

**Away from the Plantation:**  
**An ethnography of Hawai'i Japanese American identity in Honolulu, Hawai'i**

by

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Accepted by the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology, Dickinson College, in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for Departmental Honors in Anthropology

May 11, 2017

Department of Anthropology and Archaeology

Dickinson College

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## **Abstract**

In this paper, I reconceptualize sugarcane plantations in Hawai‘i outside of a narrative of progress to explore the dynamisms of Hawai‘i Japanese American identity. These dynamisms emerge from the perspectives and family histories that Hawai‘i Japanese Americans shared with me in interviews, as part of research conducted in O‘ahu, Hawai‘i in 2016. To situate these dynamisms, I first focus on the sugarcane plantations of Hawai‘i, which are often framed as the foundation of Hawai‘i Japanese American identity. Drawing upon Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing’s (2015) theoretical framing of mushrooms, I interpret plantations as mobile and dynamic "assemblages" that move beyond their capitalist peaks. As such, I follow pieces of plantations outside of their physical and temporal boundaries to other moments of formation and performance of Hawai‘i Japanese American identity. The plantation is embedded in these moments—in celebrating the Buddhist festival *Obon*, attending Japanese language schools, and consuming the Japanese animated medium, *anime*. However, in these moments’ movement through space, time, and social networks, Hawai‘i Japanese American identity is continually redefined and reinvented. As such, I contend that these moments become uniquely important in rethinking the “lively interplays” (Hackney 2002, 213) in and amongst the intersections of Hawai‘i Japanese Americans and Japan—as an ancestral homeland and as a contemporary nation state.

### *Initiating Movement*

The women who attend dances classes at Mo‘ili‘ili Community Center prefer to meet at Burger King. They have senior deals, fresh biscuits in the morning, and air-conditioning. When I slept in on Friday mornings, I knew I could find Grandma there with her ninety-cent coffee, Sachiko, and maybe Esther, if she was not traveling that weekend. At Burger King, we *talked story* about how the Ward center is being knocked down so they can build more condominiums that only *haoles*, or white people, can afford, and who Sachiko saw at Zippy's the other day. Grandma would tell Sachiko to “*no enryo*”—to not hold back—and Esther would recount her cruise to Tokyo. Sachiko would tell of the morning Pearl Harbor was bombed—she was knee-deep in the taro patch. Being from the *mainland*, or continental United States, I would listen, half confused, but entirely captivated by the spontaneity with which Japanese words and references emerged in my Grandmother and friends’ daily conversations.

The Hawaiian Islands and Japan have had a complex relationship, which has been predominantly mediated by the United States beginning in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. From the start of the Meiji Restoration (1868) in Japan—a period of great modernization—until the signing of the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907, approximately 220-thousand Japanese laborers moved from Japan to Hawai‘i to labor on American operated sugarcane plantations (Yasumoto 2010, 117; Okahata 1971, 164). As such, the Japanese population in Hawai‘i has been an ethnic majority since the late nineteenth century and a substantial portion of the Hawai‘i Japanese American population has roots in the plantation industry (Schmitt 1968, 75).

Yet, the plantation about which scholars write and to which Hawai‘i, or *local*, Japanese Americans refer are often incongruous. In economic and capitalist discourses, scholars homogenize and stall the plantation so that it becomes a single, bounded entity. However, as evidenced in the mornings spent in Burger King with my grandmother and her friends, direct and indirect references to the plantation emerge with great indeterminacy.

To move the plantation out of academia and into more dynamic understandings, I begin with Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing’s (2015) ethnographic exploration of *matsutake* mushrooms. To grossly oversimplify, matsutake mushrooms are a Japanese delicacy found in human disturbed forests which, according to standard “progress stories,” have been abandoned for their failure to produce (Tsing 2015, viii). In the assumed ruins of such locations, the valuable matsutake emerge. Through matsutake, as both physical matter and as metaphor for possibility, Tsing (2015) points to the potentials of looking beyond dichotomous narratives of progress and ruin. Instead, Tsing (2015) moves with matsutake, following them physically and metaphorically through economy and ecology (4).

In this process of movement, Tsing (2015) identifies the plantation as the opposite of mushrooms; as mushrooms sprout with indeterminacy, plantations are cultivated to produce one predictable crop (Tsing 2015, 24). The plantation to which Tsing refers is the fabricated site of commercial agriculture; it is a general model that has been moved and applied across space, time, and scale. Through its “scalability” the plantation garners the reputation of its own cast—a solid and static, mechanized plot of land operationalized through strict social hierarchy (Tsing 2015, 38). In this cast, there is no opportunity for diversity; there is a sole rhythm that drives production and nothing else (Tsing 2015, 24). This is the progress story of the plantation.

As Tsing explains in her notes on scalability, “sugarcane plantations were never as fully scalable as planters wished. Enslaved labor escaped into maroon communities. Imported fungal rots spread with the cane” (294). Conceiving of the plantation as a contained system that can be scaled is therefore problematic. When Tsing (2015) references the plantation, she references a useful fiction—an impossible system that is treated as extant by capitalist theory. Tsing further develops the impossibility of the plantation in practice through her example of the pine forests of northern Finland, where the distinction between tree plantation and organic forests are blurred (167). Tsing sets up the boundaries of plantations in practice as malleable and beyond capitalist segmentations of space and motion. The plantation, cannot exist in the capitalists’ theoretical vacuum. The plantation necessarily creates and is involved in movements—or lively interplays (Hackney 2012, 213)—generated and perpetuated by humans, beings, and things. The plantation is a “polyphonic assemblage” (Tsing 2015, 22).

Tsing does not dwell on the plantation, but instead she follows mushrooms. Through my ethnographic research of Hawai‘i Japanese American identity, I realized that I was in the position to pick plantations up where she left them. In informants’ stories, the plantation’s legacy did not emerge as a self-contained system dedicated to the accumulation of capital, nor did it die with each plantation’s closure. Instead, fragments of the plantation emerged organically in conversations and lived experiences.

In this thesis, I hone in on three expressions of Hawai‘i Japanese American identity: first, the festival *Obon*, second, Japanese language schools, and third, the Japanese animated medium *anime*. Each expression of identity manifests in varying temporal and relational manners, affecting certain planes and groupings of people differently. Yet, each expression is

influenced by other expressions of identity, birthing an interconnected system that is always in movement —this is the polyphonic assemblage. As a polyphonic assemblage, Hawai‘i Japanese American identity integrates the plantation as an important and relevant moment, but it never stops metabolizing the plantation. Consequently, each expression has embedded in its existence a digested piece of the plantation. In the festival of Obon, the plantation emerges through physical *bon* dance steps that mimic plantation work; Japanese language schools have residue of planters and laborers’ efforts to stabilize the Japanese labor population; and local Japanese Americans can smell the *cultural odor* of anime.

I contend that in these expressions of Hawai‘i Japanese American identity the plantation is not discretized; it is constantly in motion in space and time. I do not seek to re-conceptualize the plantation for the sake of redefining it as the only distinguishing feature of local Japanese American identity. I seek to re-conceptualize the plantation in its dynamisms and to follow its fragments through time and space to demonstrate its plasticity. Like crossing the ocean requires movement from shore to shore through water, I will follow the movement of the plantation’s fragments, until they break on the shore of another moment in Hawai‘i Japanese American identity formation.

While these expressions of identity are related to the plantation, each expression is just as related to one another as they are to the plantation. I argue that through Obon festivals, Japanese language schools, and anime consumption, local Japanese Americans negotiate their understanding and affiliations for Japan, as their ancestral homeland, and Japan, as a contemporary nation state. In each expression, local Japanese Americans’ relationships to these two conceptualizations of Japan are influenced by the language(s) they speak, their

family ties, US military involvement, and, above all, their own movement—that is their lively interplays—through polyphonic assemblages.

### ***Participating and Interviewing***

Over the summer of 2016, I spent June and July engaging in participant observation. I lived with my paternal grandmother in Mo‘ili‘ili, a historically Japanese neighborhood. In addition to living with my grandmother, I attended classes at Mo‘ili‘ili Community Center (MCC). Established as a Japanese language school in the late 19th century, MCC continues to function as a language school for children and has expanded to include summer camps, before- and after-school programming, and programming for older adults. Since my grandmother attends classes at MCC, I tagged along with her and was graciously welcomed. I also attended several classes taught by Jayson Chun at the University of Hawai‘i, Mānoa. Being in Hawai‘i during summer, I had the opportunity to attend several Obon festivals. On O‘ahu, the Obon season entails festivals nearly every weekend as hosted by local *Hongwanji* Buddhist temples, libraries, schools, and community centers. I attended three Obon festivals, where I danced, ate, and talked to other attendees.

Over the course of these two months, I conducted 24 semi-structured interviews with 24 local Japanese Americans. To identify informants, I looked for people who met two criteria. The first criterion was having an ancestor who moved from Japan or Okinawa<sup>1</sup> to any island in the archipelago of Hawai‘i and had children in Hawai‘i. The second criterion was having lived personally in Hawai‘i for over ten years. In these semi-structured interviews, I asked each informant to describe their family history. Additionally, I asked each informant questions pertaining to Japanese language, their upbringing and interaction with

other family members, their travels, and other reflections related to their relationship with their identity.

### *Pausing to Clarify*

As a brief but important aside, I will also be adopting the vocabulary of Jane H. Yamashiro (2017) to discuss the local Japanese American community. Since the Japanese American community is widespread and diverse, I will use Yamashiro's (2017) term "global ancestral group", to refer to the global population that "claims shared ancestral ties" (5). This term is more appropriate than diasporic terms, since it encompasses all Japanese Americans, regardless of their orientation towards their "ancestral homeland" of Japan and without assuming desire to return (Yamashiro 2017, 6).

One way I present Japanese Americans' relationships to the ancestral homeland of Japan is through generational markers. I use the Japanese terms affiliated with each generation removed from Japan—as defined in the appendix "*Japanese American Generations*"—in conjunction with age, since there is great variation between which generation one represents and one's age. For example, of the two informants who are *nisei*—second generation—one is 89 and the other is 26 years old. Only providing a generational marker would be insufficient in describing relevant sociohistorical contexts. However, only providing age would neglect the commonalities between these two informants' familial roles, such as being the linguistic brokers for their parents.

Generally, I shy away from using the language of "migration," "immigration" and "emigration" when referencing anyone who moved from Japan to Hawai'i. I make this semantic choice since these terms are often statuses assigned to people in terms of political borders with specific intents (Luibhéid 2014, 125; Gálvez 2014, 169). During the height of



Japanese movement from Japan to Hawai‘i—the late 19th and early 20th century—U.S. immigration policy was being developed as a tool of inclusion and exclusion in conjunction with imperial expansion into territories, including Hawai‘i, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam (Luibhéid 2014, 126). Hence these terms may codify an understanding of human movement in terms of political borders, which does not accurately reflect Hawai‘i’s positionality during Japanese movement (Luibhéid 2014, 125). For this reason, I have chosen to simply describe the movement of individuals. Additionally, by describing the motion of people, I hope to focus on the process of movement itself.

To conceptualize the movement of people across space, I refer to the world of dance—specifically, to Bartenieff Fundamentals. Peggy Hackney (2002) details the process of embodying Bartenieff Fundamentals through three “fundamental” components of movement: first, recognizing that movement is change; second, understanding that to form connections outside of the self, one must be connected to one’s self; and third, bodily connections are patterned (17). From these fundamentals, movement becomes a "lively interplay"—an exploration of oneness, differentiation, and integration inside and outside of the body (Hackney 2002, 213). When I talk about the movement of people, thus, I talk about more than simply travels and crossing borders. Instead, in this thesis, movement is a lively interplay that defines and redefines relative relationships, boundaries, and networks.

### ***Working Through Plantations***

To take apart the pieces of the plantation, I begin with the construct of the plantation. There is a wealth of economic literature pertaining to the structure and productivity of plantations around the world. A great deal of that literature focuses on what Adrian Graves and Peter Richardson refer to as the “old style plantation,” (Graves and Richardson 1980, 216) also

known as pre-capitalist plantations. To argue for a more complicated definition of plantation production, Graves and Richardson point to Marxist scholar Jairus Banaji, who critically examines Marxist interpretations of slave plantations. In the relevant literature, Banaji (1977) identifies two reasons for classifying slave plantations as pre-capitalist (Graves and Richardson 1980, 216). Banaji (1977) eventually concludes that slave plantations' specific production was feudal, patriarchal, and capitalist by arguing for a "heterogeneous and...disarticulate nature of the slave plantation" (17). In arguing for heterogeneous interpretations of historical materialism, Banaji poses,

The whole challenge which the "colonial question" poses for historical materialism lies in establishing these distinct economic rhythms (*sic*) and movement in tracing their specific origins according to the conjuncture of the world economy, and finally in grasping their deeper connections [1977, 12]

Hence, within the bounds of capitalist systems, plantations can belong to plural global political economies, which are rhythmic and dynamic.

Banaji's (1977) framing of plantations serves as a platform for Graves and Richardson's (1980) work. They maintain Banaji's (1977) multifaceted approach to understanding the complexities of political economy surrounding plantations. This is evidenced when Graves and Richardson (1980) contend that literature ought to focus on the "new style plantation," as capitalist enterprises that extract surplus as profits and accumulate capital, to challenge the definition of the plantation as a "timeless" and a singular "productive unit" (229). Graves and Richardson confront this definition by fleshing out three different sites of sugar production (221). In each definition, the authors point to the complexities of colonial accumulation by emphasizing points of capital "*differentiation*" (Graves and

Richardson 1980, 225) between growing and milling, as influenced by social, political, and economic factors.

Although Banaji and Graves and Richardson present the plantation as interactive with a dynamic global political economy, they fail to see such dynamisms outside of capital. This is the key difference between the rhythms suggested by Banaji and those that Tsing describes. Tsing posits the “modern political economy” (2015, 24) as in flux with the polyphonic assemblage, which “is the gathering of these rhythms.” “The polyphonic assemblage...moves us into the unexplored territory of the modern political economy...Rhythms further multiply when we move out of factories to watch foraging for an unpredictable wild product” (2015, 24).

Despite the moment of analogy between Tsing and Banaji’s language, the rhythms to which Tsing refers emerge from all entities involved in assemblages. These rhythms thus extend to accommodate beings and matter that fall outside of the cycle of production to which Banaji (1977) and Graves and Richardson (1980) are conceptually bound. Thus, despite challenging the homogeneity of the plantation, Banaji (1977) and Graves and Richardson (1980) do not permit for dynamisms that are unrelated to production itself. The rhythms of polyphonic assemblages are the rhythms that I listen to—that I move with—since they are not limited to the confines drawn around capitalism. As Tsing (2015) describes, polyphonic assemblages bring us into the modern political economy. That is, polyphonic assemblages require us to look beyond isolated production centers and into the blurred dimensions of their global extensions—“the peripheries of capitalist production” (Tsing 2015, 24). Hence, before delving into the assemblages of local Japanese American identity, I explore Hawai‘i’s modern global political economy, which proliferates through time and

space. To remain focused on my subjects, I conceptualize this modern global political economy in terms of the movement of bodies. By listening to these rhythms, I pull at the pieces of the plantation that emerge through the lively interplay, within and between assemblages.

### ***Moving Bodies in Modern Political Economy***

The first planters were ex-slave owners from the US south and the first plantation laborers were indigenous Hawaiians (Okahata 1971, 39). However, as money was mostly unimportant to *local* society at the time, many Hawaiian laborers were unmotivated by wage labor (Okahata 1971, 31). Therefore, in 1850, the Kingdom of Hawai‘i’s legislature passed the Masters and Servants Act, which ensured Hawai‘i’s reception of indentured servants—the first of which were Chinese “coolies” (Sur 2008, 2). At some point, Chinese laborers became resistant to planters, fleeing to the mainland before their contracts ended and leaving planters in search of another racial group to tap into; hence, the first importation of Japanese laborers in 1868 (Okahata 1971, 32). In this first importation, Eugene van Reed, the American consul general for Hawai‘i, recruited and shipped 153 Japanese individuals from Japan to Hawai‘i against the will of the Japanese government (Okahata 1971, 39). Despite this violation of international law and the strained relationship between Hawai‘i and Japan that followed, the Kingdom of Hawai‘i and Japan continued to negotiate and renegotiate terms for a second wave of laborers (Okahata 1971). With the wages of laborers and sufficient reciprocity between Hawai‘i and Japan secured, 220-thousand Japanese laborers were moved from Japan to Hawai‘i between 1885 and 1924 (Okahata 1971, 109).

Japanese laborers did not simply replace Chinese laborers who moved away from the plantation. They contributed diversity to the plantation, a quality that planters valued as a

means of making labor populations disparate, thus disempowered. Ronald Takaki (1982, 153) emphasizes through archival materials the planters' commodification of laborers. Part of that commodification, Takaki (1982) contends, is found in the intentional requests of laborers of varied ethnicities. In 1895, manager George H. Fairfield of the Makee Sugar Company wrote to his fellow sugarcane planters warning them to, “keep a variety of laborers...for there are few, if any cases, of Japs, Chinese, and Portuguese entering into a strike as a unit” (Takaki 1982, 153–54). This explicit recommendation points to the intent behind planters' choice to create a diverse labor force. When put into dialogue with the commodification of laborers, the specification of ethnicities becomes a means of seeing each ethnicity as a discretized, yet interrelated commodity. Each ethnicity thus becomes its own item, purchased to create a docile labor pool.

The conclusion that Takaki (1982, 153) comes to after analyzing the documents exchanged by planters is that diversity of the working class in Hawai'i can be attributed to the economic need for labor. However, in this analysis Takaki does what Banaji (1977) and Graves and Richardson (1980) do—he looks for rhythms within the plantation as a capitalist center. As all three authors were writing in a similar time, this makes sense. However, this means that Takaki's analysis that does not align with modern political economy—it does not go or beyond the fringes of the plantation. Hence, his analysis of the plantation leaves it as an intact and static system.

By leaving the plantation intact, Takaki provides limited interpretations of key events in the history of Hawai'i. In 1898, the United States forcibly annexed Hawai'i. Takaki (1982) understands this moment as a catalyst for importing laborers of new ethnicities from Puerto Rico, Italy, and Portugal (155). This was also the moment in which contract labor ended and

free-wage labor began, meaning independent companies began negotiating the movement of people from Japan to Hawai‘i (Okahata 1971, 143). Back on the plantation, planters became preoccupied with stabilizing their working class, since there was more competition between plantations (McGowa 1995, 182).

Meanwhile, as planters were negotiating the plantation’s boundaries and extents, Japanese laborers were moving to the mainland (Okahata 1971, 162). Their movement sparked panic among the white Americans living on the west coast, spurring groups such as the Japanese Exclusion League in California, whose motto was, ““The Japs must go!”” (Okahata 1971, 163). In response, the United States and Japanese governments signed the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907, which prohibited the movement of Japanese laborers from Japan to the United States and its territories (Okahata 1971, 163). Takaki (1982, 157) interprets the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907 as a moment in which most the Japanese labor population became dangerous in the eyes of the planters, hence their importation of Filipino laborers. While this may have been a consequence of the Gentlemen’s Agreement, Takaki’s unwillingness to look outside of the economic ramifications of the plantation isolates the plantation. Consequently, Takaki does not touch on one of the most fundamental components—at least for Japanese laborers—in the creation of the working class in Hawai‘i: picture marriages.

Since the Gentlemen’s Agreement directly targeted their primary labor source’s mobility, in the early 20th century planters began to encourage the movement of Japanese women—who would come to be know as “picture brides”—to create localized Japanese family units (Okahata 1971, 164). Though planters encouraged laborers to engage in picture marriage, laborers willingly participated in the normalization of picture marriages by actively

requesting their families find them wives in Japan and in not intermarrying with women of other ethnicities (Okahata 1971, 164).

Picture marriages mirrored arranged marriage practices, which were common in Japan at the time (Ichioka 1980, 342). However, instead of having a go-between arrange meetings between families—as was common for arranged marriages—for picture marriages, go-betweens would deliver pictures of the bachelor seeking a wife to women in Japan, and reciprocally send the bachelor a photo of the woman who agreed to the marriage (Ichioka 1980, 342). Once picture brides arrived in Hawai‘i, they would participate in collective “wharf-marriages,” (Okahata 1971, 165) to immediately recognize the union between picture brides and picture husbands. Through this process of picture marriages, the Japanese population in Hawai‘i continued to grow after the Gentlemen’s Agreement, and to stabilize through the establishment of nuclear families.

Because picture marriages benefited both planters and laborers the arrival of picture brides resulted in the cumulative development of local resources, such as Japanese language schools, churches, and community centers to foster Japanese communities. Thus, picture brides, in converting Japanese men “from sojourner to permanent settlers,” (Ichioka 1980, 340) helped to stabilize the plantation labor-force, producing and reproducing a kinship network that ran throughout the plantation.

By remaining bound to the plantation’s production, Takaki (1982) addresses the stabilization of Japanese laborers to the plantation, but does not address the stabilization of Japanese individuals in Hawai‘i—which generates unique movement through Hawai‘i. To further explore the movement created in stability, I turn to Anna Laura Stoler’s (2002) exploration of colonial plantation structures in Deli, Sumatra from the late 1860s onward.

Much like the sugar cane plantations of Hawai‘i, Deli laborers cultivated monoculture crops, and were predominantly controlled by planters, by means of managers, with little governmental regulation (Stoler 2002, 26). However, unlike the plantations of Hawai‘i, the presence of a white working-class created unique focuses among labor regulation.

In the 1920s, at the height of Deli plantation production, marriage restrictions were rescinded, permitting the movement of white European women to Deli (Stoler 2002, 30). Although planters presented their lifting of marriage restrictions as a privilege for the white working-class—a reward for the economic stability created on Deli’s plantations—Stoler (2002) contends white women were moved to create racial stability (31). The 1920s were a time of both peak profit and growing resentment among the working-class towards their labor conditions and Dutch rule (Stoler 2002, 33). By introducing white women to the plantation, planters encouraged their white working-class to protect and separate their women from the non-white laborers (Stoler 2002, 33). This was the planters’ means of introducing a narrative of racial superiority that divided people on the plantation by race instead of status (Stoler 2002, 33). This narrative thus stabilized the sexuality and reproduction of the white working-class by encouraging them to end relationships and sexual relations with non-white people on the plantation (Stoler 2002, 39). In being exclusively involved with white women, white working-class men could not bear non-white “heirs to a European inheritance” (Stoler 2002, 39).

Here Stoler (2002) complicates understandings of stability on the plantation. Despite her research being physically on the plantation, her conceptualization of stability extends beyond the economic boundaries of the plantation. Stoler is able to create an understanding of stability that reaches to European countries and racial purity, but that depends on



movement itself. That is to say Stoler constructs a form of stability that is rooted in the movement of bodies inside and outside the plantation as a physical space and as a capitalist production. This is the form of modern political economy that I understand as inseparable from—but insufficient in defining—polyphonic assemblages. Hence, I am interested in modern global political economies with movement in stability.

The stability created among the Japanese population is a product of the many movements: of Japanese laborers to Hawai‘i as a consequence of Chinese coolies’ movement; of Japanese laborers to the mainland and consequent racialized restrictions; and of picture brides to Hawai‘i from Japan. However, these are not the only movements that contributed to the stabilization of the Japanese labor population, and they are in no way final movements. Thus, we must go beyond the modern political economy—moving in time and space—to the peripheries of the plantation to understand pieces of the polyphonic assemblage that is local Japanese America identity.

### ***Dancing Through Bon Dances***

Planting, harvesting, and stripping sugarcane by hand requires synchronized patterns of movement. In the same way that sugarcane grows in its own cycle, moving through its own choreography of sorts, those who labor over the sugarcane must choreograph their own movements in response. Together, in the field, laborers and sugarcane share a stage with one another, and all other organisms and things that are performing their dances. Hence, it follows that certain bon dances, performed at annual *Obon* festivals in Hawai‘i mimic the dance of the sugarcane laborer (Van Zile 1982, 27).

The Obon festival, made up of *bon dances*, originated with Buddhist practice in India and spread to Japan in the 6th century (Van Zile 1982, 1). As it trickled through Japanese

social practice, it synthesized with indigenous festivals, manifesting in a three-day long celebration in mid-July to venerate ancestors (Van Zile 1982, 1). Thirteen centuries later, bon dances traveled with Obon festivals and were brought with the first Buddhist priests to move from Japan to Hawai‘i around 1889 (Van Zile 1982, 3-4). Emerging from the first temples and manifesting between the rows of houses on the plantations, new bon dances were choreographed to plantation inspired songs, called *holehole bushi* (Van Zile 1982, 3-4; JCCH 2016). In Hawaiian, *holehole* refers to dead sugarcane leaves and in Japanese during the late 19th century, *bushi* meant song (Odo 2013). Modeled after the rice harvest songs that women would sing as they labored on rice paddies in Japan, *holehole bushi* were songs that women would improvise while stripping dead sugarcane leaves (Odo 2013). The lyrics of these songs ranged from lamenting the difficulty of their lives in Hawai‘i to poking fun at their husbands (Odo 2013). As songs pertaining uniquely to the plantations of Hawai‘i, *holehole bushi* became markers of the laboring Hawai‘i Japanese population. It thus follows that the movements used while laboring on the plantations—digging, throwing, cutting—were integrated into new bon dances and accompanied to *holehole bushi* (Odo 2013). The best known of these Hawai‘i Japanese bon dances is the "Hole Hole Ondo." To dance the "Hole Hole Ondo," one must dig, throw dirt over one's shoulder, clear the area, and block the sun from one's face.

When I was being taught the "Hole Hole Ondo," the women teaching me broke down each movement into a task—dig, throw, step, clap—based on tasks performed to cultivate sugarcane. However, as we began to dance together, falling into concentric circles, the distinction between each task was lost. What resulted from the collective practice of each labor task was a synchronized, fluid expression of plantation labor. Herein lies the

significance of bon dances: metaphorically and in practice, they muddy distinction between the plantation as a capitalist system and the extra-capitalist systems that arise from the plantation. For this reason, bon dances remind me of Tsing's (2015) example of the pine forests in northern Finland, where the boundary that separates pine plantation from organic forest is impossible to draw (167-69). Similarly, bon dances draw the movements of the plantation—used for a capitalist end—into an expression of collective identity, physically blurring the movements through dance and conceptually blurring the pertinence of plantation labor to solely capitalist systems. However, bon dances do not just blur assumed distinctions in and around the plantation; bon dances are means of metaphorically and physically blurring local Japanese Americans' relationships to Japan.

Contemporarily, each organization that hosts an Obon festival has an affiliated Bon Dance Club. Comprised primarily of older women, Bon Dance Clubs rehearse for hours leading up to their respective festival, practicing and refining the movements of well-known bon dances, and choreographing new bon dances. For Mark, a 33-year-old *hapa yonsei* man who attends Obon festivals every year, every time he goes to Obon, there are new dances. Mark is part of his local *kenjinkai*—a group of Hawai'i Japanese Americans with roots in the same Japanese prefecture. His *kenjinkai* is composed of primarily older adults, with the average age of members being around 70. As a young member, he empathetically explained the way that Bon Dance Clubs have been creating new bon dances to Japanese-pop (J-pop) songs by popular groups like AKB48. Mark added, “it's kind of interesting to see...60 to 70-year-old ladies dancing like a pop-y [dance] in their kimono.” To Mark, the reason for creating new bon dances is to appeal to a younger audience, thereby making events such as Obon more attractive to the rising generations. When Bon Dance Clubs utilize J-pop songs,

such as AKB48, and create bon dances that accompany these songs, they intentionally target youth with the hope of integrating them in the festival. Mark identifies the significance of integrating a younger audience in Obon festivals as the “continuation of the legacy.”

Underlying bon dances choreographed to J-pop is the desire to ensure that Obon will survive in Hawai‘i as a local Japanese American practice. Here we see a notable lively interplay between a very contemporary expression of Japanese popular culture and a centuries old expression of Japanese folk culture, itself adapted from India. This is what I have come to understand as a lively interplay between Japan as an ancestral homeland and Japan as a contemporary nation-state, where the former is represented in the practice of Obon and the latter in J-pop. To better explain the distinctions and relationships between these two conceptualizations of Japan, I turn to two examples of movement between Hawai‘i and Japan that are situated in WWII and post-WWII contexts.

The first example comes from Ryan’s maternal family. Ryan, is a 55-year-old *sansei* Japanese American man. Though he was raised in Los Angeles, his maternal grandfather originally moved from Japan to Hawai‘i as an educated man, thus, immediately began working for a Japanese newspaper. When Pearl Harbor was bombed, his grandfather was the managing editor for the *Nippu Jiji*, a well-known Japanese newspaper. Since Japanese newspapers were perceived as a threat to Americanization in pre-war Hawai‘i, the bombing catalyzed efforts to shut down this communicative medium (Shoho 1991, 20). As such, the majority of people affiliated with Japanese newspapers in Hawai‘i were interned, including Ryan’s maternal grandparents, his mother, his aunt, and his uncle.

Ryan’s family did not remain interned for long, as they accepted the US

government's offer to exchange them for Americans held hostage in Japan. Ronald explained that,

the US government wanted bodies that they could exchange for Americans that were held by the Japanese...It's a complicated story, but...there were many more Americans held by the Japanese then there were Japanese held by the Americans, so they semi-encouraged Japanese Americans to apply for exchange.

Ryan's family were thus sent to Japan, most likely aboard the M.S. Gripsholm, a Swedish chartered ship that exchanged civilians and POWs between the United States and Germany, Italy, and Japan from 1942 to 1943 (Iritani 2015).

In the *exchange* of Ryan's family, we see one expression of the lively interplay between Japan as an ancestral homeland and Japan as a contemporary nation state. Ryan's grandparents, as *issei*, were Japanese citizens who resided in the United States, thus, their movement to Japan was a return. They had a direct understanding of Japan as their ancestral homeland because they pertained to the same place as their ancestors. That means that as they grew up, they were dynamically involved in Japan as it responded to global and domestic influences. Regardless of whether or not Japan can be classified as a contemporary nation-state at that time, this is what I mean by *understanding Japan as a contemporary nation-state*; that is, being directly saturated and in lively interplay with Japan as a dynamic entity.

On the other hand, Ryan's mother, aunt, and uncle were *nisei*. They were American citizens and understood an indirect ancestral homeland; their experience of Japan as the place of their ancestors was framed through their parents. For them, there was distance between Japan, the place of their ancestors, and Japan the contemporary-nation state that was shifting

and responding to global and domestic phenomena. That is, until they, as adolescents, were given to Japan so that the U.S. government could receive people they had classified as somehow more American. This is not an example of a return, it is simply an exchange.

Both return and exchange are examples of lively interplays that integrate Japan, Hawai‘i, and the United States—as places and as experiences—with bodies. However, as a result of some transitive property, Ryan’s mother, aunt, and uncle were prescribed the same status as their parents. Their Japaneseness, as stemming from an indirect understanding of Japan as an ancestral homeland, was conflated with the Japaneseness of *nihonjin*, or Japanese people born and raised in Japan. The case of Ryan’s mother, aunt, and uncle thus represents a blurring of Japan as ancestral homeland and Japan as a contemporary nation-state.

The second case of blurring comes from Sachiko, an 89-year-old nisei woman. Raised on family farms, Sachiko represents the laboring class that emerged from the plantations on Hawai‘i. Her family’s farm, nestled in Kipapa Gulch, was started by her father, an ambitious man who moved from Japan to Hawai‘i at age 13 to begin working on the sugarcane plantation. When the planes with the blood-red sun emblazoned on their sides moved in towards Pearl Harbor, Sachiko was knee deep in the muddy taro patch. As a working-class family, Sachiko’s family was mostly unaffected by the bombing of Pearl Harbor. But that is not to say that Sachiko herself was unaffected by the war.

At age 18, Sachiko took a job working for the U.S. army in finances, and on the weekends, she returned home to work on her family’s farm. In the 1950s, with the military downsizing in Hawai‘i, Sachiko took work in Japan, staffing the U.S. military base in Yokohama established during the beginnings of occupation. This was the first-time Sachiko had ever been to Japan. She spoke no Japanese and did not learn any either, since for the

entirety of her time in Japan, she interacted exclusively with Americans. As Sachiko described it,

you work with nothing but Americans....all occupied forces running it, because America had won the war. So, everything that we did, were with the Americans...during the weekends, you go to resorts run by the Americans. All the American horses, and you ride the train, but you ride the section only for Americans. You didn't need to know Japanese!

Sachiko's experience demonstrates a distinctive lively interplay with Japan that necessarily involves America. In Japan, Sachiko was surrounded with Americanness, speaking only English, engaging other Americans, supporting American enterprises. Thus, her involvement and understanding of Japan was necessarily filtered through her nationality.

Here we see another and distinctive lively interplay between Sachiko and Japan. Sachiko is just as American as Ryan's mother, both are nisei women with American citizenship. Both had indirect means of understanding Japan as their ancestral homeland, since both had parents who had moved from Japan to Hawai'i and neither had been born or raised in Japan—until Ryan's mother moved. But Sachiko moved from Hawai'i to Japan on the basis of her Americanness, not on the basis of her Japaneseness. In Japan, Sachiko was surrounded with Americanness and lived comfortably in an American construct. While, on the other hand, Ryan's mother was expected to adjust to life in Japan as a nihonjin. So, what makes Ryan's mother's Japaneseness more potent than Sachiko's, and Sachiko's Americanness more potent than Ryan's mother's?

When situated in the greater global political economy, there are several factors that speak to their varied experiences. Ryan's maternal family was of a higher social class than

Sachiko's. Ryan's grandfather's affiliation with a Japanese newspaper made him a suspect of the U.S. government, and it motivated his and his family's internment. Sachiko's working class family did not draw the same attention, since they were not involved in the proliferation of Japanese language and media. Based on these differences in class, Ryan and Sachiko's families were brought to different circumstances that prompted different responses.

Essentially, Sachiko's family was not presented with the ultimatum of returning to Japan or remaining a second-class citizen, but Ryan's was. Without this ultimatum, Sachiko remained in Hawai'i to develop her own Americanness while Ryan's mother moved to Japan, where she developed her own Japaneseness.

That is not to say that Sachiko did not have her own Japaneseness and Ryan's mother did not have her own Americanness. Eventually, Ryan's mother returned to Honolulu, Hawai'i at age 17. In Honolulu, she lived with her aunt and uncle briefly—during which time she met Ryan's father—before moving to live with her sister in Michigan, again briefly. Then, Ryan's mother was presented with the opportunity to work as an American in Japan. Her justification for doing so, according to Ryan, was that “she liked Japan, she spoke the language well, and it paid fairly well at the time, so she took it...she said that was the best time of her life.” Ryan's mother thus returned—around the same time that Sachiko moved from Hawai'i to Japan—this time, out of her personal volition and as an extension of the American military.

This is the point at which global political economy cannot be understood outside of assemblages. As Tsing (2015) reminds us, “assemblages drag political economy inside them...Assemblages cannot hide from capital and the state; they are the sites for watching how political economy works” (23). Two different global political economies are



undoubtedly related to the internment of Ryan's mother and her return to Japan as an American. Seeing only the global political economy that moved Ryan's mother, I could look at the message that the American military was sending when they sent a Japanese American woman to Japan as American—a woman who the preceding American government had exchanged for other Americans.

But in reading into that global political economy, the nuances that create different movement in the experiences of Ryan's mother from Sachiko's would be lost. This is where I turn to seeing assemblages, so that I may focus on Ryan's mother's and Sachiko's individual lively interplays, which are and have always been continuously dynamic. Hence, this is the point where I return to the metaphor of bon dance. Bon dance, as a performance, blurs the lines between the movements used to labor on the plantation and communal identification among local Japanese Americans. Bon dance embeds references to the plantation in a dynamic and mutable medium. When bon dances are shaped—in its their own lively interplay with those who perform it—by J-pop, they become sites for the integration of the memory of Japan, as an ancestral homeland, and the products of Japan as a contemporary nation-state.

It is not necessarily true that bon dances blur distinctions. What is more accurate is that distinction and indistinction, blurring and sharpening, are expressions of lively interplays. Bon dances are physically and metaphorically lively interplays, in the same way that Ryan's mother and Sachiko's relationships with Hawai'i and Japan are. Like bon dances, these women's lively interplays are inevitably tied to performance—as a mechanism of movement. Their performances of local Japanese American identity fluctuated and,

depending on the relative global political economy, manifested in varying degrees of distinction and blurring.

During the bombing, Sachiko's performance of local Japanese American took place in the muddy taro patch. Therefore, she was somehow understood as less Japanese than Ryan's mother, whose performance of local Japanese American occurred in her father's home—the home of a Japanese newspaper manager. Here Sachiko's Japaneseness was distinct from Japan, whereas Ryan's mother's was indistinct. Despite their differing performances of identity in the moment Pearl Harbor was bombed, both Ryan's mother and Sachiko continued to move through their identities, and time and space, responding to moments inside and outside of the global political economy. Ryan's mother moved to the mainland to be with her sister and brother-in-law, and to take care of her niece, but she left for Japan because she felt like a “third-wheel” and because she spoke Japanese. Sachiko walked to the other side of the building during her lunch break at work to spend time with women, because she needed a break from working with men all day. In these moments of lively interplay, Ryan's mother and Sachiko danced through their performances of local Japanese American identity, responding to others and circumstances, the way one dances through traditional bon dances and J-pop bon dances alike. As both dances require similar movement, they blend together, blurring distinctions between old and new. After hours of spinning through seas of kimono and thick humidity, the old and the new both create the Obon festival of that night, under the dark sky and the bright stars, stirred by ocean breezes.

### *Speaking Through Language Schools*

Much like Obon festivals, the histories of Japanese language schools in Hawai'i reference the plantation. Originally marketed as means of ensuring that nisei children would adjust

properly should issei Japanese laborers return to Japan, Japanese language schools were part of the original sojourner mentality that accompanied laborers (Asato 2006, 3). However, they alluded to the idea of stabilization—laborers used language schools as incentive for laborers to stay past their three-year contracts (Asato 2006, 3). These first schools thus assumed laborers’ sojourner status (Asato 2006, 4). Additionally, the majority of Japanese language schools were originally affiliated with either Christian churches or Buddhist temples—specifically of the Pure Land, or *Hongwanji* sect—who used their schools to acquire wider circle of affiliates (Asato 2006, 4). In 1903, the founding of the Central Japanese Association marked the shift of language schools’ orientation from accommodating sojourners to permanent settlers (Asato 2006, 7). With this shift, the forceful annexation of Hawai‘i, and the growth of free-wage labor, language schools proliferated across the islands in attempts to maintain a devoted labor class (Asato 2006, 8; McGowan 1995, 182).

All this historical context is to say that Japanese language schools are anything but neutral institutions. Japanese language schools in Hawai‘i, in originally serving sojourners, are inseparable from Japanese curriculum and nationalism. When their non-secularism is added in, Japanese language schools become necessarily politicized, so that when Pearl Harbor was bombed December 7th, 1941, they were immediately shut down.

Although Japanese language schools closed following the bombing, they reopened after the end of WWII in Hawai‘i. However, for Joyce, a 69-year-old sansei woman, who attended Japanese language school for eight years as a child, school was ineffective. As she stated rather bluntly, “I failed.” Joyce’s lack of language retention is particularly interesting when contextualized in her father’s language history. Joyce’s father was both a native speaker and schooled at the local *Hongwanji*. When he joined the army during WWII—as

was required of all qualifying American men, including all interned Japanese American men—“he was tagged to be an interpreter, going through language school in Minnesota.” Remarkably, the details of his travels were outlined in a diary found aboard the military vessel that took him from Hawai‘i to Japan. As Joyce recalled,

It had been a written diary on the ship that went from Honolulu to Iwo Jima...a lot of the Japanese soldiers were in caves that they had built underground, so trying to get them out, they had to speak in Japanese...the soldiers, they were told that...the Americans are savages, and then to get them to rethink that was very hard. But they ended up having to firebomb and gas out the caves

Here we see dynamisms that echo those of Sachiko’s. In Joyce’s father’s circumstance, there is a distinction between the nihonjin hiding in the caves and the local Japanese American sitting above them. Like Sachiko, Joyce’s father represents the movement of a Hawai‘i Japanese American from Hawai‘i to Japan as an extension of the U.S. military. As Americans who relate to Japan through their shared understanding of Japan—as an ancestral homeland—both Joyce’s father and Sachiko enter into Japan as a contemporary nation-state as foreigners. The key differences between Joyce’s father and Sachiko are first, their temporal situations in Japan, and second, language ability.

Joyce’s father was part of the majority nisei Military Intelligence Service (MIS), composed of 6,000 linguists trained during World War II (Nakamura 2005). In the vignette that Joyce recounts, her father is an American. However, by speaking Japanese, he represents local Japanese Americans’ pre-war prioritization of maintaining Japanese language in Hawai‘i. Having attended Japanese language lessons at his Hongwanji, Joyce’s father is

inextricably tied to the legacy of Japanese language schools in Hawai‘i—the legacy of stabilization.

Again, this is not the stabilization and stagnancy of people in space, it is the stabilization and codification of populations over time and space. Japanese language schools in Hawai‘i represent communal desires to sustain the language among local people. They are produced and reproduced through communal organization, religious mobility, and familial valuation of the Japanese language. In their public nature, Japanese language schools thus pull the Japanese language into a public demonstration of Japaneseness, which understands Japan as ancestral homeland. The Japanese language school thus stabilizes Japaneseness by weaving Japanese language into the public realm of Hawai‘i.

Yet, it was the very stability of Japanese language in pre-war Hawai‘i that eventually moved Joyce’s father into a circumstance of great instability—aboard an American vessel traveling to Japan during wartime. Joyce’s father’s role in MIS was not just unstable due to the dangers of being in active duty; it was unstable because it was based conditionally on his ability to speak both languages and to move between them. As a local Japanese American interpreter, Joyce’s father himself represents the lively interplay between English and Japanese as well as Japan as an ancestral homeland and Japan as a contemporary nation state. Undulating between languages, Joyce’s father shows the dynamisms of being the product of efforts to stabilize Japaneseness—attending Japanese language school—and to destabilize Japan as a contemporary nation state. This role of interpreting thus complicates what stability means in terms of maintaining Japaneseness since it necessarily involves destabilizing processes and consequences.

The lively interplay between Japanese and English is performed in informal, non-interpretive language as well. For Mark, Japanese surfaced in the speech of his grandmother, a nisei Okinawan woman, who lived on the plantations of the Big Island. As he recalled, “my grandma would use particles, you know like ‘de,’ ‘o,’ ‘ni,’ ‘e,’ in all of her...words. So, she’d be like...‘rice-o eat,’ and I’d be like, ‘what?’ So, interestingly, when I took Japanese, my particle sense was like perfect...because I’d always hear it in my head when my grandma speaks.”

Mark’s grandmother—who learned English upon arriving to Hawai‘i—directly borrowed Japanese particles and used them to modify English words, exemplifying the effects of contact between English and Japanese (Seifart 2015, 512). This hybridization in and of itself is a lively interplay as it shows the process of destabilizing both languages and creating new forms from them. Yet, through destabilizing both English and Japanese, Mark’s grandmother planted a native understanding of Japanese particle use in Mark. This understanding facilitated Mark’s acquisition of Japanese in school. His schooling then led him to Japan, where he taught English to Japanese students and developed his own Japanese language abilities.

In the case of Mark’s grandmother, the lively interplay between Japanese and English emerged in her hybridized words. Through this lively interplay of destabilizing, she created stability in Mark’s foundational understanding of Japanese. Hence, for Mark, speaking Japanese is a lively interplay that depends on the instability of his grandmother’s language as much as the stability of the Japanese language program offered in his high school by which he learned to develop his skills. That is not to say that Mark’s grandmother’s language was entirely unstable or that Mark’s is entirely stable, but that both Mark and his grandmother

demonstrate the fluctuation that is inherent to the transmission of the Japanese language in Hawai‘i. This same fluctuation is seen in a different form in the case of Joyce and her father.

As an interpreter, Joyce’s father was engaged in the Japanese language as a distinct and isolated form of communication from English. However, he was still involved in the lively interplay between these two languages, moving between them as he moved between Hawai‘i and Japan. Yet, despite his proficiency, and her schooling, Joyce does not speak Japanese. Perhaps the distinction drawn between Japanese and English, in Joyce’s father’s language and in post-war tensions on the mainland prevented Joyce from acquiring Japanese for, as she explained, “I had the background when I was little. But I think it was so engrained in me, ‘Don’t speak Japanese’...because we lived in Michigan.”

Regardless, she is still just as involved in the lively interplay between Japanese language and English language. Not speaking Japanese is an act of destabilization that has just as much potential to inspire stability as the stability of Japanese language schools has potential to destabilize the distinctions between English and Japanese. That is to say, the stability of Japanese language is not linear. Language is not passed down from generation to generation, or through Japanese language schools themselves. Instead, Japanese language in Hawai‘i in its lively interplay with the English language forms points of instability and stability which independently manifest in the ability and inability to speak.

### ***Smelling through Anime***

By means of rich clouds of spices wafting from multicultural spreads of food and thinly salted breezes off the sea, I navigated family gatherings and friends-of-family gatherings in Hawai‘i. Thus, it was no coincidence when I encountered Dr. Jayson Chun in a breezy spot near the food. A few days later, I found myself stumbling through a heavy sun shower and

into his classroom. Surrounded by other Asian American students—for the first time in my life—and stunned by the AC, I listened attentively as “Dr. Jay” enthusiastically walked us through the cultural and historical context of that day’s subject: the series *Nana*, in its forms as manga, anime, and film.

Simply put, manga and anime are both forms of Japanese media; manga is comparable to comic books or graphic novels and anime is comparable to television series or animated films. Both manga and anime cover a wide range of subject matter and complexity, allowing for people to consume the media throughout their lives. Anime in particular<sup>2</sup> has spread internationally, becoming a global phenomenon. As such, the study of anime has become important to study of Japan as a contemporary nation state.

Iwabuchi Koichi (2002) monitors the flow of Japanese cultural material through other Asian countries. Iwabuchi contends that Japanese animators and cartoonists intentionally draw characters with Western features to reduce, what he coins as, the “cultural odor” of anime, thus appealing to Western consumers (24-35). Iwabuchi defines cultural odor as “the way in which cultural features of a country of origin and images or ideas of its national, in most case stereotyped, way of life are associated positively with a particular product in the consumption process”(2002, 27). In making characters less obviously Japanese, animators create a medium that is more easily globalized (Iwabuchi 2002, 24-35). Hence, cultural odorlessness becomes a means of propagating Japanese media. In this interpretation, Iwabuchi complicates notions of Japanese cultural material as a simple process of exchange and proliferation of soft power. Yet, Iwabuchi frames cultural odor as a quality of the modern global political economy.



Antonia Levi (2013) builds upon cultural odorlessness, suggesting that anime's cultural odorlessness is contingent on consumers' ability to detect and recognize cultural material. In her study of North American consumers of anime, Levi (2013) argues that when viewers see fantastical elements in anime, and are unfamiliar with Japanese culture, they conflate the two (11-12). Hence, fantastical elements obscure Japanese cultural odor by allowing North American consumers—who presumably lack Japanese cultural literacy—to view Japanese cultural material as part of a fantasy dimension (Levi 2013, 11-12). Levi contends that cultural odor is more contingent on the *nose* of the consumer, metaphorically speaking. While Levi does not reject the idea that animators are partially responsible for including or omitting cultural odor, she does make cultural odor a two-way street. Whereas Iwabuchi (2002) framed cultural odor as intentionally included or omitted by animators, Levi (2013) reframes cultural odor as a less intentional product of interactions.

In fact, Levi's (2013) interpretation of cultural odor resonates with Tsing's (2015) explanation of smell as a complex and mysterious phenomenon. Tsing describes,

Humans breathe and smell in the same intake of air, and describing smell seems almost as difficult as describing air. But smell, unlike air, is a sign of the presence of another, to which we are already responding. Response always takes us somewhere new; we are not quite ourselves any more...but rather ourselves in encounter with another. Encounters are, by their nature, indeterminate; we are unpredictably transformed [2015, 46]

Levi's understanding of cultural odor can be understood through the metaphor of smell—as a quality and as an act. The quality of smell is omitted from an entity, an object, a being, and so on the same way that cultural odor is emitted from a piece of anime at the hands of the

animators. As animators create pieces of anime, they embed or omit pieces of cultural odor, creating a distinct smell. The act of smelling is what consumers of cultural material do; they use their cultural *noses* to detect and they use their brains to identify “the presence of another”—the presence of cultural odor. However, their senses of smell are conditioned by other factors.

While Levi’s framing of cultural odor adds dimension to the metaphor of odor, her North American subjects’ noses and the noses of local Japanese Americans appear to be very different. Hence, when I sat down with three of Dr. Jay’s local Japanese American students to talk about anime, the notion of cultural odor took on different forms and factored into different lively interplays.

A key dimension of each informant’s lively interplay with the medium is their understanding of anime in relation to American cartoons. For example, Stephanie, a 24 year-old *yonsei* (fifth generation) woman—who enjoys anime and was taking Dr. Jay’s class to fulfill a requirement—laughed about her parents hating Ed, Edd, n Eddy, which she watched when she was young, and the lack of substance it contained. Takuya, a 26 year-old *nisei* man—who is a translation major and intends to translate for anime and manga—stated watching cartoons is “like my brain’s melting away watching it, stupid cartoons. You’re so addicted to watching it, but you learn nothing.” Dylan, a 24 year-old *yonsei* man—who grew up in Maui and was taking the class because he saw Dr. Jay speak at Kawaii Kon, Hawai‘i’s equivalent to Comic-Con—offered Spongebob Squarepants as an example of stupid cartoons. Through this part of their conversation, all three informants shared an understanding of cartoons as “stupid” and unsubstantial. Hence, Takuya, Stephanie, and Dylan identified a clear and homogenous odor of American animation equipped with palpable descriptors.

In contrast, when Takuya, Stephanie, and Dylan attempted to create a homogenous understanding of Japanese anime, they struggled individually and collectively. To Takuya, anime is attractive because, “they totally make it different from...your regular cartoons that you see on American television...it’s actually really deep... you can...think through stuff...from the Japanese anime...They’re really good at making a story that sounds really real.” In this quotation, Takuya pinpoints two important reasons why he finds anime appealing: first, because the plots of anime tend to have more depth, and second, because anime contains a sense of realism.

Depth is commonly cited as a unique appeal of anime. In fact, Levi (2013) cites depth as one of the most appealing features among North American consumers (10). Levi suggests that anime’s handling of “sadness, environmentalism, and technoterror” (2013, 11) as thematic material provide dimensions of substance that are unmatched by other media. Here, Levi (2013) also juxtaposes anime, as a Japanese medium, with American films, pointing to the “classic Hollywood happy ending” and “classic patriarchal hero” of the film *Avatar* as compared to the moral ambiguity and unresolved ending of the anime *Princess Mononoke* (13-14). Additionally, she marries depth with notions of fantasy. However, where Levi points to fantasy, Takuya points to realism as integral to his attraction to anime, identifying the stories as “really real.”

Takuya frames the reality of anime as pertaining to his Japanese upbringing. When I explicitly asked him if he was attracted to anime because he himself is Japanese, he described,

All the cultural things are actually direct in Japan. So [I] pretty much can know all the Japanese stuff, so it’s really close to me in a way, but then, actually... Since my

parents did bring in some American concepts...into the household, it wasn't purely Japanese. So there's this weird closeness...But then there's this weird displacement sometimes because...I didn't grow up experiencing those exact cultural practices.

Here it is evident that anime is not culturally odorless to Takuya. The reality Takuya detects in anime is tied to his upbringing and immersion in Japanese "stuff." In the moments of concordance—where his reality aligns with what he sees in the anime he is watching—the odor is of Japan as an ancestral homeland. He sees the way his performance of Japaneseness coincides with the performance of anime characters. However, in moments of dissonance—which Takuya identifies as stemming from his parents' integration of "American concepts"—he detects the odor of Japan as a contemporary nation state. He interprets those moments as Japanese; however, he does not recognize it as part of his performance of Japanese. For Takuya, the cultural odor of anime is thus the product of his lively interplay with the medium as part of his identity as a Japanese American man—the odor he detects in anime is contingent on his reality.

Similarly, Stephanie understands her attraction to anime through her reality. At first, she framed her ability to relate to anime characters as stemming from "the human part, but in terms of culturally" she felt disconnect, stating she could identify, "some similarities, but it's just like, that's Japan." In identifying the general culture portrayed in anime as Japanese, Stephanie identifies a Japanese odor to anime. This Japan, the contemporary nation state, is distant to her. Yet, Stephanie was unsatisfied with her general means of connecting to anime and her self-positioning outside of Japanese culture. Hence, at one point in our discussion, I asked Takuya, Stephanie, and Dylan how they identify themselves. Takuya expressed that, to

him, being Japanese American and Hawai'i Japanese American are distinct. When I asked him in what ways they are distinct, Stephanie jumped in to describe,

Hawai'i Japanese, it's like all these different cultures combined. I don't know from the plantation days or what, it's just, it's not Japanese but...in my mind, it's Japanese...because...I feel like I identify more with the Japanese...in terms of...mindset and not [as] much as [with] American, maybe

When I asked her for an example, she explained her reaction to the anime *Welcome to the NHK* which she watched in Dr. Jay's class. She stated,

there's a scene with [a character's] mom, and...he becomes a shut in because he feels...really guilty...I was like, 'oh shoot, that's me!' I feel so guilty, 'cause...in my case, my parents don't tell me what to do with my life...but in the same sense, I feel...so guilty because I'm like taking so long, and I'm...using their money...I guess I never really made the distinction that that's not American, like I don't know, because I only know Hawai'i, and I feel like a lot of Hawai'i people feel like that

In this example, Stephanie reworks the original framing of herself that she posited. She backtracks over her generality and distance, instead defining her point of connection with anime through her local Japanese American identity. By describing local Japanese American as distinct, and quickly using an example from anime to demonstrate the uniqueness of her identity, Stephanie provides us with a snapshot of the lively interplay that she engages when consuming anime. As a consumer, she detects the emotional experiences of anime characters that parallel her own experiences and identifies those emotional experiences as pertaining to her wider identity. Stephanie thus smells local Japanese American identity in anime.

Takuya and Stephanie demonstrate two interrelated, yet particular, interpretations of anime's cultural odor. Anime is a complex medium that reflects its plural history. Much like Mark's grandmother's language, and newly created bon dances, anime is a hybridized medium. It is rooted in *kibyoushi*—storytelling Japanese woodblock prints—and influenced by British political cartoons, American comics, and Chinese animation (Levi 2013, 4). As such, anime often presents multiple faces (Fennell et al 2012, 452). The faces that one sees when consuming anime are contingent on one's preexisting cultural knowledge (Fennell et al 2012, 452); hence, the distinctions in Takuya and Stephanie's detection of anime's cultural odor. Both Takuya and Stephanie—as a product of their own lively interplays with their Japaneseness and local Japanese American identities—are subject to the contexts that have formed through and around their interactions with anime.

Through the metaphor of smell, cultural odor becomes more than a piece of modern global political economy—as Iwabuchi (2002) originally imagined it. Cultural odor—like smell as Tsing (2015) describes it—is difficult to detect, and necessarily dependent on both those who create the smell and the nose of those who smell it—as Levi (2013) indirectly suggests. It thus follows that cultural odor, like smell, is inseparable from the lively interplays which frame it. Tsing (2015) further elaborates the way in which the smell of matsutake mushrooms are situated in their own contexts, stating that “the smell of matsutake wraps and tangles memory and history—and not just for humans. It assembles many ways of being in an affect-laden knot that packs its own punch. Emerging from encounter, it shows us history-in-the-making. Smell it” (52).

In responding to the scent of cultural odor, as Tsing (2015) suggests, Takuya and Stephanie are being responsive to the cultural material in anime. In turn, they are

indeterminably transformed by consuming anime. This transformation occurs since the cultural odor emitted from the medium is influencing their perception of the cultural material they see reflected in plots, objects, worlds, and characters. Hence, anime's cultural odor brings them into different understandings and perceptions of the cultural material they recognize as a product of their specific cultural literacies. Takuya and Stephanie are constantly engaged with lively interplays with their own forms of Japaneseness and local Japanese Americanness, which inform what they detect and what they interpret as cultural material. In consuming anime, as local Japanese Americans, Takuya and Stephanie are engaged in a process of transformation and reflection—whether conscious or not—pertaining to their multifaceted and innately odorous identities. Here anime consumption becomes a complex lively interplay in and of itself where local Japanese Americans, like Takuya, Stephanie, and Dylan, are constantly engaged in a process of change and rediscovery of what it means to be local Japanese American.

### ***Quaking Earth and Rippling Currents***

Reconceptualizing the plantation has taken me into pockets of local Japanese American identities that I could not have predicted during early mornings in Burger King. Following Tsing's (2015) metaphorical and physical quest to see and listen to matsutake mushrooms in their complexities, I have found myself in an entirely different place than she found herself. I guess this is what Tsing (2015) means by indeterminacy.

In the same way that waves in the ocean push and pull, initiating and breaking one another, the movement of local Japanese Americans throughout space and time has created enchanting lively interplays. Also like ocean waves, this movement has always been and always will be in dialogue with Japan. Take the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami that shook

Japan in 2011. As steel and brick structures came crumbling and the Fukushima Daiichi power plant leaked radiation in Japan, waves jostled the harbors and inlets of the Hawaiian Islands. As these currents reached Hawai‘i, oceanographers measured and observed the effects of the tsunami across the Pacific (Benjamin et al. 2016, 1133). As homes were destroyed and people were displaced in Japan, local people—Japanese and non-Japanese—mobilized to fundraise upwards of \$9 million for relief efforts (Glauberman 2012). Rooted in *aloha*, a shared sense of belonging and interconnection, and tourist industry, a monetary sense of belonging and interconnection, these relief efforts were entitled Aloha for Japan. Hawai‘i and Japan, connected by the Pacific Ocean—which has permitted the travel of bodies and the risk of tsunami alike—are engaged in lively interplay. Yet this lively interplay is not bound to contemporary and stagnant versions of Hawai‘i and Japan. Over time and through different perspectives, this lively interplay transforms, becoming one performance for a moment when a local Japanese American views Japan as an ancestral homeland, and another performance in another moment when it is Japan as a contemporary nation state. Hence, perceptions and interpretations of these land masses behave much more like the ocean—with fluidity.

Local Japanese American identity is a product of that dynamic lively interplay; it is the product of movement. From the creation of bon dances to accompany contemporary J-pop songs, to the hybridization and acquisition of Japanese language in schools and at home, to the cyclical process of consuming anime, local Japanese Americans are constantly engaged with lively interplays in different spaces at different times. Within the greater interactions between Hawai‘i and Japan—as ancestral homeland and contemporary nation state—these more discretized lively interplays form movements which, much like waves,



blur, destabilize, and create odor. Yet, out of these processes of blurring comes clarifications, out of destabilization comes stability, and out of odor comes odorlessness. In these dynamisms, individuals perform their local Japanese American identity—constantly informed by the polyphony that surrounds them, but always moving with the indeterminacy that accompanies individualism. The only component that is thus definite is that local Japanese American identity is so much more than the plantation. Instead, local Japanese American identity is a polyphonic assemblage, an amalgamation of rhythms, textures, and scents. Local Japanese American identity is a narrative impossible to tell in its entirety, for it is constantly being rewritten.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Okinawa is a southern prefecture in Japan, composed of many islands. Historically, Okinawans have been marginalized and understood as not Japanese. Depending on who you ask in Hawai‘i, being Okinawan can be significantly different or synonymous with being Japanese.

<sup>2</sup> I have elected to only discuss anime since my informants were more focused on anime than manga.

### ***Acknowledgements***

I owe a big *mahalo* to the Community Studies Center of Dickinson College for funding my research, as well as the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai‘i and Mo‘ili‘ili Community Center for welcoming me. Additionally, I wish to thank Professors Ann Hill and James Ellison for their guidance and support. Most of all, I wish to thank my grandmother, Florence Saito, for housing me and being my key informant throughout my research.

### ***Japanese American Generations***

<b>Term</b>	<b>Generation removed from Japan*</b>
<b>issei</b>	First generation
<b>nisei</b>	Second generation
<b>sansei</b>	Third generation
<b>yonsei</b>	Fourth generation
<b>gosei</b>	Fifth generation
<b>rokusei</b>	Sixth generation

\*For the Japanese American population, the first generation is the generation to move from Japan to Hawai‘i. Also, as per Yamashiro’s (2017) terminology, I have elected not to capitalize generational markers for the same reasons that sociologists do not capitalize “white” and “black” when discussing race (xix).

### *Informants*

<b>Name*</b>	<b>Year of birth</b>	<b>Generational marker</b>
Ryan	1961	sansei
Sachiko	1927	nisei
Stephanie	1992	yonsei
Dylan	1992	yonsei
Takuya	1990	nisei
Jeffrey	1965	sansei
Linda	1940	sansei
Janet	1933	sansei
Joyce	1948	sansei
Susan	1966	sansei
Christian	1966	sansei
Carl	1942	sansei
Barb	1935	sansei
Walter	1933	yonsei
Ruth	1943	sansei
June	1931	sansei
Margaret	1942	sansei
Sharon	1967	yonsei
Brandon	1995	gosei
Kerri	1978	yonsei
Mark	1984	yonsei
Pualani	1995	sansei
Edna	1935	yonsei
Cathleen	1965	gosei

\*All informants' names are pseudonyms

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