up [name of popular Hiphop ‘boy band’]

44. → I don’t know what you get from TV,

45. but I’m going to die here ((I think referring to on stage in the ring))

46. That won’t be too bad, I’m serious

47. MC R:

48. → I don’t really care about you all JHiphop people,

49. the industry is full of wack people.

50. Yo, MC S, I don’t like how the crowd and audience is looking down at us.

51. → This ring (stage) should be set higher, about 10 meters higher.

52. Jumping over hurdles. We’re gonna keep on going.

53. → Me performing and delivering these rhymes.

54. → We’re gonna be saving Japan, and I’m just telling you this is just one way of doing
56. it. → Since the senpais\textsuperscript{13} did not lay down the solid foundation for us,
57. we’re coming up from the bottom to the top.
58. ((unintelligible)) SHINJUKU REPRESENT

Hiphop cultural aesthetics are referenced, represented and manifested in utterances performed during the battle. MC R eventually won this close battle. Upon viewing the translation below, one will see that while MC S had more substantive content, it was MC R’s mesmerizing flow—his ability to “freak” phonemes—that made him the champ. The following analysis outlines the grammatical and cultural dynamics of this particular battle. Lines 4 and 5 (俺の価値観でやってやんぜ、なあ MC R よ (=YO/“for real/“yo”) contain a feature of AAE verbal combat as well as Hiphop battle aesthetic in which one interlocutor says the final word of a phrase that their battler is saying in an attempt to signify that their opponent’s freestyle is “weak” or untalented because the opponent was able to guess the next word of the emcee she or he is battling. MC R’s use of this technique was interesting and unexpected for me, because it is the only time he does it in the battle, and he does it with a sentence particle, “yo” which is an emphasis signifier that has a similar translational meaning in AAE. Other Hiphop ideology-based themes that abound in this battle are (1) the idea of artist as superhero or savior (cf., Morgan 2008), (2) the assertion of nationalist and gendered identities, (2) espousing philosophy about components of Hiphop, including the aesthetics of battling, the “underground” versus the industry, and (3) rites of passage in Hiphop socialization processes (Morgan 2001:190).

Assertions of nationalist and gendered identities are located in lines 9, 12, 14, 15, 25, 33, 34, 43, 55, and 58. In lines 9 and 58 respectively, MC S and MC R recognize their home

\textsuperscript{13} Senpai is an honorific assignment representing an age-based status relationship. A senpai teaches the kohai, for example, in that the senpai are advanced in age, skill, and knowledge, and are expected to teach, lead, and guide.
community of Shinjuku with pride and strength. Representing Shinjuku demonstrates their experience with an urban lifestyle and it also positions their identity as Japanese national. In lines 14-15, MC S follows traditional Hiphop aesthetic as well as (perhaps unconsciously) Japanese spoken poetry aesthetics, e.g., *renga* or *senryu*, of giving respects to one’s imagined community or artistic crew (= “Peace to the hardcore, [name of MC S crew], muthafuckas!”). MC S and MC R further situate their urban lifestyle and authenticity by characterizing their neighborhood as being dangerous through references to gangsters and mafia (line 16), as well as references to engaging in the illegal activity of smoking marijuana (line 21). Line 18 features a term that, prior to my participation in Japanese Hiphop speech communities, I had only known older males and often those who were sympathetic to the politics of WWII, to use: “*Nippon danji.*” This term could translate to, “I’m a JAPANESE MAN!” and it is relational to black nationalist Hiphop (cf., X-Clan, Public Enemy) that asserted emcees’ identities as BLACK and MALE (cf, Brotha J of X-Clan, “I do the great pimp strut, cuz Ima BLACK MAN!”

Lines 12 and 25 are mocking and marking whiteness by signifying white speech acts heard in WWII movies and other media, “Mayday, mayday” (=a distress signal, call for help) in conjunction with a recognition and reverence for the day the that WWII ended (which was also the day these two young men were battling) in line 12. Line 25 is MC R’s attempt to undercut

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14 To get the full extent of how this phrase is nationalist, review more of Brotha J of X-Clan’s verse (1990) for context: “And while I'm boomin this, I'm not a humanist/ I'm just a pro-black nigga and I'm doin this/ And don't you try to prove, that you can make a move/ Because I'm outraged, devil; it's a different groove/ And if you come again, this shit'll never end/ And we will fight through time through the very end/ You get my point son? You get my point dad?/ I'm goin back to your caves and I'm quite bad/ I do a war dance, and cause a avalanche/ And do the great pimp strut cuz Ima black man!”

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MC S’s talented diss (the use of a pun through signifying white war speech and referencing WWII, which was in the minds of everyone because of the media surrounding the commemorations at that time) that simultaneously and brilliantly dissed white American identity, uplifted and showed reverence to Japanese (male) identity through his reference to the date, while dissing MC R, who he is saying should send a distress signal akin to “Mayday, Mayday” because he is about to lose the battle. MC R responds through an attempt to unpack this diss by uttering, “Check, check on two, anybody can say that,” implying that MC S’s line 12 should not be read as deep as MC S intends, because the rhythm of his utterance is reminiscent of early Japanese Hiphop and even earlier US Hiphop flow styles.

Other references to masculinity are in line 35 (this is between MAN and MAN), line 34 (first grade b-boy [=low status young person, “wet behind the ears” implication]), and line 44 (which predicates masculinity on his willingness to annihilate other popular male Hiphop artists who are read as “commercial,” “soft,” and “weak”; thus, they are damaging the already delicate image of Japanese masculinity according to the global world order that feminizes Asian male identity). Finally, line 55 echoes a “stakes is high” mentality in Hiphop philosophy, which further situates the dominant “keep it real” and “don’t give up” mantras with the emcees as “gods” or “saviors” who save disaffected people as well as Hiphop through the practice of Hiphop. Further, MC R critiques elders (=senpais) for not laying a solid foundation, and accentuates that he among others is building a Hiphop foundation (cf., Rapper 1’s comments) “from the bottom to the top.”

**Japanese AAE Codeswitching in Japanese Hiphop**

AAE is used by people I know, my friends; that’s how we talk. AAE, used by people of color, is different from language that white people use (.2) so it’s (I don’t know) special.

--A 19 year old, Japanese national cultural worker who works in Japan and the US
In the popular and widely consumed Dictionary of African-American Slang, Izumiyama (2007 [1997]) begins with a “Hip-Hop Map” that designates “who’s representin’ where.” A map of the continental United States is drawn with Hiphop “hotspot” cities denoted along with lists of famous African-American rappers (with the lone exception of Eminem) who “represent” those areas. These cities and artists are set according the author’s sense of saliency towards Hiphop and African-American culture and history. The dictionary continues to give a linguistic introduction to African American English as well as other information about popular and literary history and culture. The book features words that represent all aspects of African American English, from phonological manifestations such as “da” for “the” to lexicon like “steelo” (=style). Samples of how to use the word in context in addition to definitions and emoticons indicating whether the vernacular in question is gender-based or still relevant are part of each dictionary entry. Popular magazines such as BMR (Black Music Review), which prominently features Hiphop, have monthly columns that elucidate “the word” in AAE much in the manner of how Morgan (2008) theorizes. BMR’s column is titled, “Word is Yours!” The June 2007 issue of BMR’s “Word is Yours!” column featured the word, “nappy” as “Lesson 14” in the series. The descriptions elucidate the subject matter in a similar manner to Izumiyama (2007).

Izumiyama’s book features brief biographies of salient African-American leaders, mostly male, ranging from politicians and human rights activists to prominent sports figures. It says that these leaders are included because they are commonly referenced in Hiphop lyrics. The book also presents timelines and essays answering the question, “where did Hiphop come from?” Interestingly, African-American roots are designated, and African-American narrative styles are discussed in detail. The timeline features Langston Hughes Not without Laughter in reference to
dirty dozens and other writers, including Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, with excerpts, explanation and translation, along with reference to other dance and music styles from the 1930s through the 1960s. The year 1969 references Kool Herc’s immigration to the Bronx in addition to H. Rap’s Brown’s *Die Nigger Die* and Iceberg Slim’s *Pimp—The Story of My Life*. It continues on through the present with African-American history and cultural roles in Hiphop’s origins narrative.

Why would a dictionary of African-American “slang” feature so much information on Hiphop, from “roots” to linguistic features to geography? I posit that the existence and popularity of this book and many others (cf., Izumiyama 2005) further situates Hiphop in Japan as part of imagined black cultural practice, with Hiphop serving as a trope for blackness. This is partially maintained through specific speech acts that reflect African American English. I present lyrics from popular songs initially translated by a 19-year-old cultural worker who also works with me as a research assistant and co-constructive analyst. These songs were selected because they are popular among diverse sets of Hiphop “heads,” and they represent a cross-section of artists in the public sphere. As a bilingual, bicultural producer of Hiphop culture, VSOP’s translations were much more artistic and to the liking of the cultural workers I worked with than some of the other translations presented in this research (such as those by the author), because they were considered more authentic and less literal or even “square.”

I present both the codeswitching found in the original artists’ lyrics published by the artists themselves in their CD sleeves or on online fora, as well as the translations produced by VSOP. Note that both the originals and the translations feature grammatical features of AAE. As stated earlier, cultural workers reported that it was precisely the aspects of translations that maintained the AAE linguistic features that reflected the intention and feeling of the original composition.
Below I outline and analyze examples of AAE linguistic features as well as Hiphop language ideology in the Japanese compositions presented.

“Luck Last” (2006) by Anarchy feat. La Bono and AK-69 —AK-69’s Verse

**Original:**

Shining 韻かすぎて ganxta rap やけど覚悟で来いよ hey yo hey yo wack

→ It’s da mutherfuckin ‘69, LとAを援護 Tubi fuckin’ stylez

街歩きゃ誰にも負けたくないだけの小僧
怒らすなて俺をよう ちーとやそっとじゃ語れねえ模様

→かなりヨレてバキバキでも ガンガンにネタ売って暮らしても
ケチな事で手汚しても 女以上に離さんかったmicrophone

→Luck last put your sets up, 終わりよければ全てよした blah

今が良きゃ put your sets up いかれた過去が生きる right now blah

**Translation:**

1 Shining, let the gangsta rap bump, you might get burned so you better watchout

2 Hey yo hey yo wack, → it’s da muthafuckin’ 69

3 → Got the L and the A on lock, tubi fuckin’ stylez

4 When I walked around the town, didn’t want to lose to anyone, so don’t start shit

5 You need to know me to talk about me

6 → Even when I was broke and livin’ a hard life, even when I was sellin’ and living a ballin’ life,

7 Even when I was doin’ dirt, I never let the microphone, even for no women

8 → Luck last put your sets up, all that matters is if you reach your goal,

9 If you lovin’ right now put your sets up, livin’ a crazy past

Anarchy is based in the Kyoto area of Japan. He is a rapper on the R-Rated Records label managed by Ryuzo for Maguma MCs. The song, “Luck Last,” features appearances by La Bono (R-Rated Records) and AK-69, a rapper based in Nagoya. His album art (see Figure 4-1) features himself in a striking pose behind letters that follow the aesthetics and rules of commercial graffiti writing, as it looks as if it were written with a marker and extra lines and marks accentuate and frame the wording. The tattoo on his hand supports his “bad boy,” hardened, and masculine image.

**Object 4-2 Anarchy’s album cover for “Luck Last”**

Though morphemes such as “the” and “they” being linguistically realized as /da/ and /dey/ are indicative of social class, linguists have also situated the occurrence within an AAE phonological framework (cf., Green 2002; Morgan 2001). Lines 2-3 include AAE phonological
The style of “the” appearing as “da,” and there is also lexical innovation considering L and A (=LA) with “on lock” lexicon, a verbal phrase meaning that the object/subject in reference is “under control.” The numbers “69” refer to a car and “tubi” refers to car parts, specifically exhaust systems hand-crafted by artisans in Italy. The term “fuckin” follows the rule of post-vocalic /g/ deletion, and “stylez” follows innovation in orthography, with the final /s/ being written /z/. Line 6 not only begins a reference to a Hip hop philosophy tenet of perseverance, but it also features three words that follow postvocalic /g/ deletion: “livin,” “sellin,” and “lovin.” “Put your sets up” in line 8 means to represent one’s identity, “hood,” or gang affiliation, with “sets” referring to hand symbols or gestures that signify one’s affiliation or region, and it completes the narrative of perseverance.


Original:
ホラ ROCK ON 秒殺でトリコ BIG-O
のライム 放り込む 大立ち回り その耳
連行
物的証拠 記録の RECORD この病む街
消えぬマジック 時は経ち 見失う価値
GOT MY MIMDON MY MONEY
MONEY ON MY MIND
ビルの谷間に舞う現ナマ 路上の会話
はシリアス 徐々に夢リアリティを増す
BEAT に乗り 追いかける明日 ヘッド
フォンから AQUARIUS
俺は望んでこの街と共存 走り抜ける
WAR-ZONE 東京タワーのネオン 消える前に
会いに行くぜ オマエに、オマエに

Translation:
1 → Rock on, in a second I’ll grab your heart, Ima throw to you Big-O’s rhyme
2 Movin and actin to haul your ears, physical evidence, it’s on the record
3 This sick city, the magic doesn’t disappear, time passes, losing sight of the value
4 → Got my mind on my money, money on my mind, money falls between the valleys of the building
6 Communication on the streets is serious, slowly changes from dream to reality
7 → Sittin on the beat, chasin tomorrow, hearin Aquarius from the headphones
8 I choose to live in this city, running through the war zone
9 → I’ll come and visit you before the neon on the Tokyo tower disappears

The Hip hop group Aquarius is made up of the two-man crew of DJ and producer, Yakko a.k.a. Jhett, and rapper Deli from Nitro Microphone Underground (NMU). The collaboration
resulted in an album called Oboreta Machi. The song, “Koko Tokyo” features fellow NMU members S-Word and Dabo, along with another legendary Tokyo rapper, Big-O. Big-O is currently gaining popularity in the US through his newest fashion line, Phenomenon. Their album cover features artistic lettering in romaji in addition to the group members, who are wearing popular Hiphop fashion.

Object 4-3 Aquarius’s album cover for the “Koko Tokyo”

Line 1 of the preceding verse contains the “Ima” phrase that Morgan (2002:127-128) describes as part of AAE and Hiphop linguistics. Line 4 features the phrase “got my mind on my money, money on my mind” which is a phrase that abounds in Hiphop as well as AAE historic narrative poetry. More recently, The Notorious B.I.G.—a slain rapper who is considered as possessing some of the most talented lyrical skills in global Hiphop—has been noted for that phrase. The lyrical sampling here serves as a shout to the aforementioned traditions. The phrase beginning with “got” is also consistent with Morgan’s research (2002:128) concerning the higher percentage for “got” verses “have” in subject case for Hiphop verses. Line 9, the final line of the verse, is quite poetic and reminiscent of traditional Japanese poetry genres, such as tanka, with his reference to coming to visit his sweetheart before dawn. It also petitions literary aesthetics such as mono no aware, in that a sense of sadness along with sentimentality is communicated with his vivid and beautiful imagery. The Hiphop aesthetic of perseverance is also communicated in this song, and the lyrical reference to Notorious B.I.G. accentuates this sensibility.
“No Pain No Gain” (2002) DJ PMX feat. Maccho (Ozrosaurus), Zeebra—Maccho’s Verse

Original:
俺にはこれしかねぇ 磨き上げたライ ムの腕しかねぇ
急な險しい皐道 裏街道 甘く見んじゃ ねぇぜ 決して楽じゃないぞ
舵取ったベースライン 拳チライン ナビ にわかじゃ筋通らん この道なり
適当なようで適当じゃない 適当じゃ ないようで適当な具合
ルーツは ルート16 邪魔は無駄だ マイク持ち MURDERER は14からの ドラマ
78年式 CHECK DA NUMBER ハイテクな挽歌 BAY STAR 湾岸(YO!)
エリアから第三京浜 後はまっすぐな 道なり SMOKIN' BOOGIE
バラッドに挿されて通りを ROLLIN'
浜から PEACE TO DA お江戸ホーミー ブライドの賭け才能で ドンパ チ脳細胞ギャラクシー
分かる奴だけ最後まで確信 DJ PMX とタイトな 2MC

Translation:
1 This is all I have, this skill of rhymin that I been doin
2 You better keep in mind that this ain’t easy, this is a tough path full of back alleys
3 Crazy bass line with a punch line, no newcomer can get any respect
4 Seems irresponsible but I’m not but let it look like it and I stay straight with my swagger
5 My roots come from route 16, I’m a murderer with a microphone, since the age of 14, nonstop drama
6 Gotta ‘78, check da number, speaks like a ballad, reppin’ the bay Yo!
7 Just cruisin’ straight on the road, smoking’ boogie
8 I stay rollin’ as the ballad plays in the back, I give ma peace to ma Tokyo homies
9 I gamble with my talent and risk it with my pride,
10 I only need those who know to understand me till the end, DJ PMX and 2 tight MCs

Legendary producer DJ PMX is from the city of Yokohama and is known for his smooth (US) West Coast style tracks. PMX is the deejay and producer for the two-man crew, DS455. The song “No Pain No Gain” features Maccho from Ozrosaurus and Zeebra. Maccho, like DJ PMX, represents the Yokohama area. Zeebra is from Tokyo and was part of the legendary Japanese Hiphop group, King Giddra. The font on the cover of the album brings to mind the block lettering associated with the “bling” aesthetic that was new and yet popular at the time of this album’s debut. The expensive car and expensive fashion buttress this notion. The bandana represents street culture of Japan as well as street culture of the US, and the squatted, leaned pose is a classic “bboy” stance; both symbols represent masculinity.
Object 4-4 DJ PMX’s album art for the “No Pain No Gain”

Line 1 communicates a sense of despair or deprivation in this verse that attends to Hiphop’s dominant “don’t give up” narrative. Line 1 also features postvocalic /g/ deletion. Line 6 contains phonological feature “da” in place of “the” and “gotta” in subject position (Morgan 2002:128). Line 8 presents the syntax feature or “stay” which is akin to “steady,” but differs in that it means “to engage in activity frequently” (Green 2002:23). When lyricist Maccho says he “stay rollin as the ballad plays in the back,” he could intend a double meaning given the context of the rest of the verse: he is always rolling marijuana cigarettes and he is always riding in his car. Line 8 could be glossed as “I am always engaged in rolling marijuana for the purpose of smoking, while I habitually ride in my car and listen to music from loudspeakers located in the back of my car.” Line 8 also includes the Hiphop and AAE word “homies” meaning “friends.”

“Uh-Uh” (2003) by Suite Chic feat. AI—Suite Chic’s Verse

Original:
絡まって乱れる逆らって煮詰まる
スクラッチだらけの関係は
こうやってる間にも崩れそう今に
も
why don't you stop playin' me out
気がじゃないのは
負けたくない game 少し不利 damn!
だからなに what? 意地になる but,
もう一度溺れてこの bootylicious
病みつきな目つき何回でも to the end

Translation:
1 Falling in to disorder, getting choked
2 This relationship that’s full of scratches, make me be sick
3 Even as we talk, I feel like collapsing
4 Why don't you stop playin' me out
5 I want to stop this
6 This is a game that I don’t wanna lose but I'm at a disadvantage
7 So what? I’m gonna be aggressive but
8 One more time, fall for my body that’s bootylicious
9 I love the way that you see me with your eyes till the end
Suite Chic, a.k.a. Amuro Namie, is a famous pop singer in Japan who has shown her staying power in the industry. She has recorded under the name Suite Chic as a Hiphop emcee and singer, and has collaborated with various Hiphop artists such as Dabo, Zebra, Verbal from M-Flo, and XBS on her first Hiphop style album, When Pop Hit’s the Fan. The song “Uh-Uh” is produced by Yakko a.k.a. Jhett from the group Aquarius and features another major Japanese emcee, AI. This J-Pop turned Hiphop star features a “blaxploitation”-influenced cover for the compilation pictured (Object 4-5). Of note are 1970s-inspired font styles of “Suite Chic” written on the album cover. Also of note is her choice of the afro hair style and perhaps slightly browner skin for the front cover illustration of herself. This illustration does not reflect her usual image. She is rumored to have “mixed” or multiple heritages and is from Ryukyu Islands. She is touted as being one of the best R&B and Hiphop artists in the world by her consumers.

**Object 4-5 Suite Chic’s album cover for the “Uh-Uh”**

This translation features aspects of AAE phonology (postvocalic /g/ deletion), syntax (invariant /be/), and lexicon (bootylicious). Line 2 suggests an attempt at the use of invariant (aspectual or habitual) /be/, meaning the male character that she sings about keeps her in a continual sense of heartbreak, not that he is only making her upset in this particular moment. Line 4 contains the phrase “playin me out”; /playin/ is a result of post-vocalic /g/ deletion, and the overall phrase is common in Hiphop meaning that one has been duped, tricked, or humiliated. Line 8 contains a lyrical sample from Beyonce, who is part of an African-American female singing group called Destiny’s Child (“my body that’s bootylicious”). In Hiphop, lyrical samples serve as a “shout out,” “props,” or respectful intentions toward others who influence one’s artistic production and persona. Furthermore, “bootylicious” is part of Hiphop lexicon. Currently in the public sphere it means beautiful, or as Izumiyama (2007) defines it “booty (=body) + delicious,” and an example of it in use is “I wanna be bootylicious like Kelis” [US female emcee
and wife to US male emcee Nas] (2007:31). This newer definition demonstrates linguistic change. For example, when I was coming of age, “bootylicious” was akin to the word “wack” or “booty”—as in “it stank” like a “butt” (cf, Snoop Dogg 1992—dissin Tim Dog—“But fuck your mama, I'm talkin about you and me/ Toe to toe, Tim M-U-T/ Your bark was loud, but your bite wasn't vicious/ And them rhymes you were kickin were quite bootylicious”). “Bootylicious” held a negative connotation as an insult in a similar manner, but not as powerful, as any phrase that disrespects one’s mother. Beyonce and others have helped to catapult this AAE-rooted lexicon into the international public sphere with a new meaning.1


Big Ron is a cultural worker based in the Yokosuka area of Japan. He has been active in the “West Coast” cultural movement scene of Japan. This song is featured on his album, “Str8 Out Da Bay” and features Richee, a member of Big Ron’s Hiphop group, Ghetto INC., and DS455, which consists of DJ PMX and rapper Kayzabro. Of note on this album cover is the AAE phrase and orthography “Str8 Out Da Bay.” Thus, two California, USA references are combined. First, the Straight Outta Compton album by LA-based group NWA and “Da Bay,” which refers to the San Francisco Bay Area (usually the East Bay’s Oakland or Richmond, which serve as tropes for blackness in public discourse as well as in the Ebonics dictionaries; see Izumiyama 2005, 2007 [1997]). Second, the symbols of Big Ron’s tattooed arms simultaneously evoke a memory of LA-based Black and Latino gang cultures as well as Japanese domestic gang and mafia culture. The car selection also references a US West Coast Hiphop aesthetic, as Yokohama, home to some US military-base housing, is usually presented as having more of a

1 See also Morgan (2002:76) on grammaticalization and (2008:95, 102) for more on linguistic change in AAE and Hiphop language varieties.
“West Coast style” than Tokyo, a nearby city. Big Ron is also rumored to have “mixed” or multiple heritages. I have heard a number of rumors, one of which positions him as being of white (US, American?) and Japanese-national heritage. Big Ron’s work has been criticized for its misogynistic references that objectify women, and Latina/o research consultants have problematized his performance of LA style and culture as Yokohama style and culture that reifies stereotypes of Mexican people in the media. Despite these critiques, Big Ron enjoys popularity, sold-out shows, and high sales of his productions, both CDs and DVDs, which could hint toward changing attitudes concerning performances of race among current Hiphop consumers. Whereas in the 1990s, trends in Japanese Hiphop seemed to be more sensitive about performing negative stereotypes of racialized people (e.g., African-descendants) and there was a lot of rhetoric about respecting the “roots” and history of “the culture,” Big Ron’s performances were not read as such by some of my Latino-identified research assistants. His performance was read as offensive to one assistant. Other research assistants viewed his work as performative and not much different from other manifestations of the so-called “gangsta” genre of Hiphop, and therefore, not offensive in terms of “race,” but indeed offensive or at least problematic in terms of gender representation. In any case, Big Ron presents interesting instances of codeswitching, and represents novel aspects of hybridity in Japanese Hiphop genres.

Line 1 below contains postvocalic /g/ deletion with “cruising,” “hittin,” and “switchin.” Lines 3-5 contain lexicon that is indicative of specific US West Coast aesthetics including so-called “cholo” culture with “lowride,” “dayton,” and “candy paint,” referring to car maintenance and artistic rendering (paint, wheels, and stylization). Line 7 features a future tense auxiliary, “gonna.” Lisa Green comments that, “future is also marked with gonna or gon, which does not occur with first person singular (Ima)” (Green 2002:40). Lines 8 and 12 refer to dominant
Hiphop philosophies, one of perseverance and the other to “wild style” or artistic and unfettered creative aesthetics.

Original:
CRUISIN' 流す港町 STREET AND
HITTIN' 打ちならしてる SWITCHIN'
WOW バンパー光る CHROME
CANDY PAINT ホイールは GOLD
DAYTON WIRE はみ出すタイヤ
LOWRIDE STYLE これが DESIRE
HOT な GIRLS MY HEART IS ON FIRE
夜明けが来るまで GONNA GET HIGH
この STYLE いつだって WILD
なんでも言うぜオレ達の TRIAL
BIG RON & KAY-DOUBLE "O" と
SHOUT
PMX, DJ THAT ROCKS THE CROWD
ここまで来たあとは分かるだろ
言うこと無し続けてる SHOW は
道は長いぜ KEEP ON MOVIN'
終わりのない BAYSIDE CRUISIN'

Translation:
1 →Cruisin' around the city street and hittin', switchin'
2 wow, the chrome bumper shining
3 →Candy paint, the wheels are gold
4 →dayton wire, with the stuck out tires
5 →lowride style is what it desire
6 some hot girls, my heart is on fire
7 →gonna get high till the early morning
8 →this style is always wild
9 I cant tell ya all day long, this is our trial
10 Big Ron and Kay-double “o” and shout to PMX, DJ that rocks the crowd
11 if you've come this far, you know the rest
12 →the path is long so keep on movin'
13 the never-ending bayside cruisin'

Object 4-6 Big Ron’s album cover for the “Bayside Cruisin’”

Hybridity, Identity, and Cultural Work

I had been to the “VIP” section of a particularly large, Shibuya-based Hiphop club several times, but I had not been there when there were so many (over a dozen) recording artists in the section at once. The area we were in was very small, and it made my experience in the area seem extra crowded and tight. I found a space next to an artist whom I recognized from popular press and a brief meeting and interview a year earlier. I asked him if he was who I thought he was, and responded that he was. He asked me how my work was going and I, surprised that he remembered me from a brief meeting from the year before, replied that it was going well. At some point while we were talking (in Japanese), he abruptly asked if I was half Japanese. When I told him that I was not half Japanese, he asked how I learned to speak Japanese, and I told him that I originally learned it from my mother, who used to teach Chinese and Japanese. He then
asked, “Is she [my mother] Chinese?” and I said, “No she’s African-descent American.” “But you are half [haffu](=of multi-racial heritage)?” he said, and I responded, “Yes, my mother is black and my father is white.” “Me, too,” was his response. He continued, “My mother is Filipino and my father is Japanese. I am half, too.” He was grinning widely and nodding emphatically, seeming excited that we were both haffu.

At this point, a number of other artists near us began to relay similar comments. “My mother is Chinese,” said one rapper, and “My mother is Korean,” said another. Someone called out, “I heard [another artist who had left the “VIP” section to hang out in the deejay area] was Ainu.” I was surprised by this interaction. Up until that point I had been told that people who were haffu hid their multiple heritages to fit into Japanese society (cf., Life 199X), but in this space people were proudly claiming diverse heritage and drawing connections to their perceptions of me. The artists whom I talked to that night performed as if they were secure and proud of their identity. I asked the artist sitting closest to me who identified as having a Filipino mother if he preferred the term haffu (=half, suggesting multiple ethnoracial heritage) or daaburu (=double, suggesting multiple ethnoracial heritage). He responded that nowadays it is better (=politically correct) to say daaburu but when he was growing up, he was picked on and called haffu, and now that he is rich and famous he delights in proclaiming that he is haffu and successful. I replied that I understand prejudice (=sabetsu wakarimasu, meaning I went through similar experiences), and said “In the United States and even here [in Japan] in Nagoya as a high school student, I had problems.” He said, “To struggle and be successful is the story of Hiphop. Kanpai (=toast)” We toasted, and the topic shifted, as someone began to ask my colleague questions about her experiences with a famous US-based “conscious” Hiphop group.
My main interlocutor’s (the artist with the Filipino mother) mindful usage of “haffu” reminded me of the generational use of the pejorative N word in the US among African Americans. His practice in this instance seemed indicative of disidentification, as he purposely identified with a negative identity term in an effort to raise awareness about social inequality and abuse that he experienced growing up with that identification. His recognition of his success in spite of this identification seemed to be a political act to reveal the constructed nature of the identification in the first place. Finally, his association with hyrbidity (having multiple heritage), suffering (coping with racialized ascriptions), and success through Hiphop (overcoming societal adversity), supports the transnational Hiphop aesthetic, which holds an idea of the artist as “superhero” and artist as providing an imperative “don’t give up” narrative (Muñoz 1999; Morgan 2008).

As time passed, I had more and more experiences like the aforementioned. In 2005, the atmosphere of certain clubs in Tokyo was more welcoming of multicultural and multilingual knowledge than I had ever experienced before. Whereas my earlier experience was confined to a group conversation in the secluded VIP section of a club, I now saw open mic battles that welcomed emcees and other artists from local military bases and other club goers who all displayed skill in multiple languages and cultures. Indeed, these particular spaces privileged political marking of “daaburu” or more. The extremely young club visitors seem to be “coming up” in a different social space than my own age-mates who were marked with multiple heritages in Japan, or at least this club. The hot spot of Roppongi was a safe zone for them that night. In this atmosphere, I wished that Lafura Jackson, aka “A-Twice,” was with me to witness our shared childhood fantasy: a space that welcomed and encouraged African- and Asian- descent cultural and political collaboration.
Lafura Jackson was the son of a Japanese mother and African-American father, and his name “A-Twice” signified that he was of both African- and Asian-descent. An interview with a close friend who assists his mother with managing the cultural and academic materials that focus on Jackson revealed that Jackson was interested in uncovered, under-reported research and practice concerning collaborations between Asian-descendents and African-descendants, with a focus on African Americans and Japanese nationals. We even share a similar tattoo attesting to this wish: the kanji character for black (黒) rests on my back and it rested on Jackson’s arm. The increasing evidence of open “hybrid” identities in Japanese Hiphop scenes marks a difference from the eras in which Jackson and I grew up, where blackness as well as being marked as racially mixed or “haffu” was stigmatized. Jackson, among others, saw Hiphop as a safe space for bringing diverse cultures and language ideologies together (Jackson n.d.). It seems to be happening in the distinct spaces that I just described.

Case Studies: Producers, Consumers, and Distributors

You better be serious if you wanna be serious/ No question: we pass on the sentiment of our great teachers/ We are missionaries from Japan/ Today again we go to the battlefield….We put our intentions in rap/ We live this extreme performance/ softness overcomes hardness


Distribution: “We All in the Same Game”

The story of distribution in Hiphop is indicative of the universalization of capitalism, and it cannot be rooted in one country’s soil. Hiphop emerged in undocumented markets, outside of the formal economy in its genesis in the United States. Arguably, all Hiphop continues to begin in this manner, with the exception of corporate invented performing groups, which generally do not have the lasting marketability that those that cut their entrepreneurial teeth in “street” markets do. Indeed, many if not all Hiphop artists who are now part of a larger Multi-national Corporate
(MNC) family usually gained notoriety in their home communities, demonstrating the ability to sell large numbers of units before being offered formal economic contracts with corporate entities. While there have been some notable Hiphop acts that were created for the direct purpose of profit and not necessarily art (e.g., Sugar Hill Gang by Sylvia Robinson and The Band by Sean Combs), these creations have not proven to be profitable in the long term without constant communication with and input from local community artists (e.g., Grandmaster Caz wrote many of the lyrics for Sugar Hill Gang). This formula is not unique to the United States, as most record labels and distributors are actually engaged with larger MNCs that run this aspect of the entertainment market all over the world.

Despite the fact that various small independent recording companies initiated the production, publishing, and marketing of Hiphop music, larger record companies that can be traced to parent companies\(^1\) quickly realized the profit potential and by the late 1980s bought or became the distributors for virtually all of the independent labels. At this moment, corporate control over distribution (i.e., what the public has access to consume in formal markets) is at once solidified and obscured. Even if an MNC does not have control over the artistic production of a product, the corporation does retain control over its proliferation in the formal economy. This is a cultural contradiction with the “authenticity” aesthetic in Hiphop origins narratives that posit connections to communities and local knowledge for success. MNCs partially redress this through subsidiaries. For example, reggae music by a Japanese or Jamaican artist on Island Records can eventually be traced to its parent company, SONY. Likewise, Hiphop music by an artist in Japan or the United States may be on the Def Jam or Virgin label, but it can eventually\(^1\) In the late 1980s these companies were MCA, Warner, Capitol-EMI, Polygram, SONY, CBS, and BMG. At the beginning of my research these companies were the following: Warner, EMI, SONY/BMG and Universal. Warner and EMI merged during the tenure of my research, leaving three major media conglomerates: Warner-EMI, SONY-BMG, and Universal.
be traced to SONY-BMG and EMI respectively. Even the notoriously “independent” ADA is now owned by Warner.

In the mid-1990s, scholars interested in these global economic flows thought the country base and ownership of these MNCs could be verified. For example, we thought that we could say that SONY was a Japan-based and owned company, and that Warner was a USA-based and owned company, but most of this has shifted with changing laws and economic practice. With the severe economic recession that hit Japan in 1994, many of its leading companies have changed national hands so quickly that it has been difficult for this ethnographer to keep up. I know from those inside these industries that there has been a trend for Western and Northern European countries as well as the United States to procure ownership of these companies, but keep them based in Japan for market and legal reasons.\[^2\] This has created massive restructuring with Japanese Hip-hop companies, as it has with American Hip-hop companies. Among the artists whom I work with, there is a resistance not only to having one’s political and artistic agenda controlled by a corporation, but also to having one’s political and artistic agenda controlled by a foreign corporation that is conspicuously situated outside of the “traditional” Hip-hop cultural aesthetic, including pride and commitment to autochthonous production.

\[^2\] An economist in the Mitsubishi companies explained it to me like this, “If the trend is to ‘buy Japanese’ then it is best for the American company to keep its product ‘Japanese’” (Fieldnotes 2001). I suppose this complies with meeting the needs of perceived tastes and preferences. An African-American MNC-affiliated artist who practices globally comments, “That shit changes every year: companies switching hands. It’s hard to keep up. I mean that’s the way the music industry works; whatever is hot, different investors jumpin’ in, jumpin’ out…That’s the way that shit works; it’s real fluid” (Fieldnotes 2004).
Consumers: Beyond Blackface

The consumers\(^3\) that I have engaged are so different that I will just give a few examples from my field experiences in an effort to provide a sample of the variance. In addition, it is my hope that these individuals’ narratives will reveal the spurious claim of a fixed, “carbon copy” Japanese national consumer, who is often presented as artificially tanned with darkening make-up, “African-derived” hairstyles (e.g., braided extensions or locs), and wearing clothing that is associated with a Hiphop fashion industry. Such images have spawned a number of articles from American scholars and journalists arguing that this phenomenon represents more evidence of (1) the lack of authenticity in Japanese Hiphop,\(^4\) and (2) antiblack, racist attitudes of “the” (=homogenous) Japanese society.

Yuri and Makoto have never left the island of Honshu in Japan. Makoto has never left his region, which is located in the southern part of the island. He is from a self-described lower middle class family and he cannot afford to travel. Yuri, who lives near the capital city, visited the southern region once on an extracurricular activity field trip. Makoto is an airplane custodian in his middle twenties who specifically cleans restrooms. He consumes mainstream, top-selling commercial Hiphop and reggae artists that are featured on popular radio stations and on video channels such as MTV Japan and Space Shower TV. He reports that his love of Hiphop has led him to have an increased pride in himself as a Japanese man. He is an avid reader of works that are mentioned in his favorite Hiphop songs. He mentioned that the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* in translation was a pivotal text in his self-realization process.

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\(^3\) These consumers are presented using pseudonyms that I have arbitrarily chosen. They are presented in female–male groups, and categorized by access to travel.

\(^4\) This particular sentiment is indicative of the age-old “always imitators, never innovators” racialized rhetoric from WWII and the 1980s. See John Dower (1993:291) or Dorinne Kondo (1997) for more explanation.
Yuri was in her early twenties when I met her, and she had the unique experience of interning as a promoter and organizer for “underground” Hiphop events in the Tokyo-Kawasaki-Yokohama metropolitan area. Yuri consumes commercial Japanese Hiphop artists who have an “underground aesthetic” as well as some popular American Hiphop groups that are marketed as “underground” in America. The Japanese artists that Yuri likes best are usually unsigned, internet-based groups who represent the local culture of her home area, located just outside of the metropolitan area that she works. Her favorite groups tend to sing about things like ecology and peace. Yuri likes similar environmentalist-minded Hiphop artists from the United States. Both Makoto and Yuri self-identify as Japanese nationals.

Mayuko and Bunwon are open with their “ethnic minority” identity in Japan. Both of them were born in Japan and currently live in the Kantoo region on the island of Honshu. When I met them, Mayuko was in her early thirties and Bunwon was in his middle thirties. Mayuko is a Korean-descent Japanese resident. Her family has lived in Japan for many decades. She is an office worker at an NGO where she does educational research. Mayuko attended college, and as a Christian, she recalls always listening to “black music” in her household. She thinks that Hiphop is the music for her generation. She likes the melodies and beats. She also likes the messages of equality in some (Japanese) rappers music. She enjoys all Hiphop, but she only purchases Japanese Hiphop. Bunwon was originally from the southern region but moved to the north in the hopes of pursuing an art career. He is from a single-parent, low socioeconomic household, and he is also “daaburu” (=of mixed racial and ethnic heritage), as his mother is Filipino. Bunwon now lives a comfortable, middle-class lifestyle in a city location, working as a visual artist. Bunwon consumes and purchases both underground and commercial Hiphop from both Japan and the United States. He believes that the Hiphop lyricists narrate their life struggles
through their art, and he is influenced to do the same in his own artistic expression. Both Mayuko and Bunwon have only traveled briefly to other Asian countries for the purpose of visiting distant family or exploring notions of cultural heritage.

Michiko and Seichi are self-identified “TCKs” or “Third Culture Kids,” whose fathers are very wealthy businessmen who often lived abroad with their families for business purposes. When I met them, Michiko was in her late twenties and Seichi was in his early thirties. They attended private schools as well as college. Whereas Michiko went to a prestigious Japanese university, Seichi attended a well-known American university. Both Michiko and Seichi are avid Hiphop fans, and they frequent concerts, clubs, and album debuts or “in-store” visits to record shops from Hiphop artists. They consume and purchase Hiphop from Japan as well as the United States. They have a preference for oppositional, nonconsumerist, anticapitalist music such as music by K Dub Shine or dead prez. They both have dreams of joining their social activism with what they believe to be an emerging international Hiphop political movement. Seichi, who was once seriously considering a career as a bilingual lyricist, is now a fairly well known artist who raps mainly in Japanese, despite his bilingual skills and is increasingly concerned with what he understands to be traditional Japanese lyrical and cultural aesthetics in his music.

Producers: The “Keepers” of the Culture

Japanese pioneers such as Pioneer 1, Pioneer 2, and Pioneer 3 are able to police Japanese origins narratives as well as what should be constituted as “real Hiphop” because they are elders and they “were there.” Other pioneers, such as Pioneer 4 and Pioneer 5, present interesting intersections with the formal music industry. These artists have not only spent time in the United

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5 The US-based pioneers are marked as US Hiphop Pioneer # and the Japanese Hiphop pioneers are labeled without reference to geopolitical entity, Pioneer #.
States “experiencing” black culture firsthand, but they also purport fictive kinships with key US Hiphop pioneers.

   Pioneer 2 is famed for his over-twenty-years’ friendship with US Hiphop Pioneer 7. According to the Japanese origins narrative, Pioneer 2 met US Hiphop Pioneer 7 when a certain tour hit Tokyo, Japan in the early 1980s. US Hiphop Pioneer 7, who was a teenager at the time and was traveling as a live performer alongside a documentary film that features him and many artists from US Hiphop’s origins narrative. Pioneer 2 was a fellow adolescent who “befriended” US Hiphop Pioneer 7, learned dance styles from him, and later started a Japan Chapter of US Hiphop Pioneer 7’s transnational social movement organization 2 (TSMO 2). For over twenty years Pioneer 2 was known for holding bgirl and bboy dance circles on weekends in an outdoor area. Pioneer 2 is considered the “father” of Japan’s largest underground Hiphop festival, which is cohosted by Pioneer 1 and his transnational social movement organization 1 (TSMO 1) as well as many other organizations and corporations.

   Pioneer 2 is best known around the world for his dancing, but he also engages in other elements of Hiphop such as emceeing and graffiti. At a Knowledge Panel at an annual Hiphop festival, Pioneer 2 and Pioneer 1 engaged in philosophical discussion and cultural critique of Japanese Hiphop practice. They expressed origins narratives and policed current practices with all elements of Hiphop that they perceive to be deviating from its original goal (“peace, love, unity and harmony” and social change). They problematized graffiti as practiced in Japan, and petitioned US Hiphop Pioneer 7 to participate in a multilingual dialogue about the topic. Social commentary was linked to artistic and cultural aesthetics in this conversation. Pioneer 1 pleaded with the young crowd to read more and to study the origins by watching films like Wild Style, and Pioneer 2 asked the crowd “to raise a revolution as Hiphoppers.” Their age and their life
experiences in addition to their relationship with another elder from across the Pacific, US Hiphop Pioneer 7, hierarchically situated their edicts, as they repeated their “old” ages, bragged about their small children (=paternal privilege) and threatened to have their ancestral spirits haunt those who disrespected the international culture of Hiphop.

When I met Pioneer 3, he enjoyed the rare pleasure of “checking” public discourse on the origins and current cultural practice of Hiphop on the air of his radio show. A self-identified “elder” in Japanese Hiphop, Pioneer 3’s extensive and conspicuous experience working in a US city with Hiphop-affiliated industries situates him as one of the few Japanese Hiphop pioneers whose career has traced both the formal and informal sides of the economy as well as both the artistic and journalistic sides of the culture. As an “elder,” Pioneer 3 is positioned as “one who knows” and “one who was there” at Hiphop’s earliest phases. He has been called upon to judge or moderate emcee or deejay battles, and as a prominent personality in public discourse, he is an accessible public authority on Hiphop culture. His role “in the community” as a radio personality provides him with the opportunity to converse with and reach out to troubled individuals on a nightly basis by answering faxes, e-mails, and phone calls while on air. He advocates social change and is critical of white supremacy with his bilingual, binational (of black America and Japan) mildly cultural nationalist political rhetoric. He contends that although he holds no disrespect for white people, the “raced” peoples of the world are in a similar struggle against subjugation. Pioneer 3 remembers being discriminated against by white people during his stay in the US. While he finds US black culture politically useful, he encourages young Japanese people to “be themselves” and to be proud they are Japanese, while vigilant not to fall into racist strains of Nihonjinron that are antiblack or anti other ethnic peoples.
When I met Pioneer 4, she was an industry executive. She is a relative newcomer, as the company she works with was established in the late 1990s. As a result, she occupies a space in the latter part of Japanese Hiphop’s origins narratives. Though Pioneer 4 has been criticized by other cultural workers for promoting Japanese Hiphop that is considered consumerist and commercial and “not real,” she says that she is not an advocate of American imperialism, and she believes that Japanese artists who perform “American identities” are rebelling against the exoticized image of Japanese people as samurai and geishas. Pioneer 4 is an important power player in the intersection of “underground” Hiphop and the formal music industry. Like other CEOs of formal economic record companies in the US (e.g., Epitaph and Stone’s Throw), Pioneer 4 recognizes youths’ tastes and preferences for “underground” Hiphop. Companies like these are currently courting groups that critique the status quo through cultural nationalism and communist rhetoric. Perhaps as Kyle Cleveland, sociologist and director of the Wakai Project at Temple University Japan comments, these companies are attempting to market revolution to increasingly disgruntled social groups.

Pioneer 5 is probably one of the most knowledgeable people about Pacific Rim Hiphop culture, and he has been extremely instrumental in scouting out talent throughout this region of the world. A Japanese national, yet a member of a racially stigmatized ethnic group, Pioneer 5 is keen on Hiphop’s utility as political strategy for socially subjugated groups. He is the child of one Chinese parent and one Japanese parent, and he spent his early childhood between Hong Kong and Japan. Despite the discrimination that he experienced as an Asian-national living in a US city as an exchange student, his most salient experience of racial subjection occurred when he was a middle school student who was picked up by the Japanese police for not carrying his “identification papers.” Until fairly recently, like in South Africa, members of certain racial and
ethnic groups did not enjoy full citizenship rights, and the adolescent Pioneer 5 was therefore required to carry identification attesting to his state-regulated identity. In protest of this oppressive policy, he refused to comply. As a result, he was punished by being arrested, abused and detained. His mother learned of his arrest through neighborhood rumor and immediately went to rescue him, but not without first reprimanding and shaming the police for their behavior. Pioneer 5 was then sent to the US for high school. The program in which he enrolled turned out to be a scam, and he soon found himself across the Pacific with no money and no way to contact his family. He reports that an African-American woman who owned a hair salon offered to take him in on two conditions: (1) that he sweep the shop after school and (2) attend church every week.

Pioneer 5 ended up attending high school with an African-American entertainment industry mogul’s son and through this network, after high school he enjoyed a number of jobs in both the Hiphop and fashion industry. Pioneer 5 says that he has never forgotten his roots, and he continues to work for social justice. He is particularly committed to Hiphop, among other forms of black cultural music forms because those are the melodies that helped him to cope with trying times as a young person. An example of Pioneer 5’s social consciousness would be his resigning from a very lucrative designer job for an American (non-Hiphop) fashion mogul, because the fabrics the designers used were produced in sweatshops in Southeast China. He remarks that he could have relatives there and he cannot be complicit with policies that exploit “his people.” At one point Pioneer 5 said he prefers to work in the fashion world of Hiphop, where he claims to experience less discrimination, and he thinks that there is less global exploitative practice in those companies versus the non-Hiphop alternatives. He has innovated many popular items and
designs that abound in Hiphop today. Despite all of his successes, Pioneer 5 still experiences discrimination based on his state-regulated identity in Japan.

Pioneer 1 conspicuously adds to his list of friends on the website for TSMO 1, with a particular emphasis on two world-renown Hiphop giants: a world-famous political rapper and US Hiphop Pioneer 9, the founder of TSMO 1’s parent organization, TSMO. Indeed, in Japanese Hiphop origins narratives, Pioneer 1 is the US Hiphop Pioneer 9 of Japan, the founder of their TSMO 1. Like US Hiphop Pioneer 9, his life experiences inspire Japanese youth who may be grappling with exam failure, abuse at school, job loss, ethnoracial inferiority complexes, hikikomori6 or some other social injustice to “keep on, keeping on (=ganbatte)” and persevere. Pioneer 1 claims to have experienced a great deal of race-based discrimination while living in the United States. He says that a combination of experiences caused him to end up impoverished, homeless, and addicted to crack-cocaine while living in a US city.

Pioneer 1 attributes his rescue to US Hiphop Pioneer 8 of the parent TSMO and relative to US Hiphop Pioneer 9. He says that US Hiphop Pioneer 8 helped him get back on his feet, and in this way Hiphop saved his life. In this narrative, he returned to Japan to “save” Japanese youth with Hiphop, as he once was the recipient of such outreach. The TSMO 1’s (cultural nationalist) mantra, “peace, love, unity and harmony,” are strikingly similar to Japan’s own version of cultural nationalism, Nihonjinron. Therefore, it should not be surprising that many tracks produced by Pioneer 1 reveal their own strain of culturally nationalist rhetoric that is strategically essentialist to liberate “the Japanese race” from the Western domination that makes people feel bad and unworthy. Pioneer 1 and his cohorts seem to use this ideological combination to

6 Literally meaning parasitic, hikikomori is a sociologically prescribed social pathology among youth, and it is akin to agoraphobia. I actually disagree with such ascriptions, but this is one of many newer “social problems” assigned to youth.
dialogue with like-minded US-based Hiphop artists to create an international criticism of state-regulated identities such as race and class. In these lyrical dialogues, the essentialist notions of state-based ascriptions seem to be used in an effort to “unfix” these fixed identities and to promote a counterhegemonic cultural pluralism.

**Conclusion: The Politics of an International Hiphop Generation?**

The use of a “borrowed blackness” by Japanese Hiphop producers and consumers that is facilitated through MNC distribution as well as “underground” transnational networks is reminiscent of Mark Reid’s explanation of *negotiation* in a post-Negritude, postcolonial activist project in which social change is sought that simultaneously works within and against the grain of the status quo. Reid comments that in discussions of global racialism it “would be more productive to view it as a sociopsychic problem that is generally aided by patriarchal conventions and values which sustain a multinational corporate economy” (1997:22). He concedes “that any economic solution to racist and sexist processes of cultural production must negotiate with the capitalist needs of multinational corporations” (1997:22). This trend to reinvent oneself through transcultural dialogues that include narratives that are strategically oppositional to formal economies, while simultaneously working within them, seems to be characteristic with the utility of “critical memory” as discussed by Houston Baker, Jr. (1994). The power of this narrative lies in the public’s willingness to comply with the pioneers’ lead. I believe this because in many cases the liberation ideologies were not communicated primarily through the dominant media conglomerates, but through genuine people-to-people contact that ironically was usually made possible by neo-imperialist endeavors such as corporate mergers and military occupation. In this vein, the inspirational narrative spun by Hiphop’s American pioneers and guarded by their international counterparts shows particular promise for what Homi Bhabha calls the “transnational as translational” in the postcolonial intellectual project (1994:172).
This chapter began with Japan’s Hiphop origins narrative and outlined how that origins narrative influenced Japanese cultural workers to transcend political boundaries and geopolitical identities in search of a liberation message that serves their autochthonous political agenda. Interviews with cultural workers were analyzed for terminology and discursive practice that situated Japanese national identities in allegiance with African-American identities as one explanation for these cultural workers’ performance of blackness through Hiphop. Japanese cultural workers’ use of Hiphop language ideology and philosophy was analyzed through an analysis of flow and battle concepts. Instances of AAE grammatical features were identified in an analysis of selected song lyrics and related album art that attends to both an African-American and Hiphop cultural aesthetic. Finally, case studies were provided in addition to other stories from the field in an effort to narrate examples of individuals who live (=ikiru) Hiphop life and philosophy.

Hiphop was situated as following past social movements’ political agendas of furthering critical awareness of and action against racialization and related socio-economic subjugation. In this vein, Hiphop has been a successful social movement, albeit not a new one, as it has successfully brought antiracist ideology against a global world racial hierarchy into the international public sphere through popular culture and related organizational building. However, the limits of this social movement, which build on cultural nationalist discursive practice, lie in an ideology in which issues of race and class injustice trump issues of gender and sexuality injustice when the latter refers to the basic human rights of women and children (cf., Collins 2006, Gelb 2003, Philips 2006, McClaurin 2001, Tanaka 1987). Indeed, the liberation of the strategically essential “black MAN” and “Japanese MAN” through Hiphop leaves much undone in regard to political work relating to women and racialized others (e.g., Ryukyuans) who feel
alienated by the discourses (e.g., Yamato purity) based on performances of unified national identities (e.g., Rappagariya’s lyrics referencing national icons such as *hi no maru bento*). The next chapter further investigates this situation.

Table 4-1 Transcription conventions used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>()</td>
<td>Words spoken, not quite audible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(())</td>
<td>Transcriber’s description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[</td>
<td>Overlapping utterances use open-ended bracket for each overlapping utterance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Hiphop]</td>
<td>Words enclosed in brackets represent transcriber’s interpretation of preceding words or phrases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=</td>
<td>No interval between turns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>Interrogative intonation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2.0)</td>
<td>Pause timed in seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.</td>
<td>Small untimed pause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>th::en</td>
<td>Prolonged sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>why</td>
<td>Emphasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Louder sound to surrounding talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→</td>
<td>Utterance or line number of interest to ethnographer for analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(=fo sho)</td>
<td>Translations or elucidations of words used in either Japanese, AAE, or GAE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 5
IS OPRAH RIGHT? RACE AND GENDER POLITICS IN HIPHOP

You don't have to bitch and ho me down in order to make music

—Oprah Winfrey

**Ethnographer’s Eye/I-Novel or Shishosetsu: Raising Critical Notions of Self and Society through Narrative**

In *Crafting Selves* (1990), Dorinne Kondo theorizes about the ethnographer’s “eye/I” in the final reportage of research experiences. She comments, “So I tell the story of how I came to center my project on notions of identity and self-hood, through an ‘experiential’ first person narrative I deploy in order to make several ‘theoretical’ points,” one of which is “that any account, mine included, is partial and located, screened through the narrator’s eye/I” (1990:8). Kondo continues to critique ethnographic writing strategies that promote fixed identifications by not including particularities of power relations in the ethnographic field experience. She also notes the difficulty of using standard ethnographic language and writing techniques to communicate in a manner that does not reify static conceptualizations of identities. For example, she, as I do in this write-up, avoids the use of the collective noun “the Japanese” as well as generalized statements using abstract individuals such as “the Japanese woman is...” (1990:46). These and other instances of attention paid to problematizing rhetorical strategies that essentialize identities are important ethnographic steps towards an ethnography that critically analyzes identificatory practice without

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1 The quote from Oprah Winfrey is from CNN.com’s “Transcripts” and can be accessed at http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0606/22/sbt.01.html. (Accessed November 15, 2007). The entire quote from Winfrey is, “My point is you don’t have to bitch and ho me down in order to make music.” This utterance followed her assertion that she likes/ listens to some Hiphop, but not that which marginalizes women. Her comments are a response to accusations from many rappers, including Ludacris and Ice Cube that Ms. Winfrey “got a problem” with Hiphop.
reinscribing such identifications on the people whose lives we report. She concludes that she aims “to make issues of power central to our discussions of the ‘self,’ and second, to experiment with rhetorical strategies that might be more compatible with theoretical emphases on multiplicity, contextuality, complexity, power, irony, and resistance” (1990:43).

My text employs alternative reporting styles that attend to the political project that Kondo (1990, 1997) explains regarding critical race research. By employing autoethnography in a manner similar to the Japanese literary genre of shishosetsu, I narrate a story of complicated and contradictory discursive practice. The shishosetsu, which is often translated as an “I-novel” or fiction that is based on confession or autobiography, investigates and reveals critical notions of self and society through narrative and specific rhetoric. Mary Layoun summarizes Edward Fowler’s work on the genre in the following way:

Fowler’s analysis of the “rhetoric of confession” in the shishosetsu as a reformulation of self-expression for society in which the self is rigorously contained is brilliantly to the point and directly confronts the ready assumptions of some critical schools that would simply equate the notion of self in the shishosetsu in particular or Japanese society in general with the “Western” notion of the individual self. [1989:159]

The autoethnographic reflections offered in this work are meant to be read as an expression of mediated identities and societal commentary as part of a collective voice offered through the collaborative analysis of collected materials. The use of autobiographical form as “fiction” or narrative has been a key tool for women writing against the grain throughout Japanese literary history. Classics like The Gossamer Journal and The Confessions of Lady Niijo allowed women writers to reveal the intimate details of social inequality in the spirit of “prose” or “art” and Yukiko Tanaka (1987) comments on leftist women writers in the
1920s who also employed *shishosetsu* in their work to reveal and criticize injustice. Tanaka comments:

> They introduced a woman’s point of view into leftist literature by defining themselves as doubly oppressed under the patriarchal system—in the family and in society. These writers, many of whom came from impoverished families in rural regions, showed a tenacity and honesty rarely seen among male writers; they observed and wrote about a society run by men and recorded their personal battles against traditional mores with unprecedented candor. [1987:iix]

Thus it is in the spirit of *shishosetsu* as well as autoethnography that I engaged research participants, consultants, friends, and family in my analysis that is represented in this narrative concerning my research. I attempt to illuminate how our talks and performances constructed moments of recuperation, while illustrating salient aspects of social inequality. This section draws on popular cultural narrative to buttress stories recounted by female cultural workers in a movement building process. Namely, the concepts of *uhuru* and Uhura\(^2\) are utilized for signification concerning the role(s) of women in social movements that have historically utilized black popular culture as part of their politicization process.

**Lessons in *Uhuru* from *Uhura***

At the end of an essay examining the “black” in “black popular culture,” Stuart Hall reminds his readers that popular culture is where “we discover and play with the identifications of ourselves, where we are imagined, where we are represented, not only to the audiences out there who do not get the message, but to ourselves for the first time” (1996d:474). International Hiphop, as part of black popular culture, fits Hall’s description concerning how we discover and play with our identifications, though popular culture is

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\(^2\) *Uhuru* is Swahili for liberation. Swahili is a favored language of “revolutionary gangsters” (Black Guerilla Family), cultural nationalists (Simba Wachanga), and African-American Hiphoppers (dead prez, X-Clan). Uhura is the name of the lone regularly cast black female character on the original *Star Trek* series.
often commodified and stereotyped. The dialogue performed in the *In Living Color* skit (first aired April 1992) below serves as a humorous metaphor for my international organizing experience with Hiphop. The skit also helps me to understand, through a disheartening but sadly common performance, how black women in addition to all women are often used and yet excluded from the outcomes of many social justice agendas (cf., Collins 2006). Although the performance provided below did not take place in Japan, and it may not be obvious how it is related to transnational Hiphop, I outline in my analysis how it demonstrates the experiences of women in historic social movements, including the movement we call Hiphop.

**The Wrath of Farrakhan**

*Jim Carrey as the Captain Kirk character:*
“Captain's log stardate fourteen, we’re being pulled toward a hostile planet, I'm hoping that Scotty will be able to activate the back up control systems. God, I feel so vulnerable.”

*Kim Wayans as the Uhura character:*
“Captain, I'm picking up some strange signals. Something about intergalactic oppressors, sir.”

*David Alan Grier as the Spock character:*
“Captain, intruders are approaching the bridge, sir.”

(Three men step into the scene)

*Kirk:*
“Who are you?”

*Damon Wayans as the Farrakhan character:*
“I am the Minister Louis Farrakhan.”

*Kirk:*
“Spock!?! Spock, who is he?”

*Spock:*
“A former Calypso singer, Captain. Who later became leader of a 20th century African American religious sect known as the Nation of Islam.”
Farrakhan’s security backup, Islam #1
“You like to buy some incense?”

Farrakhan’s security backup, Islam #2:
“Bean pie, my brother?” ((to Sulu))

Steve Park as the Sulu character:
“No, thank you.”

Kirk:
“What do you want?”

Farrakhan:
“I’ve come to warn your crew.”

Islam #1+#2:
((Echoing Farrakhan)) “Warn your crew.”

Farrakhan:
“Of their enslavement.”

Islam #1+2:
((Echoing)) “Enslavement!”

Farrakhan:
“Aboard this vessel.”

Kirk:
“That’s poppycock. These people are perfectly free to do anything they want.”

Farrakhan:
“It is that same lie that kept Elvis the king. That made that poor child Latoya Jackson think she could sing. It is that same lie that’s got white boys rapping and the Fat Boys acting.”

Kirk:
“Hey Mister, you can’t come in here and talk to me like that. Uhuru ((pronounced “Ah-whore-a”)), get me Star Fleet Command.”

Uhura:
“Yes, Captain.”

Farrakhan:
“Oh! My Nubian princess. How long have you placed his calls? I watch the show every week and all I see is the back of your nappy wig.” ((Uhura touches her hair))
Kirk:
“Uhura. Star Fleet. Now!”

Uhura:
“Well, wait a second. He’s right. I’ve been sitting here for fifteen years with this damn thing in my ear and ain’t got one raise yet. Is that all I’m good for? To be your little secretary, or your occasional chocolate fantasy. You get up off your flat butt and get Star Fleet your damn self cuz I ain’t budging. Preach on, brother ”

Farrakhan:
“Yes, sister.”

Kirk:
“Mr. Sulu, call Scotty. Tell him to get this man out of here.”

Farrakhan:
“Wait a minute, Mr. Sulu. Before you touch that dial. Answer me this question: Who does the laundry around here?”

Sulu:
“I do.”

Kirk:
“Mr. Sulu” ((imploring))

Sulu:
“Well, you call me ‘Buddha head’ and ‘pie face’ in front of everybody.”

Kirk:
“Well.”

Sulu:
“I’ve been in space all this time and I haven’t had one woman yet. You even take the ugly ones Captain. My loins are about to explode. I want to do the nasty!”

Farrakhan:
“That’s right. Rise up from the oppressor!”

Islam #1+#2:
((Echoing)) “Rise up!”

Kirk:
“Mr. Spock, my friend, we’ve got to do something.”

Spock:
“Why do you say ‘we’ Caucasoid? It’s obvious Captain that Minister Farrakhan is right.”

*Kirk*: “Spock, are you out of your Vulcan mind?”

*Spock*: “Well, logically speaking Captain. ((Grabs Kirk by the shoulder, hurting him)) I am the strongest and most intelligent person on this vessel and yet I am only second in command.”

*Uhura*: “Mm-hmmm”

*Spock*: “I should be Captain and I’m also a better director than you”

*Farrakhan*: “Can’t you see it’s discrimination?”

*Kirk*: “You get off my ship buddy!” ((Blasts Farrakhan with laser gun))

*Farrakhan*: “Put your puny weapon down Captain. You cannot harm me. My people have survived four hundred years of slavery!”

*Islam 1+2*: ((Echoing)) “Slavery!”

*Farrakhan*: “Three hundred years of Apartheid!”

*Islam 1+2*: ((Echoing)) “Apartheid!”

*Farrakhan*: “And 25 years of The Jefferson’s in syndication.”

*Kirk*: ((Yelling in aguish)) “Farrakhan!!!”

*Farrakhan*: “Go to you room” ((Kirk runs out of room crying))

*Farrakhan*:
“Oh, I love it when I do that to them. ((Farrakhan sits down in the Captain’s chair))
Nubian Princess. Call Sylvia’s Soul Food Shack. Make reservations. I got a taste for
some blackened white fish. Mr. Sulu, what are you gonna have?”

Sulu:
((smiles broadly)) “Sylvia.”

Farrakhan:
“Well alright then my horny Asian brother. Warp factor five. We’re goin home.
Destination: 125th Street.” ((Shot pulls out to shot of exterior of ship. Ship is now
labeled USS Farrakhan with Nation of Islam flags on either side. Ship on strings flies
away. Full screen of title: “Wrath of Farrakhan”))

Object 5-1 View the skit “The Wrath of Farrakhan”

What is striking about this skit is how identity politics are grossly exaggerated and
essentialized to candidly communicate trends of criticism concerning social movements. Of
key interest are Uhura’s character and Sulu’s character. Both performances elucidate the
intersection of sexualized, gendered, and racialized identities. Though both characters have
their intersectional identifications illuminated, only one character emerges in the end to
have experienced a social change: Sulu; Uhura sits down, right back where she started,
playing the role of secretary.

Object 5-2 Nichelle Nichols as Uhura in a secretarial role in the original Star Trek series

Let’s examine the script. Kirk’s character, the sign for white male power, routinely
orders his crew around, and it is revealed later, that he does so in racist and sexist ways.
Farrakhan’s character, backed up by two security characters that double as “yes” men,
boards Kirk’s ship armed with charisma and lyrical talent. Using his lyrical talent, he
engages in “truth-telling,” criticizing Kirk’s treatment of each crewmember. The three
visitors, with Farrakhan at the forefront, represent the strength and valorization of black
masculinity within a black nationalist framework. These men are also positioned as
“saviors” who have come to liberate the subjugated crew members from Kirk’s reign of
white male supremacy. In addition to Uhura, two members of the crew are situated as “black”: Spock (who plays the sign of ambiguously ethnic, racial “other” by virtue of being “mixed” with Vulcan and *Homo sapiens sapiens*) and Sulu (who plays the sign of homogenous Asian-racial other). They are identified as “nonwhite others” through kinship terms used by Farrakhan and his security. Spock marks Kirk as not being the same as he is by using the word “Caucasoid” and Sulu is referred to as “brother” by Islam #2.

**Object 5-3 George Takei as Hikaru Sulu, in the original *Star Trek* series**

Uhura’s character is the one who makes the change of guard occur. Although it is her character who first warns Kirk of Farrakhan’s approach, it is also her character that sets the stage for the change of guard by being the first to revolt against Kirk’s control. Farrakhan, using call and response with his security backup, claims he is there to “warn” Kirk’s “crew” of their enslavement aboard the vessel. Kirk counters that his crew is free and not enslaved. Farrakhan then signifies on stereotypes, lies, and identifications in popular culture (which is humorous because the skit in which he is performing also relies on stereotypes and identifications). Kirk then orders Uhura (which he pronounces “Ah-whore-a” signifying that she is a “whore”) to get Star Fleet Command (I suppose for backup assistance against Farrakhan). At first, it seems as though Uhura is about to comply, and she replies, “Yes, Captain,” but then Farrakhan intervenes using words that signify kinship as well as shared racial experience, “Oh My Nubian Princess.” He attacks her compliance with Kirk’s agenda, and like Don Imus, calls her hair “nappy,” though the assumption is that his intent is to suggest that she should be much more than a secretary given her talents. This implication is important as it suggests that Uhura’s liberation is linked to his agenda and that by helping him she, too, will benefit.
Kirk interjects with a more stern order, and Uhura starts the revolution. Her list of grievances include not getting a raise or job promotion despite her seniority and she alludes to being sexualized and sexually harassed as well as taken advantage of by Kirk. She concludes using a kinship term, “brother” toward Farrakhan, who replies in kind, “Yes sister.” Kirk then turns to Sulu for help, at which point Farrakhan intervenes and reminds Sulu of the racialization that he has experienced. It is revealed that Sulu is not only called racial epithets such as “Buddha head” and “pie face,” but he has also been relegated to the racial stereotypic service task of laundry—imagery that links foreign Asian racial identities to a US-based racial trope from Asian-American history (cf., Shah 1997). Sulu’s character builds on the revelations laid down by Farrakhan to reveal an intersection of sexualization and racialization by introducing the stereotype of the effeminized Asian-racial “other” so prevalent in popular culture (cf., Kondo 1997; Poulson-Bryant 2005:71). The critique is that Sulu is not allowed to express his full sexuality because he is Asian, and the conversation that communicates this is a tirade against Kirk, along with enablement from Farrakhan. All aspects of this dialogue take place in a manner that objectifies women and accentuates the “man-to-man” aspect of political coalition building. The last person to revolt is the Spock character who asserts he is more talented and yet underemployed because of Kirk’s white supremacist management.

When Kirk attempts to retaliate against Farrakhan himself, he is unable to because Farrakhan draws from an essentialist survivalist narrative in which he cannot be destroyed because he is the descendant of people who survived slavery, apartheid, and media violence through the production of racialized stereotypes (e.g., The Jefferson’s). Once Kirk is conquered by Farrakhan, a changing of the guard takes place. The revolution has occurred.
There is a new Captain: Farrakhan. Sulu’s character is “uplifted” in that he is no longer sexually oppressed, though it is at the cost of objectifying another woman, Sylvia. When Farrakhan asked him what he is going to have at Sylvia’s Soul Food Shack, Sulu responds, “Sylvia.” Uhura goes back to her old position as secretary, this time for Farrakhan, and no social change has taken place, as she continues to be sexually harassed as well as place calls at the command of the captain.

This is obviously not reality; it is a skit from a popular television show that aired in the 1990s. However, when I watch it, I cannot get over how much it mirrors the experiences of the women with whom I have organized in the transnational Hiphop movement. Although we represent different countries, different languages, different classes and different ascriptions of race, we all seem to be stuck in the same script as Uhura. We are the people who make things happen. We get things done. We are like the church secretary. We get everything ready for worship on Sunday and then, when everyone is congregated, the minister gets up to preach and receives all of the credit (financial and otherwise) for making it all happen. When I speak at Hiphop political events, I call this the “church secretary syndrome.” In social movements, not only black social movements, we have had spokespeople, usually men, who act as “saviors” armed with charisma and rhetoric, like Farrakhan’s character. It is generally other people, usually women, who execute the grunt work of political movement building (copying the fliers, typing the memos, making the phone calls, walking door-to-door), while men receive the credit and increased privileges. When one watches documentaries concerning the Civil Rights Movement, for example, there are all these women in the background, and yet we don’t know their names. But we know Martin, Andrew, Jesse, and Ralph well enough not to
need a last name. There have been numerous published critiques of how this played out in
the Black Power Movement, the Yellow Power Movement and beyond, many of which
utilize autobiography and reflexivity to break silence on these matters (cf., Brown 1993;
Davis 1983; Collins 2006; Gelb 2003; Mackie 2003; J. Morgan 2000; Moraga and
Shakur 2001; Tanaka 1987).

The Hiphop generation has inherited this gender politics as we have built upon and
borrowed from these past social movement strategies. As detailed in the preceding
chapters, through musical and historical sampling via rhetoric in lyrics, beats, film clips,
speech clips, and other performances (such as fashion), Hiphop’s cultural workers furthered
the agenda of cultural nationalism and revolutionary internationalism (as well as other
leftover legacies from past social movements) by raising levels of global awareness about
race and class injustice. Introducing shared frames of oppression through a liberatory
assertion of masculinity is a key trend in these political agendas. This occurs all over the
world. In Japanese Hiphop, we hear rappers assert, “Nippon danji!” In US Hiphop, rappers
let us know, “Ima Black man!” Women cultural workers labor in a similar role to Uhura:
we are the “office ladies” (O. L. in Japan), secretaries, booking agents, road managers,
promoters, event organizers, budget managers, political organizers, research assistants, et
ce tera, and nobody knows our names.3 Stuart Hall comments:

The way in which a transgressive politics in one domain is constantly sutured and
stabilized by reactionary or unexamined politics in another is only to be explained by
this continuous cross-dislocation of one identity by another, one structure by another.

3 Marcyliena Morgan (2008) has a chapter outlining this aspect of hidden women in
Hiphop, and she also explains how men have supported women’s movement building.
Rachel Raimist is conducting her doctoral research on exactly that subject (how women are
erased in Hiphop), and she has a film titled, Nobody Knows My Name.
Dominant ethnicities are always underpinned by a particular sexual economy, a particular figured masculinity, a particular class identity. There is no guarantee in reaching for an essentialized racial identity of which we think we can be certain, that it will always turn out to be mutually liberating. [1996d:473-474]

Indeed, thus far, as Hall explains, political agendas that pertain to liberation along lines of race and class have “trumped” any agenda that considers equality among identifications of sexuality and gender. That is, women like Uhura in social movements from global labor movements to global antiwhite supremacy movements, including the so-called global Hiphop movement in the US, Japan, or some other geopolitical space, have been asked to fight and labor for the liberation of men under the pretext that we experience a shared frame of oppression due to commonalities in our state-regulated identities.

And many of us have enjoyed our roles. After all, behind the scenes, we know it is the “church secretary” who “makes it [i.e., social change] happen”: just like Uhura, the first to dissent, in the skit. It is meaningful work to labor toward equal access and liberation for our “brothers,” men. Because we are also racially marked, the assertion, “Nippon danji”/“Ima Black man,” or pride in being marked yellow, black, Japanese or Afrikan, makes many of us feel “good” or at least validated. Often while observing emcee battles in Japan, I was excited for the young men who asserted their identity in angry and rebellious ways. Their performance reminded me of my own angry and rebellious adolescent years, some of which were spent in Japan. I identified with their pain, and I still to a large extent am in solidarity with their movement: to raise levels of social justice among the identifications of race and class through disidentification or any other means necessary—unless it continues to be on the backs of women and the children they support.

That is, Hiphop has potential. It has furthered the goals of past social movements by dovetailing efforts of race and class justice work, and it has been successful all over the
world in this regard. However, I posit that it will be Hiphop’s emerging gender politics that make or break it as a new social movement. Eduardo Canel writes that a new social movement “perspective emphasizes the cultural nature of the new movements and views them as struggles for control over the production of meaning and the constitution of new collective identities” (2004:1; emphasis added). Hiphop’s struggle is to combine gender and sexuality equality with ant-racist and anti-classist work already in progress, our legacy from past social movements.

Hiphop’s potential is that its cultural and political workers have the opportunity to transcend the limitations of past social movements and build something new, but that would also entail letting go of the rhetoric and practice that has kept us locked into collective identity politics that do not make room for gendered critiques. Stuart Hall reminds us that although past social movements were predicated on collective identity politics that are “always underpinned by a particular sexual economy” and “a particular masculinity,” social justice and equality for all “can be won…[t]here is a politics there to be struggled for” (1996d:474). This new political struggle is for a collective identity that encompasses all state regulated identifications, from gender to race to sexuality. This is a worthy cause; it can be accomplished. A first step is to begin to conceptualize women not as the mules or secretaries of social movements, but as theorists and architects integral to constructing new collective identities. Indeed, we can start by learning the names4 of “church secretaries” (female cultural workers) and stop “gazing at the backs” of our “nappy wigs” as if we aren’t there.

4 Because this is ethnography, I do not share the real names of the women I have worked with in Japan. Instead I offer narratives of their experiences, and I make sure that their names, and more importantly, political agendas, are known in other spheres of my work.
The relative scarcity of women rappers in Japan presents an analytical puzzle.
—Ian Condry (2006:164)

Understanding gender in Japanese Hiphop is complicated, yet unavoidable, as racialization is always inextricably linked to social constructions of gender and sexuality. The male cultural workers whom I worked with represent a feminized population (Sassen 1999) and an emasculated stereotype within the global racial order (Kondo 1997). Identification with Hiphop not only allowed them to perform black masculinities, but also hypermasculine culture that is uniquely Japanese. That is, artists would use speech patterns and vocabulary that were associated with male vernacular, and aggressive body language and other communicative utterances were selected and exaggerated. These performances of gender went against the grain of the dominant racialized stereotype of emasculated Asian males. Even the racialized tropes of kamikaze referenced in the Rappagariya song described in Chapter Four (“Kobushi”) serve a hypermasculine agenda to fight both racialized and gendered identities. By performing blackness, female performers can break stereotypes of Japanese women as obedient and subservient, and speak out with venom and vigor like their male counterparts. However, some of the artists I interviewed also performed the script of “cute” (Condry 2006) for females, which maintained the status quo in Japanese mainstream society.

The female cultural workers with whom I work in Japan have historically been managers of artists, assistants to artists, receptionists at recording studios, businesswomen in the industry, journalists, promoters, or organizers of events. A few years ago, I began aggressively interviewing female artists. Sexism was often a difficult subject to discuss during my interviews, as we were often not alone (there were male coworkers around
whose presence made it uncomfortable to be candid), and there was also often a sense of hopelessness in regard to fighting sexism in the larger Japanese society, so focusing on sexism in Japanese Hiphop seemed to be a moot point for many of my interviewees. That is, they acknowledged that sexism is a worldwide problem, and Japan is no different.

Some criticized Japan’s government practice for being behind other countries in establishing laws that protect women’s bodies and women’s rights. Other cultural workers cited the pressure to marry and have children as another way in which they encounter sexism. Many criticized what they perceived to be Japanese males’ sexual obsessions with youth or young girls. They reported that the sexualization of girls made them feel undesirable at ages that would still be considered young in other cultural settings, for example 24 years of age. Most interviewees also acknowledged that it was hard to be a female artist among males and that one has to fight to ensure equal billing and equal pay in the industry. But then they also felt that it wouldn’t be much different in any other Japanese corporate job. Most spoke about their experience within Hiphop communities as being more positive in regard to sexism in larger society in that Hiphop culture allowed space for each to speak her mind on topics and the performativity involved in its cultural product afforded women the opportunity to play with their identities and transgress normative boundaries concerning what was acceptable or not compared to mainstream Japanese society.

A few female artists who have had the opportunity to travel to the United States shared experiences of being sexually stereotyped along racial lines of being an East Asian woman, in that these women were expected to act according to stereotypes of East Asian women working as prostitutes or in massage parlors, and it was assumed that these women
would want to perform fellatio and otherwise service males who were supposed to be colleagues in professional music industry spheres. Such stereotypes of women as sexualized objects, particularly along historical racial lines, abound in Hip hop as they do in other aspects of popular culture in the United States and abroad. While African-American women are most often objectified in US Hip hop and Japanese women are most often objectified in Japanese Hip hop, one can find examples of cross-cultural exploitation in music videos, lyrical content, and popular artist interviews (e.g., a multiplatinum African-American artist has referred to Tokyo as “Blowasaki”—a reference to fellatio and a sexual stereotype concerning Japanese women).

The experiences of sexualization and sexual harassment are by no means limited to the US. I conducted several interviews in offices and other officially professional spaces in which the walls were covered with pornographic posters, pictures, and calendars of Japanese women. In a mainstream culture where not only is pornography widespread, but child pornography is also rampant, these aspects of female degradation and violence against girl children also seeps into the Hip hop world. For the most part, however, the cultural workers whom I worked with (both female and male) did not endorse such degrading objectification. One female cultural worker comments: “Some people, they don’t take serious women, you know, like ‘that’s women’s opinion’, but it’s changing…. Hip hop is kind of hard. In R&B, [women] can do reviews and writing, but Hip hop—some people think it’s just for men.” Numbers of women artists, business women, and writers commented that in general, society women are expected to work twice as hard as men to “prove” themselves in the formal business and art worlds.
Given that parts of Hiphop, even that which is purported to be underground, intersect with formal economies such as the popular music industry, the treatment of women is not always much different. Nevertheless, all the cultural workers with whom I work say that despite its inability to completely transcend sexism and domestic racialization within Japanese society, Hiphop presents a forum for intercultural and transnational communication that creates a safe space to begin discussion about these important topics. Many think that the discussion is only the beginning for great problem-solving possibilities concerning these matters and they cite relational examples of how Hiphop has been used to address these problems in the US as models for what their organizations and artistic productions can accomplish (cf., Ice Cube and Yo Yo’s artistic dialogue, Russell Simmons’s Hip Hop Summits and the ongoing, pioneering work of the Universal Zulu Nation).

Contrary to popular discourse, black social movement members do not have a monopoly on sexism, heterosexism, and other forms of gendered subjugation. Countless feminist writers have documented and attended to issues of sexism and hetereosexism in practices that support and maintain white supremacy and global capitalism (cf., Sassen 1999; E. Wood 1997). Concerning sexism in the Japanese Hiphop movement, Ian Condry concludes:

In terms of women’s empowerment, the recent examples of female hip-hoppers Ai, Hime, and Miss Monday show that gender is finally gaining wider treatment within a Japanese rap scene largely dominated by men. If some of these straight-talking women achieve mainstream success, it may be possible to point to hip-hop as a vehicle for gender equality in Japan. Their influence up until 2005, however, seems largely confined to their fans, a substantial, but not widespread, effect. [2006:214]
I posit that there is a nascent “new” women’s movement budding that is built on the past women’s movement building processes that have existed in Japan for decades, some would say centuries (cf., Tanaka 1987). Conversations recorded document a rise in critical awareness of women’s issues among many of my Japanese peers. Our mother’s and grandmother’s generations have been agitating for legislative changes and equal protection under Japanese law, often operationalizing CEDAW and ICERD (transnational conventions concerning human equality) to “get the job done.” My agemates have taken charge in leading NGOs and other community based organizations and networks in Japan that protect and support women and girls grappling with multiple forms of sexual and gender-based violence. Such activism lends a transnational element to current women’s movement building efforts. But what is the status of women within the transnational Hip hop movement?

Gender issues are gaining more attention in the government as well as on the streets. Over the past 13 years I have seen an increase in laws protecting the rights of women, and I have also seen an increased discourse concerning the abuses of women and the children they support among the people I know. I disagree that there is a scarcity of female cultural workers, or even artists, in Japanese Hip hop. They may not dominate in the public sphere, but they exist and they represent on local levels. If I could, I’d say their names, but ethical considerations preclude me doing so in this project. Below are the stories of four women that Ian Condry studied.

In his chapter that discusses women in Japanese Hip hop, Condry (2006) provides a brief narrative of women’s roles in Japanese popular music, beginning with pop and ending with R&B. He uses the stories of Sakurai Riko (former executive of record label Def Jam
Japan) to transition to his biographical sketch of Ai, whom he does not designate as an emcee, but more so a singer that Sakurai “discovered.” He moves on to discuss Miss Monday whom he considers a bona fide emcee, who represents women and who does not petition “cutismo.” He cites her as saying, “What I want to say is, ‘Even if you’re a girl, do what you want to do.’ It doesn’t have to be hip-hop. You can be a mechanic or a truck driver. My attitude is, together as women let’s change ourselves to do what we want” (Condry 2006:177).

After providing a brief biographical sketch of Miss Monday, he describes a third female emcee, Hime, as utilizing Japanese clichés or more aptly fixed identities and negative stereotypes (such as “yellow cabs,” women who are stigmatized for pursuing erotic relationships with foreign men, who are usually African American, cf. Kelsky 2001) to communicate oppositional messages to Japanese mainstream society. Condry also describes Hime’s use of imagery that attends to Nihonjinron notions of language (kotodama) and “traditional” literary aesthetics in her verse construction (e.g., tanka, haiku). Moreover her name can be glossed as “Princess” and she uses the kanji for women and giant together to represent her name. Hime utilizes a variety of “traditional” Japanese cultural images to buttress her messages to her fan base, including sampling taiko drums, and referring to herself as a “female samurai” and “Japanese doll.” Condry introduces each of the three artists in this chapter through their affiliation to well known male artists or their relationship to major record labels and corporations. He describes a fixed gendered identity of Japanese women artists as “cutismo,” which he defines as being “parallel to a kind of machismo common among male rappers … [where] women singers in Japan’s pop music world are expected to conform to a particular type of feminine cute-ness” (2006:165).
Condry contrasts this identity with those of female Hiphoppers who he says reject images of feminine vulnerability (2006:166). Below are two songs and more information about the first two emcees that Condry briefly introduces.


I have always conceptualized Ai as an emcee as well as a singer, dancer, and overall performer. Her single, “Watch Out!” demonstrates her prowess as a fierce lyricist and disciple of Hiphop. Ai raps alongside internationally known beatboxer, Afra, while Tucker plays the keyboards in this song. Her lyrics feature codeswitching with AAE as well as English. Phrases such as, “Doki, Doki ((Japanese word for heartbeat)) is getting louder (=faster)” and “kick the leash and be free in da beat! (=kick the leash 自由に/jiyu ni/ in da beat!)” establish her great talent as an emcee, who not only rhymes in one or two languages, but also delivers skillful and appealing codeswitched verses that situate her as unique and charismatic.

The video to “Watch Out!” is equally engaging. Its basic premise is to promote the Hiphop philosophy of “keepin it real.” The first part of the video showcases Ai, Afra, and Tucker in J-Pop-like gear. Tucker has on an afro wig and a Run DMC-circa Addidas-brand jumpsuit and Run DMC-style hat. Afra is wearing a large floppy hat, sports (swish) pants, and an oversized T-shirt. Ai is wearing a short-haired wig and puffy pink shirt, ripped jean shorts, and boots with “bling” on them. The video editing entails classic “wipes” in bubbled star shapes, and other significations on J-Pop. Then pioneer rapper K Dub Shine enters wearing a white T-shirt with an outline of the continent of Africa airbrushed on it that is colored in red, black, and green with the words “Zulu.” K Dub Shine admonishes Ai, Afra, and Tucker, and pulls off Ai’s wig and shames Tucker into taking off his own wig.
The words, “Gotta Be Real” in Japanese and English appear in white with black background on the screen, and the scene switches to an *a cappella* performance of the song. Tucker and Afra are wearing baseball hats and oversized shirt and sweatshirts. Ai is wearing her longer, natural hair and she is wearing a common club outfit of jeans and a stylish fitted shirt. Tucker is skillfully playing the same brand of keyboard that Sly of Sly and the Family Stone played, which further situates their performance as embedded in “authentic” talent. Herein lies a key point in transnational Hip hop aesthetics: the difference between the concepts of real and authentic.

The concept of real is often confused with authenticity in Hip hop journalism and scholarship. Real has the connotation of being “true” or affirming of oneself. It is deeply rooted in self-esteem, self love and self empowerment that is connected to the good of one’s community in many Hip hop philosophical manifestos (cf., KRS-ONE 2000). Authenticity is related to real, but it tends to have less to do with introspection and more to do with knowledge acquired. Monthly magazines like *BMR, Woofin* and *Blast* often feature articles to educate one wishing to study and learn more about a culture. Such tutorials are centered on an ideology of authenticity rather than *real*. Ai, Afra and Tucker are situated as “real” in the latter, *a cappella*, portion of the video because they are relaxed doing their art, being themselves. Signs and symbols such as the vintage keyboard as well as their connection to the ultimate trope of knowledge keeper in Japanese Hip hop, K Dub Shine adds the notion of them being authentic as well. The video displays key signs and symbols to boast of Ai and her colleagues’ skills as artists and cultural workers within Hip hop. The song’s translation and a link to view the album art (Object 5-4) are provided in an effort to illustrate Ai’s great abilities as an emcee as well as a masterful codeswitcher.
Object 5-4 One of Ai’s album covers for “Watch Out!”

[Original]
[verse1]
まさに絶好調
今日このテンション
何かやらずにはいられない どうしよう！
朝が来る！
Are you gonna stop me? How?
Yo! 誰にももう....
Cant stop me now!!
ジェットコースターのような
Bomb ass DANCE
一緒に踊りましょう
どうっすか？
I wanna be a big star
I mean, gonna be! a big star
Watch!
絶対つかみます！いつか
[chorus]
1,2,3
とりこになるの live in da beat
ドキドキ増すの どうしたらいい？
I cant stop myself...
WA, WA, WA, WA, WA, WA!
WATCH OUT!
[verse2]
すごく近い近い
I’m so close 2 u
now, この状態で
what am I supposed 2 do!
I mean 見たコトのないものをみんな
に
さあ！聞かせてあげましょう！
meet da beat!
kick the leash 自由に
in da beat!
それじゃあそろそろ
everybody meet my team!!
AFRA と TUCKER,
Come show what you got!
Do what cha gotta do!! come on!
[chorus]

[Translation]
[verse1]
I’m feelin’ really good
with this tension so high, I really need to
do something,
the morning is coming
are you gonna stop me? how?
yo, no one can....stop me now!
together lets dance a bomb ass dance
that’s like a roller coaster
what do you say?
I wanna be a big star
I mean, gonna be! a big star
watch!
some day ill grab it!
[chorus]
1,2,3
I’m going to grab your heart with this
beat
doki doki' is getting louder (my heart
rate is getting faster)
what should I do?
I cant stop myself
wa, wa, wa, wa, wa, wa! watch out!
[verse2]
really really close
I’m so close 2 u
now with this state of mind
what am I supposed 2 do!
I mean, I’m going to show you a part of
me that no ones seen
lets let them listen to it!
meet da beat!
kick the leash and be free in da beat!
so I think its time for everybody to meet
my team!!
afra and tucker,
come show what you got!
do what cha gotta do! come on!
[chorus]
“Lady Meets Girl” by Miss Monday (2002)

Miss Monday personifies what Hip hop scholar Gwendolyn Pough calls “wreck.” Pough defines wreck as “a Hip Hop term that connotes fighting, recreation, skill, boasting or violence” (2004:17). She situates “wreck” as an example of Hip hop philosophy that contributes to self-empowerment by encouraging self-respect, self-defense, and self-determination.1 Pough explains:

The Hip hop concept of wreck sheds new light on the things Blacks had to do in order to obtain and maintain a presence in the larger public sphere, namely fight hard and bring attention to their skill and right to be in the public sphere. Bringing wreck, for Black participants in the public sphere historically, has meant reshaping the public gaze in such a way as to be recognized as human beings—as functioning and worthwhile members of society—and not to be shut out of or pushed away from the public sphere. [2004:17]

Though Pough is referring to ideology and practice for African-descent Americans, the concepts of self-making and “self-belief” as well as black power (which entails self-respect, self-defense, and self-determination) are also part of Japanese Hip hop and routinely referred to by many Japanese Hip hop pioneers. DJ Yutaka, for example, produced a song entitled, “Self-belief” featuring ‘boy band’ EXILE2 (formerly J Soul Brothers) and Rather Unique. This song maintains the basic premise of global Hip hop philosophy, which is based on US Hip hop philosophy, namely that created by the Universal Zulu Nation, of which Yutaka is the founder of the Japan chapter. Therefore, the idea of “bringing wreck” in Hip hop for black people (as explained by Pough) holds transnational significance to

1 These latter three concepts are what Ron Maulana Karenga terms “the three ends of black power.”

2 Note the EXILE album cover features Black Panthers marching with signs and flags that have been photoshopped to display the names of the rappers and other artists who appear as guests on their album. Area codes such as “813” and other Hip hop referents abound in the photoshopped banners.
Japanese Hiphop pioneers and other artists who utilize the opportunity to “borrow” the “blackness” of Hiphop as part of a larger strategy to reshape the public gaze. Whether this strategy, to borrow blackness as part of political praxis, is sustainable or not remains to be seen.

Object 5-5 Exile album cover featuring various African-American political marches with signs photoshopped to reflect the names of guest artists on the album

Miss Monday toured with the Self-Destruction\(^3\) tour in 2003, spreading her message to her sisters to be themselves and come of age with self-esteem. Her hoarse voice and phonemic finesse cast her as a talented lyricist with a well-earned place in the history of Japanese Hiphop. Pictured on the CD sleeve wearing locs, she now sports an afro (a tightly curled perm) and is transitioning to a more reggae sound. The excerpts from the song below, “Lady Meets Girl” (2003), outlines her advice to young women. She speaks about finding her voice (line 1), using the microphone to fight (line 5), and unity among women to build a better future and define themselves (lines 13, 19). She cautions against materialism (line 11). Also of interest is the use of the phrase “back in the day” by the cultural worker (VSOP) whose translation I decided to use for this explication. “Back in the day” is an AAE and Hiphop linguistic phrase. Marcyliena Morgan comments, “‘Back in the day’ is used by youth to refer to Hiphop eras” and it also represents nostalgia (2007).

1 “If I can really express what I feel,
2 I would do it right now….
3 The future is in your hands
4 Just travel forward,
5 I use the microphone to fight against this shitty daily life….
6 If I could, I would not know anything
7 like it was back in the day yo! Lady meets girl….
8 Too much information, so much weight that is carried on the shoulder
9 back then you weren't really like that,
10 grabbing everything that was seen from the eye.

\(^3\) See Appendix for more on this tour and a transcription of the theme song.
Was it good? Motivation was greed and time started slipping;
you were almost lost, too….
Again, we will climb together to the heavens
The conversation that might get you thinking….
Grab the passion that is in front of you!
Even if you can’t see what's in front of you, jump on to it!
Yo! Wow wow wow wow wow, Hey!….
Take back the sky that recklessly went.
Take apart the chains that you chained upon yourself!
Yo! Wow wow wow wow, Hey!…."

Object 5-6 Miss Monday’s “Lady Meets Girl” album cover

“Let's Go (It's a Movement)” (2003)

The following text is from the song entitled “Let's Go (It's a Movement)” by Long
Beach, California rapper Warren G, featuring Hiphop legend and pioneer KRS-ONE and
Ryukyu Islands, Japan rapper Lil' Ai. This song appeared on Beef The Soundtrack, an
album designed to accompany one of the Beef documentaries, which were Hiphop
documentaries explicating the history and practice of the battle concept in Hiphop culture.
This song signifies the transnational significance of Hiphop as well as the work put into
making its political agenda salient in the global sphere. The rappers selected for this song
represent disparate spaces. KRS-ONE hails from the Bronx, Warren G from Long Beach,
and Ai is from the Ryukyu Islands. The album cover features imagery that positions
Hiphop as spanning across the United States as it displays palm trees signifying California
and the West Coast, then the Gateway Arch in St. Louis, Missouri signifying the Midwest,
and then the New York City skyline signifying the East Coast. The song “Let’s Go (It’s a
Movement)” presents a Hiphop that transcends the national boundaries of the album cover.
Like the origins narrative of Hiphop, the first verse begins in the Bronx with KRS-ONE. It
then moves to the West Coast in a peaceful microphone pass to Warren G, despite the
stereotype of East Coast–West Coast conflict.
The message is brought home with Lil’ Ai’s final verse. Her presence in the song takes Hiphop from the Bronx and Los Angeles to the colonized Pacific Islands of Ryukyu, Japan. Codeswitching with some English, AAE, and Japanese, she raps about Hiphop as a revolution. Like Rappagariya and other political lyricists in Japan, she raps about Hiphop as a virus that spreads and has vibes to resonate or make people feel “good.” The sense from her lyrics translated below is that the Hiphop foundation that Rapper 1 (in Chapter Four) mentioned is built solid, and it protects us from false popular culture. Lil’ Ai situates Hiphop as not being bound by geopolitical space (it is transnational culture) with the line: “Hiphop defies the limit from the west to the east, from the left to the right, destroying borders that creates lines in between.” Like the male rappers described in Chapter Four, she, too, positions herself in the role of guardian, savior, and “god” that can protect Hiphop. In this way, her rhetoric is indicative of what some scholars are saying is the opportunity for women to “flip” gendered scripts with Hiphop, as the role of savior or superhero is thought to be stereotypically ascribed to men. However, one must be careful in this analysis as we have learned from Uhura’s character, as well as from Joan Morgan (2000), Ntozaki Shange (1977), Yukiko Tanaka (1987), and Michelle Wallace (1979): the trope of savior/superhero/godess applied to women is not on equal footing with trope of savior/superhero/god applied to men, in that the former could end up exploited, unacknowledged, erased, or martyred. A transcription of the song lyrics follow.

Object 5-7 Beef Soundtrack’s album art for “Let’s Go (It’s a Movement)”

The Beef soundtracks, documentaries, and related television series exemplify Hiphop’s cultural aesthetic concerning the “battle,” which was described in Chapter Four. It presents the “battle” as a discourse strategy to communicate value systems associated with Hiphop culture. At times the value systems are progressive and in line with a
womanist agenda, and at other times they are indicative of Hiphop’s classic gender politics that degrade women and children. The series acknowledges that it was a female emcee that popularized the battle aesthetic in Hiphop: Roxanne Shante. Shante criticized and engaged in verbal play with several popular lyricists in the early 1980s. She made a song entitled “Brothas Ain’t Shit,” which is accredited as the inspiration for the “answer” song “Bitches Ain’t Shit” by Dr. Dre featuring Snoop Dogg. The uneven venom with which these rappers attacked Shante, 13 years later, is revealing. Nevertheless, Lil’ Ai invokes Shante’s lyrical ingenuity in the verse below. Consider the song, “Let’s Go (It’s a Movement)”:

**Chorus 2X:**
It’s a movement/ (Let's go, here we go!)/ Ima prove it/ (Let's go, here we go!)/
KRS-One/ (Let's go, here we go!)/ Warren G, Lil' Ai/ (Let's go, here we go!)

**[KRS-One]**
Radio waves makin you behave like a slave
So many ways to enhance what you crave
Microchips and optic clips have you lickin your lips
With your eyes fixed on tits and fast whips
It's funny how we call cars whips
We slave for it
How many times were you beaten by they tricks
You lookin at an eclipse
Faded dark spot in front of the light
Shut your eyes quick
International KRS passin through
When you spell Hip-Hop the H is always capital
Here's what we have to do
It ain't hard to see
KRS, Lil' Ai, Warren G
That's the power
Ain't no calmin me
An open hour
They see the god in me
Pardon me
In hip-hop, your heart is free
What you tellin me, KRS, LBC?

**[Warren G]**
South Bronx, South Side Bronx
Boogie Down to my G-Funk Productions
Mic check, one two
Move a little somethin
Somethin with my peeps
Hip-hop declaration of peace
Street movement (let's go, here we go!)
Let's keep it music (let's go, here we go!)
Ima prove it (let's go, here we go!)
If you've got beef with Hip-Hop (let's go, here we go!)
International incomes so we're in the suite
Watchin Ichiro hittin runs life is sweet
I take it back where I'm from
Knowledge rules supreme over nearly everyone hmph
It's a shame how we caught up in the material lifestyle
And our next generation livin wild
It's time for discipline time for listening
To this declaration of Hip-Hop christening

**Chorus (2x)**
At present there is no published ethnographic study that critically engages issues of gender and sexuality in Japanese Hip hop; even though Hip hop-studies scholars have mentioned Japan as an example of a geopolitical space in which women cultural workers and consumers have allegedly been able to use Hip hop as a tool to “flip the script” on societal gender norms and other fixed identities for Japanese women such as the trope of the good wife and wise mother, et cetera. Halifu Osumare comments that “in Japan, female Hip-Hopers use the genre to defy gender restrictions for women” (2000:3). Ian Condry (2006) concurs, noting that “the more recent female hip-hoppers discussed here [in his

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1 However, the excellent ethnographer of Japanese Hip hop and reggae, Marvin Sterling, has a highly anticipated research project in progress that attends to some of these issues.
work] represent for women (*onna daihyoo*) in a way that rejects images of feminine vulnerability” (2006:166).

**Object 5-8 Lil’ Ai’s album art for “Let’s Go (It’s a Movement)”**

In general, Hiphop scholarship also tends to take for granted that Hiphop’s stereotypic misogynistic and heterosexist lyrics and performance are mediated and mitigated by token female emcees that are perceived to be performing oppositional identities that complicate standard practices of sexism. Most notable examples of such performances would constitute Hime from Japan and Lil Kim from the United States. These emcees are known for owning sexualized and fixed gendered identities and utilizing norms associated with nationalist discourse to shock and unlock their identities from dominant cultural standards and stigma. However, the need to create a more just social reality requires more than “script flippin” and occasional access to performances in order to achieve relational critical awareness of race and class analysis in the public sphere that Hiphop has been able to secure worldwide thus far. While emerging Hiphop feminist scholarship details how Hiphop has in some cases supported issues of gender equality (cf., Morgan 2008; Morgan and Bennett 2007; Pough 2004), the general claims of most scholars—that there is a “golden age” of global Hiphop that did not include sexist and heterosexist rhetoric, or that Hiphop’s cultural practice is not sexist or heterosexist because women and those in same-sex relationships have been able to mobilize the arts and aesthetics of Hiphop for their own oppositional political agendas—need to be better qualified and illuminated if a more equitable reality within global Hiphop is to be achieved.

**“There’s No Place Like Home”: Queens and Bitches and Hos, Oh My!!**

Much of the research and public discourse regarding women in Hiphop in general reflects the discursive practice that has marked African-American women. There have been
constructed categories that fix female identities into a dominant binary opposition: queens and hos. The queens are the virtuous virgins, the good wife and wise mother who do as they are told, like Uhura following Farrakhan’s demands in the skit presented. Queens are the cherished “church secretaries” who mule and martyr for the liberation of their people. On the other hand, to quote Luther Campbell of Two Live Crew, “[h]os fuck a lot.” They are reduced to inhuman qualities as they are animalistic in behavior and cannot be trusted. “Hos” bring down movements; they don’t build them in popular cultural scripts. However, “hos” can be “managed” by pimps in popular Hiphop rhetoric.

There are also manifestations of other categories that mark women’s identities as not so binary, yet just as fixed. Some of these contemporary categories (which have historical and tropological significance) are: sister, bitch, baby mama, and golddigger. Bitches, baby mamas, and golddiggers usually follow the more dehumanized definition as hos, while sisters are more in line with the definition of queens. Some aspects of these identifications occur in most Hiphop cultural production around the world, despite academic scholarship that says it does not (cf., Mitchell 2001). Tony Mitchell (2001) maintains that Hiphop in the United States is more sexist and deviant than Hiphop in other countries. Often those defending Hiphop’s political potential will argue that it is just commercial Hiphop or Rap that subjugates women; however, simple lyrical analysis of “conscious” Hiphop song lyrics will reveal otherwise. Not only do some “conscious” rappers assign women according to these categories, but some conscious rappers also will utilize pimp–ho metaphors to describe their political cause. Even “underground” or “conscious” groups are guilty of objectifying and degrading women in lyrics and lifestyle choices and onstage performances. In many cases both “conscious” and “gangsta” cultural workers assert
masculinity in ways that degrade the human equality of women: “pimp” metaphors are often utilized and celebrated, and male opponents are feminized (and in some cases threatened with rape) as a strategy to disrespect them. Furthermore, content in “conscious” songs referring to women often leave them absent as main topics of narrative, thus erasing them from social struggle. In addition, women are cast into the “golddigger” category and criticized for being complicit with materialism, consumerism, or sexualization in quite paternalistic and patriarchal ways.

Examples of this would include song lyrics that criticize Japanese adolescent girls for exchanging sexual services for Western brand name fashion items with older men, or song lyrics that criticize women for shopping too much and, through their absence in their household, allow themselves or their children to be degraded by their male partners. Although these criticisms may come from good intentions, they do not address the larger sociopolitical issues that underpin the behaviors and practice of the women and girls they criticize, and general tones of the lyrical performances could be read as condescending.

Another example of sexism in Japanese Hiphop lyrics could include referents in Japanese language that criticize by feminizing. The Hiphop vernacular _Ame-ko_ for example is diminutive and derogatory because the morpheme _/ko/_ means child and also signifies one as feminine, as many female names end with that morpheme (e.g., Michiko, Satchiko, Yoshiko, etc.). Borrowed words can also be utilized from English, both GAE and AAE, to signify objectification, such as the English pejorative “bitch.” Consider the verse below from DS455 from Big Ron’s “Bayside Cruisin’” introduced in Chapter Four:
Hiphop’s genesis in struggling, disenfranchised communities situates the culture as a salient political force among today’s emerging leadership in Japan as well as the United States.

Both countries’ origin narratives speak of organizing in the face of oppression for the purpose of peace and harmony as well as its multiple references to Japanese nationalist discourse, black power rhetoric, and liberation ideologies that attract youth worldwide to utilize this art and culture for a variety of political campaigns and strategic agendas. Hiphop’s key leaders, authors, and documentarians (cf., Kitwana 1994, 2002, 2005) have rightly predicted its transcendence from a cultural movement such as jazz to a political one such as the Black Power movement.

However, is Hiphop a new social movement or is it merely an extension of past social movements? Chapter Four and the present chapter examined how Hiphop’s cultural workers and political organizers have dealt with key issues in political movement building: race, class, gender, and sexuality. I posit that it will be Hiphop’s emerging gender politics that will foretell whether or not it can forge a new social movement. My tools of analysis in this chapter included
evidence from my experiences of political organizing within the Hiphop culture in various countries, including Japan, as well as examples from popular cultural discourse.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION: KOBUSHI AGEROO! (=PUMP YA FIST!)

Blackness, “Race,” and Politics in Ethnographic Projects

The rhetoric of race is embedded in discursive practice that petitions a biological classification system. The validity of such a system was ultimately empirically falsified in anthropological literature in the 1990s. At this juncture, anthropologists remain amidst a methodological crisis concerning to treatment of the live effects of racialization in ethnographic data. For a while “ethnicity” became the trope for race; however, such studies denied the historical significance of racial constructions and the material disparities that they have produced. Specifically, ethnographers face the challenge of successfully analyzing and writing about race without reifying it (Harrison 2002; Trouillot 2003). Inspecting instances of disidentification among cultural workers in transnational Hiphop could lead to more developed understandings of changing conceptualizations and strategies regarding race and raciology (cf., Butler 1993, 1997b; Hall 1996d; Gilroy 1993b, 2000). Perhaps studying disidentification can help ethnographers better understand identification practices, such as those carried out by states’ governing bodies. Though race is but one of many intersecting identifications, examining how race and its correlated disidentification takes place in Hiphop holds specific analytic interest.

Ethnographers and cultural critics have posited that popular culture stands for certain discursive strategies (Dent 1998; Fabian 1998; Gilroy 1991; Hall 1996d; Hebdige 1987; hooks 1992) that encompass critical voices interested in reformulating outmoded notions of identity. However, those writing specifically about such subjects who identify with Hiphop communities outside of the United States (cf., Condry 1999; Mitchell 2001) have yet to adequately address how these participants in Hiphop culture are interpreting the significance of race and racialized discourse, and representations of blackness in particular. If the political utility of Hiphop lies in
its association with a black body politic—rooted in an African-American imaginary that is (metonymically) genealogically related to a history of resistance against state-regulated identity, why is this aspect of Hiphop cultural production often avoided or left unanalyzed? Specifically, what is the analytic relationship between race and Hiphop? How does race operate as a referent within Hiphop culture? That is, how does Hiphop become racially imbued? And what becomes of the conceptual status of race if Hiphop practitioners’ racial “origins” are not publicly recognized as black?

Following Hall (1996d), the utilization of black as a political category is evidence of strategic essentialism; however, in order to discover why disidentificatory practice is necessary with this particular population (the trans-Pacific Hiphop community in question), one must understand identificatory practices of the state and related strategies of disidentification (Caplan 2001; McClaurin 2001). As Hall comments, “[popular culture] is where we discover and play with the identifications of ourselves, where we are imagined, where we are represented, not only to the audiences out there who do not get the message, but to ourselves for the first time.… [T]hough the terrain of the popular looks as if it is constructed with single binaries, it is not” (Hall 1996d:474). Referencing Freud, he reminds us that sex and representation (including race) take place in our minds and warns against conceptualizing popular culture as being constructed with single binaries (1996:474; see also Fanon 1967). Through this observation by Hall we may join the recuperative theories of Butler (1997b) and Césaire (2000) that relate theories of mental emancipation to deliverance from political subjection and explore the relationship between black popular culture and decolonization.

Chapter One introduced theories of disidentification (Butler 1997; Muñoz 1999) and AAE discursive practice and Hiphop Linguistics (Morgan 2002, 2008) in an effort to situate Japanese
Hiphop’s cultural work within a theoretical frame that considers Hiphop as part of an internationally practiced black popular culture. It offered a literature review of work on the construction of race, social movement theory, and black popular cultural music genres in Japan (e.g., blues, jazz, reggae, gospel, soul, step, and Hiphop). Chapter Two described methodological considerations, including autoethnographic reflections concerning how I entered the field and how my identifications affected fieldwork. I described my data collection and data analysis processes as well as my reporting process. Chapter Three historically situated race in Japan and sought to clarify Japan’s geopolitical identity within a postcolonial framework. In this chapter, I provided a literature review of race analysis in Japan, and examined Japanese studies as a discipline, especially its relationship to critical race theory and studies of otherness in social science. This chapter also sought to elucidate why race matters in Japan and why I am conceptualizing current governmental practice and popular cultural reactions within a postcolonial framework. Chapter Four posed the question, “Is Hiphop a transnational social movement?” I explained how blackness is operationalized around the globe for political practice and how African-American narrative style and liberation ideologies inform this practice. I demonstrated how language, beats, dance, art, and philosophy fit into this framework. I offered an origins narrative for Japanese Hiphop and described its cultural aesthetics from flows to battles and verse styles. This chapter posited that Hiphop’s contribution as a transnational social movement was that it furthered the goals of past international social movements by dovetailing race and class analyses. Chapter Five critiqued Hiphop as not being a “new” transnational social movement because, like past movements, concepts of race and class have been allowed to trump gender and sexuality as salient political issues. Explication of popular discourse regarding this theme and autoethnographic reflections from movement building processes with which I have
participated in Japan and the US were the tools of analysis employed in this chapter. I explored discussions concerning intersectionality in past and present political agendas, and I placed an emphasis on questioning the political sustainability of these political agendas.

**Revoking Hiphop’s “Ghetto Pass”**

Race is a socially constructed distinction, material relation, and dimension of social stratification that intersects with and is mutually constituted by class, gender, ethnicity, nation, and increasingly transnational location and identity. [Faye V. Harrison 2002]

A “ghetto pass” is approval from members of a community for individuals who did not originate in that community or for individuals who originated from a community, but no longer “keep it real” through community connections and sincerity. As a cofounder of the National Hiphop Political Convention (NHHPC), I wonder if it is time to revoke Hiphop’s “ghetto pass”—as metaphor for its “social movement pass”—and hopefully, only temporarily, until we can reassess whether our cause is still “worthy,” given Hiphop’s core’s gender politics. Indeed, what has made the language with which I write about Hiphop in regard to its relevance as a contemporary social movement difficult, and at times confusing or contradictory, is the fact that my analysis of its position has changed throughout the tenure of this research. Within a Hiphop cultural framework, I am constantly reevaluating as to whether our cause is still worthy (cf. Morgan 2008). Moreover, many of the female cultural workers that I organize with in the international Hiphop community are becoming increasingly careful about uncritically praising Hiphop’s political utility, as we are finding ourselves in the position of the Uhura character (right back where we started at the beginning of the movement). While writing Chapter Five, I polled every international female Hiphop activist that I could think of as to whether Hiphop still had a “worthy” cause, given its apparent gender politics and values concerning children and family support. Everyone I talked to was exhausted from her secretarial role and skeptical concerning Hiphop’s political utility. While we recognize Hiphop’s antiracist and anticlассist work—work
that was achieved through the “muling” of people gendered in the same identification as us—we also realize that contemporary definitions of race are intersectional with other identifications such as gender and sexuality (cf., Harrison’s previously cited definition of race, 2002; Hurston 1990 [1935]). Therefore, how successful can Hiphop continue to be if its international gender politics are not immediately addressed?

The original “Hip Hop Political Agenda” document drafted in 2003 for the US National Hip Hop Political Convention (NHHPC) listed three items that were eliminated from the final document in 2004. Those three agenda items were gender equality, sexuality equality, and media justice. At the 2006 NHHPC meetings in Chicago much debate ensued to put at least two of those items back on the agenda: gender equality and media justice (which is seen as intersecting with gender equality given the prevalent degrading images of women in Hiphop media). After a lot of discussion, the gender equality item was supposed to be added back; however, a press release distributed after the Democrats won back the US Senate in November 2006 omitted this agenda item. When a fellow female cofounder of the NHHPC criticized this, she was met with sexist rhetoric (e.g., it was insinuated that she was “frustrated,” as in sexually frustrated) and was asked if she wanted to be removed from the listserv where the group had its discussions. In addition, during the summer of 2007, the national chair of the NHHPC, which would be held in Las Vegas in 2008, posted a picture of female organizers at the World Social Forum in Atlanta (June 2007) on his MySpace (social networking site) page with the caption, “31 flavors of the NHHPC.” When criticized for sexually objectifying fellow organizers by referring to them using a popular ice cream slogan, he responded, “I dont [sic] see a problem with recognizing the ethnic diversity of our comrades... my definition of having ‘flavor’ is a good thing” (ellipsis in original). By saying “ethnic diversity” he was referencing varied skin pigmentation, which
further shows that he was typologically casting these females as objects. He attempted to backpedal by signifying that he was saying that these women “had flavor.” However the grammar of his original caption reveals his response as a lie, because his original use situated “flavor” as a noun (object), whereas his defense of the use of “flavor” refers to its use as modifier to a noun.

The cultural workers with whom I work in other countries including Japan were closely watching and participating in the movement-building process of the NHHPC as part of a shared vision and eventual agenda to create allied “Hip Hop Conventions” in various countries. If the prototype of the pilot is flawed in terms of gender politics, what does the future hold for subsequent organizations? This does not mean that our international allies do not have agency, and will just blindly accept the NHHPC’s political agenda, but it is to say that given this sort of treatment of women abounds in all international spaces, including Japan and the US, the outlook of social change in regard to gender politics is not positive. While some cultural studies of Japanese Hiphop have situated the genre as not being sexist in comparison to US Hiphop that has not been my understanding of the culture. For example, Rhiannon Fink writes, “The lack of misogyny and violence in Japanese hip hop is appreciated by US fans who oppose these facets of contemporary commercial hip hop in America” (2006:205). I have read similar arguments from Tony Mitchell (1998) and also Ian Condry (1999), and I remain unsure of how that assessment is made (see lyrics analysis in Chapters Four and Five).

That is, the cultural workers that I worked with reiterated the national stereotypes that “Japan is sexist” in a fixed way and criticized rampant sexism in society and government policy that predates Hiphop in Japan. I, too, have observed and experienced much sexism, sexual violation, sexual harassment, and subjugation based on sexualized and gendered identifications
in Japan (see Chapter Three). However, I can also contend that my female colleagues and I have undergone equally racist and sexist experiences in every country that I have visited and lived in, including the United States and Japan. Mos Def calls this “world nigga law” and Faye Harrison (2002) terms this “global apartheid.” The global hierarchical order generally places those marked as “female,” “racialized other” or “nonwhite,” and those in “same sex relationships” as lowest priority concerning access to basic human rights and quality of life (food, wealth, health, shelter, civic engagement, etc.). Ellen Meiksins Wood (1997) attributes growing global disparities along lines of race, gender, sexuality, class, and citizenship to the universalization of capitalism—an extension of previous imperialist agendas.

The contrast between today’s “global” economy and earlier forms of colonial imperialism should suffice to illustrate the point: colonies were what they were precisely because they presented no effective geopolitical barrier to imperial power. The movement of capital across colonial boundaries was, of course, not just a matter of paper transfers or electronic transmissions but the bodily movement of coercive force. Geopolitical borders, in other words, were not only notionally but physically permeable. Today, transnational capital is even more effective than was the old-military imperialism in penetrating every corner of the world; but it tends to accomplish this through the medium of local political jurisdictions to maintain the conditions of economic stability and labour discipline. [E. Wood 1997:553-554]

Given this historical situation, that there is a global world order that subjugates women and nonwhite people, it is important not to blame Hiphop—or its global cultural production—for how global racism and sexism came into being. As stated earlier, Hiphop has inherited a gender and sexual politics from past social movements as well as mainstream society. The global world order concerning gender, sexuality, and racial identity predate Hiphop’s genesis. However, if Hiphop cultural workers claim to be attending to all forms of global injustice, it is important to evaluate whether Hiphop rhetoric and practice are oppositional enough to the global hierarchical situation concerning gender and sexuality. At this juncture, Hiphop’s international cultural workers must ask ourselves, “Are ‘flippin the script’ and other performatives enough of a
political intervention when the numbers of people committed to Hiphop as an international movement do not recognize or know the names and issues of the women within the purported movement?” While the Hiphop movement builders should and must celebrate our success regarding race and class awareness using international Hiphop cultural work, we must also ask if our cause is still worthy if we do not attend to growing historical disparities along lines of gender and sexuality. My assessment is that the Hiphop movement building efforts situated on the periphery (e.g., the B-Girl Be Conference, the Homo Hop movement, and the cultural work of Medusa, Rosa Clemente, Yo Yo, Danae Martinez, Hanifah Walidah, Carla Stokes, Georgia Roberts, Stephany Spaulding, Retta Morris, Jessica LaShawn, Dereca Blackmon, Chasity Johnson, Rachel Raimist, Aya de Leon, and numerous unnamed, undervalued, and unrecognized others) constitute the criteria of a new social movement with a worthy cause (see also the emerging canon of Hiphop feminist/womanist literature, such as Clay 2003; Cole and Guy-Sheftall 2003; Collins 2006; Hopkinson and Moore 2006; J. Morgan 2000; M. Morgan 2008; M. Morgan and Bennett 2007; J. Morgan and Neal 2007; Neal 2006; Rose 1994; Pough 2004; Pough and Richardson 2007; Sharpley-Whiting 2007; Souljah 1996; Stokes 2007).

Although those on the periphery currently lack the numbers of the “core” Hiphop social movement that is based on masculine centered, black nationalist frameworks, all is not lost. Like past social movements (e.g., the black power movement) ultimately subjugated subjects within the United States (African-descendants in “the belly of the beast”) tend to set the political agenda on the world stage of black popular culture. Within a Hiphop cultural framework, “elders,” founders, and pioneers reserve the right to critique. Therefore, we can urge increased attendance to gender and sexual politics and create a new social movement that reaches greater heights of social change. When cultural workers criticize Hiphop as not being a “new” social movement,
we are not denying its existence as a social movement, but we are criticizing its gender and sexual politics (the worthiness of its cause) for not being “new,” and instead stuck in ideology of the past. Recall the satirical skit presented in Chapter Five, “The Wrath of Farrakhan.” A social change took place that could be the metaphor of a social movement in that Sulu experienced new freedom. Likewise, men all over the world have benefited from Hiphop activism. The jury is out as to whether women will remain in the position of Uhura, participating in movements that do not end in much social change for ourselves. Just as the emergence of womanism and black feminism served as a catalyst for the revamping and revolutionizing of “traditional” white woman-centered feminist movement-building, hopefully a similar strain of criticism will spur a relational change for renewed social change within Hiphop (cf., Philips 2006).

**Legacy to Liberation?**

Building on other ethnographic and social scientific studies of Hiphop in Japan (cf., Cleveland 2006; Condry 2006; Cornyetz 1994; Sterling 2003, 2006), the research presented here specifically attends to linguistic features and cultural practices of a particular Japanese Hiphop community. The data I have collected over the past 13 years appear to support the hypothesis of many scholars that Hiphop’s significance to agents within this community is its conspicuous and purposeful connection to African-American discursive practices (cf., Alim 2006; Basu and Lemelle 2006; Forman 2002; Kitwana 2005; Morgan 2008; Neal 1998; Osumare 2007; Ramsey 2004; Rose 1994; Smitherman 1997;; Watkins 2006; Yasin 1999). Many Japanese cultural workers view their artistic productions as part of their political work against “white supremacy.” Moreover, their participation in Hiphop is conceptualized as “saving” themselves, their listeners and especially Japan as a nation. The emcee battle and the song lyrics analyzed in Chapters Four and Five highlighted the use of such rhetoric as part of a discursive strategy to connect with African-American identities through Hiphop. That is, the agents I work with in the Japanese
Hiphop community conceptualize themselves as distinct cultural workers who are part of an imagined community of transnational Hiphop practice that is internationally located in a US-based “black aesthetic.”

Such an identity, to view oneself as part of a transnational community that is inextricably linked to African-American identity, does not necessitate that one is entangled in a neocolonial relationship with the West or US hegemony. Identifying with blackness in the US is not automatically an admission of submission to US hegemony, as “Americanized” identity is often defined as whiteness and in terms of white racial norms (Lie 2001; Russell 1991a). Analysis of the words people use to describe the US in terms of whiteness and African Americans as derivational to an “American” (=white) norm reveal (1) that raciology or Western-centered understandings of race have indeed been internalized and operationalized by the people who speak in these terms, and (2) that identification with blackness or African-American cultural narratives of resistance are not necessarily in alignment with a US imperial identity. Russell explains,

Western hegemony and Japan’s subordinate relation to the West has had a profound effect on the Japanese self-image as well as their image of the nonwhite Other. The West has played a pivotal role not only in introducing Japan to the black Other but in defining the parameters of culture and civilization in general. Given Western hegemony and cultural authority and its lavish display of modernity and material power in Japan and elsewhere, it is not surprising that in its attempt to catch up with the West, Japan began to identify with it and peripheralize cultural links with its Asian neighbors whose influence on Japan waned with expansion of Euro-American power in the Pacific. [Russell 1991a:15]

Consequently, I do not think that by identifying “acts of blackness” in Japan that I am situating my research community in an identity that is somehow inauthentic or unoriginal. Chapters Four and Five demonstrate how certain “acts of blackness,” through performative symbol or through speech act, are not necessarily about blackness per se, but about expressions of disidentificatory practice against grains of normalizing racial and gendered ascriptions in both
national and international settings. It is not my intention to project “American ways of thinking about race” onto the people with whom I work (cf. Condry 2006:25; Takezawa 2006), rather I hope to share linguistic data that they agree reveals how they are thinking about race as a contribution to pre-existing research and writing that documents communities and cultural workers conceptualizing racial oppression in shared ways, and borrowing as well as building upon narratives of resistance in these ways (see, for example, Atkins 2001; Asai 2005; Koshiro 2003; Horne 2004). As Russell (1991a), Koshiro (1999), and Mishima (2000) explain, members of Japan’s intelligentsia and governmental policy writers had access to and were informed by Western theories of race and racial supremacy. Acknowledging this historical fact within analysis of contemporary cultural practice need not be totalizing of Japan’s geopolitical identity nor a US imperialist reading of indigenous cultural practice. Drawing on historical documents as well as the work of historians like Dower (1986), Horne (2004), and Koshiro (1999) as well as the critical race research of Kondo (1997), Russell (1991b), and Cleveland (2006), scholars can better historically situate contemporary articulations of race and racialization within a Japanese Hiphop context. Moreover, documenting changing trends in multicultural club venues, multiethnic artists, and multilingual cultural productions and using discourse analysis to uncover ideological constructions may reveal even more insight to how contemporary popular culture relates and does not relate to older versions of nationalist discourse and racial hierarchies.

This critical race research project pushes the discipline of anthropology to reconsider traditional methodologies and social theories that do not fully extricate the significance of postcolonial performances, like the performance of blackness among Japanese Hiphop community cultural workers who are not bound to a particular identity, let alone a particular geopolitical space in our specific modern times. An important part of my perspective in this
research is informed by my longitudinal and familial relationships—both biological and fictive—that were forged over time during the tenure of my participation in this community. The political markings that my body and my family bring to the ethnographic project necessitate reflexivity in writing, as the ethnographic relationship was at all times multivocal, heteroglossic, and dialogic (Bakhtin 1981; Page 1988; Ulysse 2007). My body, my memory, my family experiences inform the perspective from which I now write. This methodological perspective is a necessary and integral influence that carries with it a particular political agenda to this already politically charged intellectual project. I will conclude with one such autoethnographic reflection.

**Final Reflection**

The Hiphop cultural community that I reported on in this work is a contemporary manifestation of a historical relationship between activists and artists across the Pacific. As such, the Hiphop community was not the only “home” that I found when navigating the cultural, politic, and linguistic terrain in Japan. My parents’ and grandparents’ agemates that I affectionately and respectfully call “elders” in this project also provided an intellectual and emotional shelter for me over the past 13 years. These elders were the trailblazers for international social movement building that sought open alliances according to their identification as being part of the world’s “darker races” (cf. Du Bois 1990 [1903]; Prashad 2007). This vanguard openly sought allegiances with their African-American counterparts and other oppressed peoples all over the world.

One such elder is Yoshida Ruiko, who graciously hosted my mother and me in her home after a long night of research in 1994. Watching my mother “build” with Yoshida-san on strategies for eliminating inequality worldwide at various moments over time has been an incredible experience. On one particular evening, Yoshida-san, Nakazawa Mayumi, Chikappu Mieko, and my mother went to see a multicultural and multinational performance at a temple in
the Tokyo metropolitan area. Afterward, some of the group went to dine. We ate chanpuru and other Ryukyuan cuisine while listening to Ryukyuan musicians perform at a restaurant. When the musicians were finished performing (as we “closed the spot down” that night), my mother, Nakazawa-san, and Yoshida-san talked with the musicians and other restaurant staff about blackness, race, and politics as well as Asian-national art and activism. Upon arriving at Yoshida-san’s home I was struck by her beautiful photographs of members of the Black Panther Party, particularly Huey Newton. These “elders” “broke bread” based on their perceptions of shared experiences of subjection as well as their collective cultural identity as members of a transnational social movement inspired by the international black power movement. It wasn’t Hiphop, but similar aesthetics and language ideologies were at play.

Citing the work of Yoshida Ruiko, who is also an internationally acclaimed Japanese national photojournalist, Russell (1991a) provides a quotation from her discussing the premise of one of her books and its relationship to her becoming aware of her own identity as it intersects with global racial hierarchies:

*Haremu no Atsui Hibi* is a coming-of-age record of the maturation of one yellow-skinned woman’s [kiiori hada no onna] life in an American black ghetto in the 1960s. At same time, it is also a journal of one person’s search for self-identity, a person who—like blacks—is a minority in American society. [Yoshida 1979:226, quoted in Russell 1991a]

Contrary to the scholarship that questions Japanese Hiphop’s “authenticity” based on the supposed premise that African-American Hiphop “originators” and Japanese national Hiphop cultural workers lack shared experience [of racialization and disenfranchisement] (Fink 2006:201), Russell analyzes Yoshida’s comments and historically situates the existence of shared racial identities and, thus, shared experiences between African Americans and Japanese nationals. Russell writes,

Yoshida’s use of terms like *oshukuujin* (yellow person) and *hada no kiiroi onna* (yellow-skinned woman) and her identification of herself a “minority” is a deliberate statement of
her solidarity with other people of color; a consciousness, she tells the reader, she did not possess until her experiences in America. In this and subsequent works, Yoshida rejects Western racial hierarchies, while criticizing her compatriots, particularly the Japanese intelligentsia, for their uncritical embrace of them and oppression of minorities at home. [Russell 1991a:15]

Not all, but many of the Japanese national cultural workers that I interviewed had the chance like Yoshida to travel to the US and experience anti-Asian racism firsthand, which perhaps helped to formulate their identities in solidarity with African-American experiences. Those that had never left Japan or East Asia and the South Pacific also shared Yoshida’s conceptualization of self. It could be because this generation of cultural workers grew up reading or hearing about the work of Yoshida as well as Honda Katsuichi and Nakazawa Mayumi who write about race and Japanese identity in similar ways to Yoshida. Also because of changes in technology that contribute to time-space compression, consuming Hiphop cultural productions, such as movies that elucidate social disparities and creative strategies of resistance against such structural programs, further contributes to awakening Japanese Hiphop cultural workers to shared experiences of racialization and related social inequality.

Indeed, whether it was an unknown Hiphop fan who worked a custodial position at the Kansai Airport who’s never left his city, let alone the country, or a famous deejay whose videos frequent MTV Japan and who, at the time enjoyed a residency at Japan’s then-largest Hiphop club, I have rarely had a conversation about Hiphop that did not end in an articulation of social disparities and what we, the interlocutors, could do to help assuage this worldwide problem that we both endure on a daily basis. I do think that perceptions of political connectivity within my transnational Hiphop community are becoming increasingly generational, as younger consumers and cultural workers seem less committed to Hiphop’s political promise; however, as Hiphop’s cultural and philosophical practice predicates, it is up to us—me, the famous deejay, and the Kansai Airport custodian—to criticize Hiphop’s political potential and to guide its future cultural
workers toward more progressive practice. As Chuck D said during a collaboration with DJ Yutaka, “The legends ain’t ready to leave, cause the kids ain’t ready to lead!”

In this way, let us consider that Hip hop serves as a window to studying social reality as described by the cultural workers youth in question. Hip hop is a point of entry, a site of inquiry, for understanding how race, gender, class, and citizenship affect cultural workers in their everyday lived experiences. More importantly, documenting Hip hop as a trope for blackness and its related status in relation to the state helps to illustrate how blackness is utilized as a strategically essentialized political tool to displace and assuage the essentializing political processes operationalized by states to categorize and control bodies that are politicized. Therefore, I am not only providing insight into how cultural workers cope and recuperate (Butler 1997b; Hall 1996d; Hebdige 1979), but also how the state legitimizes hierarchicalizing apparatuses, and how cultural workers subsequently make sense of this and resist when able.

While Hip hop is transnational, it is also simultaneously autochthonous because we cannot discount the agency and innovation of individuals positioned at the peripheries of its cultural and linguistic production (outside of the “Black Atlantic”). Despite occupying disparate spatial locations, those who identify with Hip hop cultural production are often temporally intertwined and linked through a “common literacy” (Anderson 1991; hooks 1992) that seeks to destabilize the status quo—whatever that may be in any given culture—and this practice seems to encompass a goal of dehierarchizing social relations (cf., Fujita 1996; Gilroy 1993b; Morgan 2002; Prevos 2001; Urla 2001). Hence, Hip hop cultural production not only represents the articulation of critical theory (Beebe 2002; Dyson 2001; Grossberg 1997; hooks 1992), but it also relates to the postcolonial intellectual project that Homi Bhabha described as “the transnational as translational” (1993:172). By concomitantly signifying blackness and disrupting
racial stasis, Hiphop’s significance to social movement building is transnational (“hiphop is black power”) as well as translational (“kobushi ageroo! [=pump ya fist!]”). This transnational genre is translatable in a metonymical sense, as its liberatory message is carried from one place to another and serves to describe the condition of our contemporary world from a specific, formally silenced perspective.
APPENDIX
SAMPLES FROM DATA REFERENCED

Summary of Analysis from RIAJ Yearbook 2006 Charts

The Recording Industry Association of Japan (RIAJ) Yearbook 2006 lists various charts including one showing how distribution works in Japan and also top selling artists/groups of artists. Whereas the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) categorizes Hiphop sales, the RIAJ places these sales mostly under the category of “Pop” and also in some cases a subcategory of “New Music.” EXILE (formerly J Soul Brothers), is a J-Pop band, which could also be described as a Hiphop-influenced Japanese soul (or “New Jack Swing”) band as is referenced in Chapter Five. EXILE was listed as having sold in the millions for 2005. It also won Gold Discs and “Rock and Pop Album of the Year” for its Single Best and Perfect Best albums. This is the same group that featured the Black Panther Party political march on its album cover and the CD booklet contains different famous photographs from African-American political struggles and demonstrations. In the past, EXILE has borrowed imagery from Public Enemy’s It Takes a Nation of Millions album cover for EXILE ENTERTAINMENT’s album art.

Object A-1 EXILE’s EXILE ENTERTAINMENT

The song lyrics featured in this research project generally sold high numbers, and the albums were ranked in the top 25 under the Japanese Hiphop category for Cisco Records, which is a different entity from RIAJ (see http://www.cisco-records.co.jp). Furthermore, Suite Chic/Amuro Namie, won “Artisit of the Year” in 1997, according to the RIAJ. Finally, most of my research assistants communicated that the samples used were representative of heavily-consumed art in Japanese Hiphop.
This translation was ranked the highest by research consultants for the song “Kobushi,” which is explicated in Chapter Four. This song also inspired part of the title for this project.

[chorus]
put your fist up, put your fist up
open up your ears, jump up
put your fist up, put your fist up
open up your ears, jump up

[verse1]
this hip hop virus has invaded your blood like poison,
representing Japan, the yellow race yo!
I’m tellin it to you straight up, tryin to fix this situation that I don’t agree with
our identity, delivering dope Japanese shit till everybody hears it
I hit every single ball thrown like Shinjo-rhyming, luck is part of skills
I’m showin you how I do it,
I’m like a Japanese soldier during a war,
putting my life on the line fighting with this microphone
carving the truth into the history and its culture
Hiphop is something that got this lock down the most
those who feel the same way, put your fist up

[chorus]

[verse2]
trying to find something different in this cityscape
outlaws that go out and smoke weed
got the hachimaki tied to my head,
injectin the dope into the world,
seeing all of the problems in the world especially at night
greed cannot measure my battling schemes
during a live performance, I use the mic to fight against my fear
no need to pray, risk your life, never backing down
my spirit is real like a Japanese sword,
put into the sheath that’s gentle
the battle might be a little tough be we coming up
using Japanese that I learned since I was young
making songs that even a yakuza would be surprised
those who came to just watch will get tipsy from listening
if you gonna do it, do it
I got the spirit from those who came before
I’m a missionary from Japan, going to war today too
[chorus]

[verse 3]
for the men and women who have pride and big spirit, listen to the lyrics
got the info that will shock your mind
packed with good news, challenging various dojos and bringing new teachings
delivering crazy out of this world rhymes to your mind
I’m not following no trend, you don’t have tell me that shit
we coming into you with me and DJ Yutaka's beat
male spirit and intelligence, putting muthafuckas to rest

popular culture changes as time changes,
fighting another day against society that gives false information
Yamadaman & Q, we are the big stars that has animal instincts to fight
eating 'hino maru bento-' with DJ Yutaka,
inheriting the culture and the values
rapping what I have to say,
this is the best skill to have to live
at times, something soft be stronger than a metal

[chorus]
--DJ Yutaka featuring Rappagariya

Object A-1 DJ Yutaka’s album cover for “Kobushi”

“Self Destruction,” Japanese Style

“Self Destruction” was also the title of a popular and pivotal song in the US by various popular artists, including heavy hitter pioneers MC Lyte, KRS-ONE, Chuck D, Flava Flav, Just Ice, Kool Moe Dee, Doug E. Fresh and Daddy O. The topics of each artist’s verse addressed salient issues that were considered to be part of African-Americans’ “state of emergency” at the time. The song attended to a recuperative analysis in a similar vein to Negritude as expressed by Aime Cesaire, Frantz Fanon and others. Indeed, self-destruction brings to mind Fanon’s concept of auto-destruction (Fanon 1967). Here is how the concept is operationalized by Japanese cultural workers. Note the themes of nationalist discourse, survival and transcendence that are prevalent throughout transnational Hiphop language ideology and cultural aesthetics.
[K Dub Shine]
this alcoholic carries a knife at around midnight and early morning,
probably some whiskey that’s mixed with water
or maybe buying some really cheap stuff,
stalking, bullying, stealing that’s not worth anything
an island where people easily kill others,
parents putting life insurance on their children and abusing them
there is a lack of respect towards others,
and people starting bitching in prison when they get the death penalty
it’s no one else’s life but yours,
what I think the reason is because of the lack of knowledge and education
which causes the increase in self destruction in this society

[Zeebra]
I’m zeebra, coming from Shibuya,
There’s a lot of chinpira (something like gangbangers in the states)
beating up a drunk salaryman in the alley
hating on parents and the police
but it doesn't look too tough when you seem scared
it’s better to be seen as cats who are tough
but that’s just a misunderstanding by a lot of fools
what doesn’t change is the baggy jeans
and the sense of danger when I see a police car
man I don’t feel good, I don’t have any good memories
there’s a lot of negatives but there isn’t any positives

[Yamada Man]
yeah, when you walk straight,
there’s times when you hit something that blocks you
but if you give up, you're gonna regret it
the challenge in this whole lifetime is trying to eat,
trying to express how I feel
of course I’ll challenge it as many times as it takes,
its journey in this game,
risking my life, I’m not playing,
my dream is big
no matter how tough it is, gotta keep my head up and fight it through
I’ll keep on goin till my heart stops,
my principle is to work hard than take the way of cheating
you gotta believe in yourself when everything is going bad

[Q]
man how many times are you gonna make me say this
going straight past from left to the right? are you serious?
think a lil bit, you thinking like a kid, is your heart like ice?
one way of a death story, don’t mistake it
so much corruption that I’m getting tired of saying
pushing the limit
dumb muthafuckas should sleep for 10,000 years,
trying to get to the bottom of this
ayo!
watch out because its burning and hot,
this is a gamble, risking the life

[Utamaru]
what’s scary isn’t the dumb comment but the pretty excuses
the actions taken by the political authorities that are distorted
before we start disciplining the kids, we need to discipline the adults
seriously,
the persistent and stubborn, Japanese stock businesses need to calm down
stop trippin because someday you'll die

[Kohei Japan]
thinking that there will be equality tomorrow,
but one accident will change the peaceful balance,
wanndering into suicide,
if there is no way out, you need a back up plan
make sure you know how to work your way out,
but if you ready to die, then follow me!

[Mummy-D]
bullying, threats, breakdowns, poor health,
falling, downgrading, escaping, disappearing
people giving up their lives,
jealousy, greed, despair, poor,
but you gotta keep on living
you need to show your will to keep on going

[Utamaru]
stop pulling my legs

[Kohei Japan]
don’t listen to the noise (the bullshit)

[Mummy-D]
don’t make a mistake on your path, the junction of life

[Utamaru]
\textit{\textbf{\&}} lets keep on doing rap music to survive

[Kohei Japan]
Rhymster, Kohei, bumping that sound
jiko ho-kai (self destruction), self destruction

-- DJ Yutaka, featuring K-Dub Shine, Rhymester, Kohei Japan, Rappagariya, Zeebra

Object A-2 “Self Destruction” album art

**K-Dub Shine’s “Save The Children”**

This song is referenced throughout, but especially in Chapter Two because of its specific autoethnographic features.

[verse3]
I don’t want to see anymore tears from children
child abuse is something that cannot be forgiven
people abuse kids like its a daily / usual / conventional practice thing
language and violence, watch how you use them
the fear becomes planted in these kids’ minds
always being scared,
like a nightmare always pressing on the child
all alone wondering around in their mind and memories
their hearts will always remained scarred
they can’t find a way out of the path
they lose hope on all people and close their hearts
this is fatal for a young child's life
do you want me to do the same thing to you?
I won’t be able to hear you cry even when you're on your knees
I don’t think I can keep my temper down
this is the only way that you will understand the child's pain
[chorus]
if there is a kid that looks like he / she was beaten, let me know
if there is a house that seems suspicious, let me know
if there is someone who needs help, let me know
if you hear someone crying, let me know
--K Dub Shine

Object A-3 K Dub Shine’s “Save the Children”

**Hannya’s “Oretachi no Yamato”**

This song is an excellent example of how nationalist discourse, cultural nationalism, resistance, assertions of masculinity and social commentary coalesce as cultural criticism.

Hannya is a member of the Mo-so-zoku (妄走族) crew. He has ascended from a battle emcee in
local battles and festivals to a top-selling artist who recently announced that he would be
working with famous J-Pop star, Nagabuchi Tsuyoshi. Nagabuchi was on the main theme song
for the motion picture film Otokotachi no Yamato and Hanny had the supporting sub-theme
song, “Oretachi no Yamato.” An excerpt appears below.

Our generation was born after the war, but there's still war going on
Some idiot creates the nuclear bomb and then some other idiot does the same thing
Will the top leader of your country and will the top leader of the other country, just step
down and fight one and one because the rest of us
really wish for peace in this world

The aftermath of war brings losses of those who we love, family and friends
Forget about winning or losing, this is about life
To have feelings as a human being
If I ever have a kid, and that kid has a kid,
I would want them to live in a world where they will be able to smile more than the world
we live in today
--Hannya

Object A-4 Hanny’s “Oretachi no Yamato”

“Knowledge” Panel Translation Sample

Aspects of the following excerpt were translated by VSOP, Wesley Uenten, Fujino Yuko,
Nakamura Mustuo, and the author. This discussion took place at a “knowledge” panel during a
Hiphop festival. It is shared to exhibit the level of thought and philosophy that create the “fifth”/
“overstanding” element in the operational definition provided for Hiphop as a culture. It also
exhibits aspects of how narrative and storytelling—within Hiphop’s language ideology—are
integral to the creation of Hiphop’s transnational origins narrative, which includes members from
either side of the Pacific—that is, American pioneers such as DST are mentioned as well as
Japanese pioneers, whose identities are hidden.

Pioneer 1:
Hiphop is being portrayed greatly through the mass media. Yeah, it’s not a bad thing, but
there is more to it in Hiphop than that is portrayed in the media. For instance, there has
been an increase in independent artists. For deejays, maybe it’s good to listen to the
Hiphop from the 1980s? Do you guys feel the same way?
Grand Wizard Theodore was the first to bring the technique of scratching. Today, there are artists such as Jay-Z, Ja Rule, Puff Daddy, Def Jam, Ruff Ryders. But Eric B, DST, Diamond D, Battlecat were the first people to be making tracks back in the day. A deejay’s job is to make sure people are having fun and to uplift people’s spirits. I don’t know how many deejays there are in the crowd but I want everyone to listen to all kinds of artists, and listen to and give the audience the music from back in day, not back in the day but the true, real originators of Hiphop because that will open up people’s perspective and they will learn. I want the deejays to listen to the old school Hiphop again. Yeah, vinyl is expensive, but there are CD’s so you can use CD’s to spread the music. It’s better if every deejay is different and has their own style or else it’s boring. So, for the deejays, I want this message to mean something for you and have pride as a deejay and spin.

**Pioneer 2:**
Is talking about deejay good? Pioneer 1 was the first deejay to scratch in Japan. Back in those days, I was a b-boy and there was only disco at the time. I was wearing a jersey and some sneakers and couldn’t get in, and that was the era / time when we joined the Hiphop movement. We were treated really bad and been through a lot but we’ve been keeping on doing it. Today, there are a lot of deejays but a Hiphop deejay is not some who spins Hiphop, but I want you guys to know that a Hiphop deejay is someone who knows about Hiphop.

**Pioneer 1:**
Even though this is what I’m wearing, even a guy in a suit, or in sneakers, or a salary man who likes Hiphop is Hiphop. It doesn’t matter what you wear. This is a culture and it’s about how you express yourself. I’m not saying magazines are wrong or the TV is wrong. I was an outlaw back in the day. Without Hiphop, I wouldn’t be here today. It saved me. When I met Hiphop, I felt like this was what I wanted to do, this is my life. And I went to the U.S. and lived there for 12 years. I have a wife and kids, and I need to protect them, and I do think that God has protected me, but if I didn’t have Hiphop I would be against myself. I love Hiphop, so I don’t want to say I don’t like Hiphop right now, but Hiphop is about peace, love, unity, and to have fun. I want everyone to share the knowledge, deejaying, dancing, music, and have fun. There’s gangsta rap, I mean it’s not bad, but if the whole world accepts it, it’s gonna be crazy. So, for those who like Hiphop, there are the good parts and bad parts. Same with us humans, but there are also the good and the bad in cultures, because humans made it. I want everybody who does Hiphop to understand the good and the bad. It’s not about your appearance, I want everyone to enjoy Hiphop and use it as like a battery to live life. There’s magazines like Blast and Woofin, there are good articles but there are also bad articles. Sorry for saying this, but it is up to you to decide. Just because he or she is wearing a chain and has vinyl, doesn’t mean he or she is Hiphop. Someone who has been long forgotten doesn’t mean he or she wasn’t Hiphop. I know what I’m saying is kinda hard to understand but I know those who get what I’m saying gets it. I want you guys to understand this and spread Hiphop and support it in Japan. We will be happy that we were able to help grow positive and good Hiphop and we can comfortably be able to die and go to the sky and watch you guys from above.
I am 42 this year, and I am a pretty old guy. But, you know, I am wearing stuff like this… but I believe that life is for you to decide on your own and if you make your own decisions and do something, it doesn’t really matter what you wear. I am looking forward to the future.

**Pioneer 16:**
It doesn’t really matter about your appearance or what you wear. A salary man who likes Hiphop is Hiphop and that’s okay. I am a salary man myself. I am a writer.

**Pioneer 2:**
You were a dancer back in the day, right?

**Pioneer 16:**
You don’t have to bring that up. Haha. I don’t think nobody would know. When I was a student, I met Hiphop and became a writer after I graduated. I think Hiphop is about your heart / mindset. It doesn’t matter what you wear. Hiphop is not just fashion. It’s more about values. It’s not a gangster’s music and you don’t have to be a gangster. I have nothing to do with gangsters but I like Hiphop. I think there is a false image that Hiphop equals gangster image and I don’t really like that. But young people are maybe seeing too much of this image. Whatever, if you wear red or blue, or something like that, is not all Hiphop. It’s about values and I don’t want those values to be destroyed. To use these values in life is important. Even when you read magazines, there are things that you cannot learn and grab from just magazines. So that’s what I want to tell you guys. Hiphop is more about the heart and mind. Yeah, fashion might be how you start but there’s more to it.

**Pioneer 1:**
Me too. Fashion was how I first got started. When I was 18,19. Those superstars from Run DMC. I own all the colors. I wore those without laces and it was hard to walk in them. Haha. How many of y’all are deejays? Be honest. Back in the day, I was real poor. I didn’t have money to buy vinyl. Applause for the sponsors. Today, there are good mentors, good mixers, good turntables. We live in a time where deejays should be really grateful. I used to scratch on belt-drives. During that time, there hasn’t been too many great turntables invented yet. But now, there’s deejay schools and you can learn about the skills. But just cuz you got the skills, doesn’t mean you know Hip Hop / are Hip Hop. I was really hungry back in the day and I am really straight up with things. And because I had that feeling, I am still here.

deejaying is not about following trends and hopping on the mainstream train. I think there should be more of those who want to do it for the love. There’s a lot of street bands around Shibuya. Where the deejays at? It’s tough to be a club deejay, you need skills and its tough to make a living as a club deejay. I understand if you got into it from fashion, but if you want to get out from it, don’t leave from the entrance but go to the exit. There’s been a lot of violence in this country. Last year, I did a United Nations tour with everybody. It was a charity event to save the children. We thought about this with Pioneer 2 and we want to do something for all the children in this country and we want to use Hiphop to help these kids. So, for everybody out there, we need to really help these kids and the future of this country and spread Hiphop in a positive way. You know, violence is
increasing and global warming is going on. The ‘gangsters’ that Pioneer 2 mentioned, is not a bad gangster but a good gangster. I think Hiphop is a gangster’s culture, I mean, that’s how it got started in the Bronx. After the violence that erupted in the area.
So, I want people here to embrace the positive aspects of Hiphop and spread positive Hiphop.

**Pioneer 14:**
I want to talk about the fashion, and I go to the U.S. a lot too but I do say that kids over there have to do a lot harder to buy, say a pair of Forces [Air Force Ones]. Kids over there [U.S.] really take care of their shoes a lot. You guys might be able to buy a lot of Forces but kids over there, it might be really hard to buy Jordans [Air Jordans]. They buy Reeboks and keep them white and manage to work the ways to show their pride. Even in dance and graffiti, I want each one of them to have their own pride. Everybody here, don’t be like ‘just because it got dirty in the rain, I’m not gonna wear it’ but take care of them….
Sample Survey from 2001

1. あなたにとってヒップホップは生き甲斐ですか。

2. あなたにとってヒップホップとは何ですか。

KRS-One（昔のアメリカ人ヒップホップアーティスト）にとってヒップホップとはいつの成分（MCs, DJs, B-boys/B-girls, graffiti writing, and knowledge）があるのです。どう思いますか。

3. どんな音楽を聞いていますか。一番影響を受けた音楽は何ですか。

4. DJをする時にどんな音楽を使いますか。それはどうしてですか。
5. 音楽を聴いている時に何を感じますか。そしてそんな感情おこると思いますか。聴取者に何をかんじてほしいですか。

6. チャリティー2やデモ3やパーソナルチア4など何かしらかいに対してしたことがありますか。

歌詞5の中にこのようにしゅかいできない「メッセージ」を入れたことがありますか。

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1 (ちょうしゅかい/listeners/audience)
2 charity
3 demonstrations
4 volunter
5 かけ
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